
HIS STRINGS TO PULL

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With a rescue tube tucked under her arm, lifeguard Jenny Andersen walked the length of the outdoor pool, keeping one eye on the kids splashing and playing in the shallow end and the other on the gorgeous man peeling his shirt off near the lounge chairs directly across from her. Two young girls ran around him, and with a playful look on his face, he twisted his towel and snapped them gently on their rear ends to shoo them away. As they squealed and jumped in the water, Jenny couldn't help but smile at his antics, nor could she help but wonder if those rambunctious kids were his. Her glance strayed to his left hand, but past experiences had taught her that a ring-free finger meant little or nothing.

He moved to the deep end of the pool, each stride of his long, muscled legs purposeful and sexy. He stretched his arms over his shaved head, and his tanned, athletic body glistened invitingly in the early morning sun. Jenny noted the way all the women were watching, or rather, drooling, from the comfort of their lounge chairs.

Speaking of drooling...

Her glance slid up the length of him to broad shoulders covered in tattoos, before traveling downward again. Good God, his body was like a Plinko game, all hard ridges and muscles that guided her gaze down to the jackpot hidden beneath a pair of low hanging swimming trunks. She swallowed against her suddenly dry throat and damn near died when she looked back to his face to find him watching her. He gave her a playful, lopsided grin that further weakened her already wobbly knees, and then dove into the water, leaving her wondering what the hell it was about him that left her panting like a sheep dog in the sweltering heat of the summer.

Watching his long frame glide through the rippling waves, she once again wondered if he was taken. But thinking about his marital status had her thoughts going back to her last relationship. She gave a disgruntled shake of her head, hardly able to believe that her ex had had a wife and kids waiting for him at home. Looking back, all the signs had been there—they could never go back to his place, the phone calls he had to leave the room to take, the nights he said he was out of town on business and couldn't call her—she'd just been too blinded by infatuation, too trusting, to see them for what they were.

Honestly, didn't anyone believe in monogamy anymore? Were there no guys out there looking for the same thing as her? She wanted what her parents had before her dad died a few years ago—love, trust, respect. Was that so much to ask for?

Sadly, she was beginning to think so.

She watched the tattooed hottie surface in the shallow end. Like a fish drawn to a shiny lure, she walked the length of the pool toward him. The young girls he'd been snapping earlier jumped all over him, trying to drag him under the water. Jenny recognized the children he was with. Their

townhouse was in walking distance of the community pool, and they came here often with their mother. Jenny had never seen them with this man before, however. Perhaps, like her brother, Garrett, he was a military man, and had recently returned home from overseas.

He picked one of the girls up and tossed her into the water. Jenny stopped abruptly, drawn to the fun-loving scene, but as her feet came to a sudden halt, something, or someone, crashed into her from behind. Before she even realized what was happening, the rescue tube flew out of her hand and she landed in the water with an undignified belly flop.

Her hands flailed, and as she gasped for air and worked to find her footing, a strong pair of arms lifted her from the water. She opened her mouth and closed it again, struggling to fill her deflated lungs. Not because she'd taken in water, but because the tattooed hottie was looking down at her with dark eyes she could so easily lose herself in.

She opened her mouth to tell him she was okay, but no sound came. She blinked rapidly, trying to clear her lust-filled brain as she struggled to take in air.

"Shit," he said. The next thing she knew she was flat on her back on the flagstone walkway surrounding the pool, and Mr. Hottie's lips were coming down fast.

Oh, God, his mouth tasted like cool mint and warm cinnamon all rolled into one. His lips moved over hers, and as air filled her lungs in a whoosh, she was sure she'd just drowned and gone to heaven. And oh, what a heaven it was...

As though moving on their own accord, her arms tangled around his neck, holding his mouth to hers as she reveled in his warmth, the sweet flavor of his kisses. She searched for his tongue, wanting a deeper, more thorough taste, but before she could find it, his body stiffened and he inched back.

He angled his head, and when eyes full of concern locked

on hers, reality crashed over her like a cold wave. Oh hell. He was performing CPR, not kissing her.

“I...uh...” she managed to get out, then for good measure, she sucked in a breath and coughed to make it look like she *was* having a near-death experience, but the look on his face told her he was on to her.

