

“Figures!” Chloe grumbled as she stood just inside the doorway to The Rotten Apple. Walking back out into the cold rain, she pulled her raincoat closer and paced back and forth.

Should she go inside?

She paced the wet parking lot several more times, debating with herself.

He would know what she needed. Of all the bartenders, HE would know.

But...it was him!

He probably had exactly what she needed.

Chloe looked up at the sky, not even feeling the rain drops on her already frigid face. She couldn't face him. Not today. Probably not ever!

But she needed...not him but...that smile. And her fix. Yeah, she would love her fix and he never failed to help her there. He always had a supply ready and waiting for her. Just for her!

But...could she face him?

No! HE was inside tending the bar! She couldn't face him. Not today. Not after...

Chloe shook her head then wished she hadn't since more rain splattered onto her face, making her shiver. Or was that because HE was inside?

Ugh! Could her day get any worse?

“Come inside, Chloe,” the deep voice said from behind her.

Chloe froze, her shoulders tensing up as she realized that she'd been caught. Turning around slowly, she forced her numb lips into a semblance of a smile. “I'm fine,” she told him, lifting her hand into the air, then hiding it because there were too many scrapes and bruises on her hand. Even her thumb was swollen because she'd hit it with the hammer earlier today.

But there was no way she was going to show any weakness in front of this particular man. His enormous height and those deliriously tempting shoulders, so broad and packed with delicious muscles...oh and that square jaw, shadowed at the moment with dark stubble because the man didn't like to shave but hated sporting a beard.

She sighed. Too many nights she'd lain awake thinking about this man, feeling horrible because she couldn't get him out of her mind. She'd been here in Winthrop, Alaska for only two months with her fiancé, Gavin, now nicknamed The Rat.

Obviously the tall man standing in the doorway had night-vision-powered eyes since he could see through the darkness, knew that she was cold and shivering and that her eyes were needy, desperate even.

“I have what you need,” he told her, putting his hands on his lean hips, drawing her eyes to those super-cut, obscenely bulging biceps and shockingly strong arms that she knew, she just knew, would fit around her so perfectly! Goodness, she wanted him to

lower those arms! It was so much easier to resist him, to keep her eyes away from him, when those arms were just hanging loose around his tall, yummy body. He was wearing one of those black tee-shirts, the kind that hugged his body too closely, showing her all those muscles that she wanted to touch so badly. Those muscles, not to mention those hard, dark eyes, a brown so dark they almost looked black but with a fascinating circle of green on the outside...

Chloe shook her head again, forcing her mind back onto her current predicament. "I'm fine," she told him but the words were weak. She was weak! She knew he had what she needed. He always had what she needed! The man was diabolical!

"You want it, Chloe. Don't deny yourself what you need just out of stubbornness. Come inside, out of the cold rain, and I'll give it to you, Chloe. I know you need it. And you know how much better you will feel after you stop fighting that need."

He was luring her into the bar, into a temptation that was too much! Much more than he could know and she had to resist! But then again...

His deep voice kept talking, kept enticing her closer, making her forget her resolution to stay away, to resist the particular temptation – both the man and what the man was offering. How he'd discovered her weakness so easily, she couldn't begin to understand, but... "It's icy cold. I put some into the fridge three days ago, just for you."

Chloe whimpered at those words. "So they're really cold?" she whispered, her eyes pleading and her body almost shaking with hope.

The man ran a hand over his jaw and Chloe suspected that he was trying to hide his amusement. "The bottle probably has frost on the outside," he told her.

Another pathetic sound escaped from her and her shoulders drooped in defeat. "Fine," she grumbled, angry at herself for being weak, for giving in. But a woman could only take so much temptation!

Her head snapped up to his and she glared at him, refusing to let him think she was weak all the time. Okay, so she might be having a slew of bad days lately, but this particular man didn't have to know that! She stood as tall as possible under the circumstances. "Only because it has been a really horrible day! I'm usually not this pathetic and any other day, I'd be able to resist your siren's temptation."

Tucker couldn't hide his laughter this time. She looked so defeated, so miserable, especially with the rain pouring down. The raincoat might be five sizes too big but it still did an inadequate job of protecting her from the cold, Alaskan rain. Then again, nothing remained dry during an Alaska springtime. The rain could be relentless but by this point in the year, anything was better than more snow.