He swiped his tongue over his lower lip, like he was savoring the taste of her, as he eyed her curiously. “Wait...you weren’t...were you...” he began, his body still hovering over hers, his mouth so close all she had to do was lift herself up an inch if she wanted to steal another kiss.

Which, of course, she did...

“Yes, I was drowning,” she said quickly. “But thanks to your quick thinking, I’m okay now.” When she saw the other lifeguard coming her way, she held her hand up to stop her, letting her know she was fine. She made a move to get up, but he leaned in, keeping her pinned with his hard body. Her mind took that moment to wander, wondering what it would be like to be sandwiched between this man—and a mattress—their bodies naked, entwined...

“Hey, lady, you okay?”

The sound of a kid’s voice put an abrupt end to her fantasy. She turned her head to see a boy around twelve hovering over her, and instantly recognized him as the big brother to the two young girls this man had been playing with earlier.

“I’m sorry.” The boy crinkled his nose apologetically. “I didn’t see you.”

“You’re not supposed to be running on the deck,” Jenny said firmly, surprised she could actually find her voice as the man’s weight continued to press down on her.

Mr. Hottie swung his head toward the boy. “We’ll discuss this later, when we get home,” he said, his expression stern yet affectionate at the same time.

They'd discuss it at home? Jenny's heart sank. Damn, the kids *were* his, which meant he was likely married to the pretty woman who brought them here often.

She tried to move, shoving at his chest, but it was like trying to push a pickup with a toothpick. "If you'll excuse me..." she began.

"Ving."

"What?" she asked.

"It's Ving," he said. "Ving Duncan."

"Okay, Ving Duncan." She gave another hard shove, needing him off her body before he noticed the hardening of her nipples beneath her speedo. Cripes, the guy was married and the last thing she wanted to do was lust after someone's husband again. "If you could just move."

He jumped to his feet and pulled her up with him. Her body collided with his, and as his hardness meshed with her softness, it damn near sucked the oxygen from her lungs—again.

"And you are?" he asked.

"Grateful that you saved me. Thank you." Working to tamp down the heat he stirred in her, she turned to the boy, and put on her best serious face. "You need to be careful. You could have really hurt someone."

"I'm sorry," he said again, hanging his head, and Jenny, having a soft spot for kids, ruffled his hair. She shot Ving an imploring look, and said, "Don't be too hard on him. He seems like a nice kid, and I don't think he meant it."

"Maybe," he responded. "But that doesn't mean he's not going to get the whipper snapper." He reached for the nearest towel and began spinning it. The boy screeched and jumped into the water.

Jenny smiled and shook her head. Ving looked so tough and rugged, but underneath all that tattooed hardness it was easy to tell he was a softie at heart. "You're a good dad."

“I’m not—” Before he could finish his youngest girl came along and snapped him with her towel. He yelped and turned. “Hey,” he said, taking off after her as she shrieked and chuckled loudly.

“No running,” Jenny called out, and as they slowed to a fast walk, Ving tossed a sheepish smirk her way. Jenny wagged her finger. “Or you’ll all be getting *my* whipper snapper.”

Something that looked like intrigue moved over his face, and his grin turned playful when he turned back to her. He arched one brow and said, “When you put it that way, it makes me want to run all the more.”

Jenny laughed and waved him off, not about to go there with him. She turned her attention to the kids playing in the deep end, all the while trying to calm her overexcited body and forget she ever met Ving Duncan.

God, why were all the good ones married?

“What the hell is the matter with you?” Garrett Andersen asked as he shaded the late afternoon sun from his eyes.

Ving stood inside the gates of the old abandoned base where his comrades were training service dogs, and snatched a tennis ball off the ground. He squeezed it in his palm, then tossed it. The shaggy dog he’d picked up earlier at the shelter—and decided to take under his wing—ran after it as he turned his attention to his buddy, Garrett.

“What?” Ving asked.

“Don’t ‘what’ me. You’ve been walking around all afternoon with a stupid ass grin on your face.”

Ving feigned innocence, even though he knew Garrett was right. He couldn’t stop smiling since he left the pool earlier that morning. “I am?”

“Yeah, you are.” Garrett’s glance moved to Ving’s shaved

head, then his gaze dropped to the tattoos decorating Ving's shoulders. "Don't you think this whole village idiot thing is kind of contradictory to the image you're going for?" Garrett asked.

Ving laughed. "Why don't you tell me what you really think?"

"Why don't you tell me what's going on?"

When the dog came back, Ving took the ball from her mouth. "Good girl," he said, and as he tossed it again, his mind went back to the hot lifeguard he'd met earlier that day. She was so sweet, the kind of girl he could bring home to his mother. Christ, where the hell had that thought come from? He'd only just met her, and even though he didn't believe in love at first sight—lust maybe—he couldn't get her out of his thoughts.

She was good with Andy after he'd knocked her into the pool, and he didn't miss the way she kept smiling down at him when he was playing with Marley and Kate. Nor did he miss the way she was looking at him with those big sapphire-blue eyes he could drown in—eyes not at all unlike the ones glaring at him now.

"Ah, shit, it's a girl, isn't it?" Garrett asked.

"Yeah," he said, tenting his fingers like he always did when in deep thought.

Just then Luke Phillips, former army security specialist, stepped up to them and patted Ving on the shoulder. He took one look at Ving's face, furrowed his brows and said, "Okay, what's her name?"

The dog came back and Ving bent forward to give her a pat on her head. "I don't know. I thought I'd let the kids name her."

"You know that's not who I'm talking about," Luke said.

Ving straightened and decided not to make this too easy on them. "Then who are you talking about?"

"The girl who's got you all tied up in knots, that's who." Luke said. "Now stop fucking around and tell me who she is."

"What makes you think a girl's got me all tied up?"

"Because you can't stop smiling and you're walking around like a love-struck dumb ass," Garrett explained.

"So spill," Luke said. "Tell us her name."

"I would if I could."

"If you're going to fall in love with a girl, don't you think you should at least get her name first?" Luke asked.

"I might not know her name, but I kissed her." He grinned and added, "Well, technically it wasn't a kiss."

Garrett laughed. "Then what was it, technically?"

Ving scrubbed a hand over his head and gave them a crooked smile. "More like I performed mouth-to-mouth."

Luke scoffed, and shook his head. "Mouth-to-mouth?"

"I was at the pool with the kids and Andy bumped into the lifeguard," Ving explained. "She fell into the water and I thought she was drowning. So I performed mouth-to-mouth. Except she started kissing me, and well, I don't know, she was just so damn beautiful and nice, that I fell for her." He snapped his fingers. "Just like that." He looked skyward. "Oh, man, you should have seen her. Big blue eyes, long legs, the face of an angel. So sweet, so damn sweet. And funny too."

Garrett narrowed his eyes and Ving didn't miss the way his nostrils were flaring.

"What the hell is the matter with you?" Ving asked.

"What pool were you at?" Garrett growled.

"Glenmore Community Pool. Why?"

Luke took step back. "Oh shit. Sounds like he's talking about Jenny."

Ving turned to Luke. "You know her?"

"Yeah, I know her. So does Garrett." With a nod, he gestured toward Garrett, like there was something funny about all this. "He knows her really well, don't you, Garrett?"

Ah shit. That meant Jenny was Garrett's girl. Ving's heart sank because he and Garrett weren't just comrades, they were friends, and had spent many nights surviving together overseas. Even if Ving owed the man a proper beating for putting a snake in his sleeping bag—damn he hated snakes—no way in hell would he ever come between Garrett and his girl. No matter how much of an angel she was.

"She's your girl," Ving said, nodding in understanding as he kicked a rock across the compound.

"No, she's not my girl. She's my sister."

Ving's heart soared. "No way!"

Garrett fisted his hands and said, "Way."

"Sweet!"

Garrett widened his stance. "What's so sweet about it?"

"Now I can ask her out."

"Ving, come on, she's my kid sister and you're a..."

"I'm a what?"

Garrett scrubbed his chin and looked past Ving's shoulders like he was in deep thought. "You're a..."

When his words drifted off, Ving pressed, "What's the problem? You never had any trouble telling me what you thought before."

"That's because my sister wasn't involved."

"And you think I'll hurt her?" Garrett exhaled slowly, and when he went quiet, Ving added, "I think you know me better than that."

"You're right," Garrett said slowly. "I do."