“Come on,” he said and took her arm, pulling her gently into the warmth of the bar and out of the cold. The Rotten Apple was always a warm, inviting place to hang out. And he'd ensured that he would be covering the bar today for exactly this reason.

“Take off your raincoat while I get it for you.”

Chloe followed his instructions but she was still grumbling. Four guys owned The Rotten Apple. All of them were sweethearts, three of them already married to wonderful women. It was just her luck that Tucker was tending bar on the very day that she needed her “fix” more than any other day.

She unzipped her coat and carefully turned the outside to the center, rolling it so that it wouldn't get any of the other coats wet. Of course, there were only two other raincoats hanging on the pegs right at this moment. One of them she knew had to be Tucker's raincoat because of the size.

She hesitated, looking at the enormous raincoat, almost afraid to hang hers up next to his. The symbolism wasn't lost on her mind at the moment.

Leaning her head against the warm wood, she took a breath. Hang the stupid coat up, Chloe, she told herself firmly. Just hang it up and go have your fix. He's probably already poured it and waiting for you.

Still her hands didn't move. She couldn't move. Everything inside of her wanted to avoid hanging her coat up on a hook near his.

If there were other coats, she might not be so wary. But it was just his. And hers. Just like she wanted....

No!

She couldn't think that way! It was so wrong!

Tucker. Just the man's name sent shivers of awareness down her body, making her feel good in all the wrong ways.

Just go inside, have your fix. No gawking, she told herself firmly. He was off limits. The man was...oh, he was perfect in every way! Smart, sexy, tall, buff and kind. So incredibly kind and sexy. Had she already said sexy? Well, he was. Enough so that she could be forgiven for saying it twice.

Good grief, she was forgiving herself for her thoughts!

Yes, she was losing her mind.

Even then, she stood in the entryway, her body starting that obnoxious trembling that always happened when she was close to Tucker. No other man terrified her like this man could.

But then she heard the enticing sound that never failed to make her resistance crumble. The bottle top, the expulsion of air as the pressure was released.

Her eyes widened and all of her muscles tightened with anticipation.

Oh, he was good! He knew what she needed and wasn't even waiting for her to come into the main area, knowing she was standing here hesitating.

"I hate you," she told him as she stepped up to the bar. But then he tipped the bottle over and poured the root beer into a cold glass.

He shook his head and finished pouring. "You love me," he countered.

Chloe sighed as she lifted the glass to her lips. That might be part of the problem, she thought, then ignored the world as she sipped the devil's brew. When the rich, creamy taste of the root beer hit her tongue, she sighed with happiness. "Oh, this is good," she breathed. "So good." After another sip, she set the glass carefully down on the bar as if the glass might be filled with gold instead of just root beer. "You always know what I need," she told him, then lowered her lashes as a blush stole up her neck. "I mean..."

His deep laughter stopped her backtracking. "I know exactly what you mean. So tell me what happened. Why the desperate need for your 'fix' today?"

Tucker ignored the stab of guilt at that question. He knew exactly what had brought her here, needing her sugary treat. He kept them in stock, just for her. When she and her then-fiance, Gavin, had first arrived in the small town a couple of months ago, Tucker had been blindsided by the vivacious brunette beauty with the flashing blue eyes and the ready smile. Chloe had been so eager to start her new life with Gavin and all Tucker had wanted to do was knock Gavin the Ass out of town with a good, solid punch.

Gavin Dorset was possibly the worst sort of man in Tucker's opinion. He either ignored the lovely Chloe or treated her like dirt. The number of times Gavin had put down the beautiful woman was enough to try a sane man's patience. Chloe seemed to just laugh off the criticism about how badly she hammered or sawed. The two of them were trying to build their house from scratch, learning each step in the process. But from what Tucker could see, Gavin had no clue what he was doing and constantly put Chloe down to make himself look better, especially when she was doing things correctly.

They were both writers although, from what he'd figured out, Chloe's murder mysteries were selling at about five times the rate that Gavin's espionage novels were selling. Instead of praising Chloe for coming up with such a fabulous plot, the man jeered her efforts, made her look bad in front of the other residents and undermined her confidence in other ways outside of their career goals.

So what was a man to do? Tucker had taken action. Oh, he hadn't punched the guy out, like he deserved. Nope, Tucker had just listened. Gavin the Ass had come into The Rotten Apple complaining about Chloe, complaining about Alaska, the weather, the environment, the trees, the sky...just about everything. Tucker had listened to all of it and patiently waited, biding his time.

Okay, so maybe he'd encouraged a little. Just a comment here, a comment there....

Tucker might have put a little nugget into Gavin's head and then encouraged the weasel into action. All Tucker had said was that Gavin might want to do a survival type expedition now that summer was coming. A way to give Gavin some insight into his next character. A long expedition that would take him through the end of the summer months.

So what if Gavin had thought it was a great idea? All is fair in love and war, he told himself as he pulled another root beer out of the fridge for the lovely Chloe. She looked adorable, all miserable and pouty. And he was just the man to help ease her out of her funk and show her that he was much better than Gavin the Ass.

"I'm going to have an affair," Chloe announced.

Tucker just about dropped the fresh bottle of root beer with that announcement. And his body hardened with a lust that was so strong, he almost doubled over. Taking a deep breath, he cleared his mind from the image of Chloe, naked, in his bed with those lovely blue eyes calling to him, begging him to make love to her.

Nope, that wasn't what he wanted.

Oh, hell yes, that was exactly what he wanted!

But he wanted more. He'd seen the way his friends Knox, Saeger and Creek had found their soulmates and, from the moment Chloe had walked through the doors two months ago, he'd known that she was the woman he wanted in his life. Forever.

They'd talked and laughed over the last few weeks. He'd gotten to know her and the more he knew about her, the more he wanted her. He'd read all of her books, several times, especially the sex scenes that were steamy hot and filled with great ideas. She'd written three already and he was eagerly waiting for the next one. She was a great writer, she was funny and witty in person and one of the kindest, most compassionate women he'd ever met.

She also had a body to die for!

Chloe wasn't especially tall, but for some reason, her legs looked incredibly long. And her waist...damn but her waist was tiny! She had hips that a man could explore forever, but that waist? It was impossibly small, drawing a man's gaze higher up.

He tried not to look. Well, he tried not to get caught looking at those breasts, but how could a man not look? They were perfect! Chloe was stacked! Full and firm, her breasts could make a man have dreams that should be illegal! And yeah, he'd had those dreams. Many times over the past couple of months.

The fact that she was willing to start her whole life over again in the wilds of Alaska only endeared her to him more than anything else since that was exactly what he and his friends had done.

So what if he'd done it on a much larger scale? As a capital investor, he'd made enough money to last him several lifetimes. He did it for the intellectual challenge now, enjoying the adventure that business gave him. His next step was finding the woman he could share that with. And this woman, sitting forlornly in front of him, was that woman. Since she'd walked into the bar, no other woman had tempted him. He'd even flown down to Victoria and Seattle, trying to find a woman who could get the beautiful Chloe out of his mind since she was engaged. Unfortunately, no woman had interested him after meeting Chloe.

After his last trip, he'd come up with a plan. Get rid of Gavin the Ass and move in on Chloe, take care of her the way she deserved to be treated.

Step one had been to get rid of the jerk. Step two, make Chloe fall in love with him. Step three, marry her and have lots of babies with the woman, treat her like the precious, amazing woman that she was and never let her regret losing Gavin the Ass and his abusive, insecure ways.

Her announcement that she needed to have an affair...that wasn't in any of his plans. Oh, he'd love to pull her into his arms and make love to her. Yes, that would be ideal. But he didn't want the short term. He wanted long term. And if his body exploded from the painful lust that was surging through him, well, he'd deal with that.

Right now, he couldn't help leaning forward on the bar and looking down into her pretty, blue eyes. "Care to elaborate?" he asked. He had to remind himself that he wasn't supposed to know that Gavin the Ass had left on his manly expedition. He wasn't supposed to know that Chloe's worthless fiancée had abandoned her, left her alone without a house or car.

Chloe took another sip, but then carefully set the glass down on the bar, her hand shaking too much since the man who had haunted her dreams, who had starred in so many of her latest novel's sex scenes, was way too close.

It should have been Gavin who had entered her mind every time she'd wanted to write one of those sex scenes. It should have been her now-ex-fiancé. But they'd been pulling apart for a long time.

Had they ever really been a couple?

Chloe wasn't completely sure any longer.

And it didn't matter a whole lot now. Gavin had left her, saying that he needed some space, that he was a man's man and she was pulling him down, making him look bad in front of the other residents. He'd actually said that! What a disgusting man!

Taking another sip of her root beer, she considered her options now that Gavin had dumped her.

"I'm going to choose a guy and have a crazy, torrid affair with him."