Ving smiled, because Garrett *did* know better. Unlike most of their comrades who were looking for no strings, Ving wanted it all. When they were overseas, Ving always talked to Garrett about settling down and having kids. His friend knew he wasn't one to go home with a different girl every night, even though he had plenty of offers.

“But she’s my sister!” Garrett said, running agitated hands through his hair.

“You know I’d never mess with a comrade’s sister if I seriously didn’t want to get to know her better.” Ving held his hands out at his sides. “I mean come on. I have a sister too. If any one of you guys messed with Tally, well...let’s just say there’d be hell to pay, and you all know why.”

Garrett nodded and visibly relaxed. “Jenny’s a nice kid and deserves a nice guy. If it was anyone but you, I’d be kicking some ass.”

“Thanks, man,” Ving said. “So you’re cool with me going out with her?”

Garrett cocked his head. “You’ll have to get her to say yes first.”

“Yeah, and she’s not one to fall for any stupid pick-up lines, either,” Luke said. Both guys rounded on Luke. “What?” he asked, taking a small step back. When they continued to glare at him he lifted his hands, palms out. “All I’m saying is she’s too smart to fall for the lines. If you want to get the attention of a beautiful and intelligent girl like her, you’ll have to be a little more creative.”

As Ving considered that and thought about how they met, a wicked idea formed in the back of his mind. Oh yeah, he knew just what he had to do to get her attention and coax a yes from her lips. And if things played out according to the half-cocked plan racing around his brain, he wouldn’t just get a date, he’d get to feel that sweet mouth of hers on his again too.

Jenny adjusted the strap on her bathing suit and strolled the length of the pool, reveling in the warmth of the morning sun shining down on her. As she watched a group of kids play in the shallow end, her thoughts drifted to her encounter with Ving yesterday.

Ving Duncan

Hot, hard, funny...*married*.

Even though she knew she should put him out of her mind, her glance kept straying to the row of townhouses down the road from the community center. Yes, despite knowing he was taken, after their run-in yesterday she'd still found herself watching him walk home with his three children in tow. A movement on the sidewalk drew her attention. She turned and when she spotted Ving and his little ones coming her way, her heart raced. She quickly put her back to them, forcing her attention on her pool duties.

Just then fellow lifeguard, Candace Simms, came up to her and nodded toward Ving. "Your hottie is back."

"My hottie?" Jenny asked, planting a hand on her hip in

defense, even though she wished it was true. "He's not my anything."

Candace wagged her eyebrows. "Yeah, well, you didn't see the way he was looking at you yesterday."

Jenny's heart leapt and, while she wanted to hear all the details, wanted to gossip like a smitten high school girl, she said, "He's taken, Candace."

"Hmmm," she said, sneaking looks at him.

"What?" Jenny asked, getting the sense that Candace knew something she didn't.

"Taken or not, he's still nice to look at."

"That he is," Jenny agreed, deciding to give her friend that much.

As she chatted with Candace about the new summer schedule, Jenny watched Ving jump into the water and rough-house with his kids. Despite her best efforts not to pay him any attention, her glance kept straying his way. A few minutes later he swam out to the deep end, and when he began thrashing, merely a few feet from her, Candace grabbed Jenny's arm.

"Shit," she said. "He's in trouble."

Acting purely on instincts, both Candace and Jenny jumped into the pool. Working together they pulled him out. Within seconds they had him laid out on the pool deck.

"He needs mouth-to-mouth," Candace said as she checked his vitals. "Hurry, Jenny."

Trusting her friend's judgment, Jenny positioned his head and quickly pressed her mouth to his. But the second her lips closed over his, his hands circled around her back, pulling her on top of him.

Wait...is he...?

Coherent thought fled as he began to kiss her, and when she felt the rough pad of his thumb on the back of her neck,

holding her tightly against him, lust prowled through her body.

Oh Gawd...

She burned as he devoured her with his mouth, need zinging through her veins at breakneck speed. His tongue slipped inside her mouth and tangled with hers, and her body responded with a shudder.

“Eww, Ving that’s gross.”

Jenny pulled back and drew in a fortifying breath when she found one of his little girls standing beside them. She looked back at Ving, who had a mischievous gleam in his eyes.

“What...what do you think you’re doing?” she asked.

“What am I doing?” he retaliated. “It’s more like what are you doing.” He gestured with a nod toward the water. “I was just splashing around, and the next thing I knew you had me on the ground with your lips on mine.”

“But I thought you were... Candace said...” When he gave her a lopsided grin, her words dissolved like honey in hot water. God, did he have to be so adorable. “But why would you...you’re married.”

He shook his head. “No I’m not.”

She looked up to see his little girl staring at her. “You have kids.”

“Kids? What are you talking about? I don’t even like kids.” He winked at the girl and she giggled and ran off. “Heck, I didn’t even like myself when I was a kid.”

“But I thought—”

“I’m the babysitter. Do you think they would they call me Ving if I was their dad?”

Jenny considered that for a moment. “I guess not.”

“So I’m not married with kids, does that mean you’ll go out with me now?”

“What?” she asked and looked around at all the people

still staring at them. When she caught the way Candace was smirking at her, understanding dawned. She shook her head, incredulous; hardly able to believe that Candace was in on this. “You orchestrated this whole thing just to ask me out.”

“And to kiss you.”

Despite herself, Jenny laughed. Honestly, even though what he did was inappropriate and dangerous—and had taken her attention off the kids—she couldn’t help but feel a bit flattered. No man had ever gone to such measures to get her attention before.

“I don’t even know you,” Jenny said.

“I’ve rescue kissed you, you’ve rescue kissed me. What more do you want to know?”

She narrowed her eyes and planted one hand on her hip. “How do I really know you’re not married and these kids aren’t yours?”

“Well, Jenny,” he said. “You could always ask your brother, Garrett.”

Her head came back with a start, not only because he knew her name but he also knew her brother. “Wait, you know Garrett?”

“Yeah, we served together.”

“You did?”

He nodded. “And yesterday at the training compound, I told him I wanted to ask you out and he gave me his blessings.”

“His blessings?” She laughed, and wondered if he came from a religious family. “Sounds like you were asking for my hand in marriage.”

He arched a brow, and once again gifted her with that sexy grin that turned her knees to pudding. “All in good time, but first I have to prove to you how awesome I am.”

“Pretty sure of yourself, aren’t you?” When she shook her head, loving how funny and easy he was to be with, a wayward

strand of hair fell forward. He reached out and tucked it behind her ear. Her entire body came alive at his touch. She looked deep into his eyes, noting the thoughtful way he looked at her. While most military men she knew were players, out with a different girl every night, Ving had a real kindness, a genuine honesty about him.

Then again, her track record had proved she was a terrible judge of character.

“So what do you say? Can I pick you up at seven?”

“No, you can’t.” When the smile fell from his face and he gave her a look that was so lost, so dejected, she said, “I work a split shift today and won’t be ready until eight.”

Ving drove around Jenny’s neighborhood, one eye on the road, the other on the dashboard clock. Jesus, whoever said time was linear had no idea what they were talking about because tonight each minute felt more like ten.

He passed by her place again, but he was so goddamn excited to see her, he’d pulled into her driveway, despite being ten minutes early, and jammed his truck into Park. He grabbed the bouquet of flowers he’d picked up earlier and rushed up the long walkway leading to her condo.

He knocked and waited for a second. Just as he was about to knock again, the door flung open and he came face to face with a pretty blonde girl covered in tattoos and piercings.

“You must be Ving,” she said, her gaze dropping to the flowers.

“I am, and you are?”

She crinkled her nose. “What kind of name is Ving anyway? Is it short for something?”

Before he could answer, Jenny came up behind her. “I see you met my nosey roommate, Samantha.”

Samantha rolled her eyes. "It's Sam. She just calls me that to piss me off."

"Hi, Sam," Ving said. When he looked past her shoulders to see Jenny, her long dark hair falling loose around her shoulders, her smile so warm and welcoming, it was all he could do to remember how to breathe.

Her blue eyes glistened when they met his. "Such a gentleman."

"What?" he asked, so lost in her that his brain wasn't functioning at full capacity.

"The flowers."

"Oh, right, they're for you." He handed her the flowers and she sniffed them. "Daisies, my favorite. Let me guess, Garrett told you."

"Nope," he said. "You just seemed like a daisy kind of girl."

She cocked her head, and gave him a skeptical look as she narrowed her big blue eyes. "Really?"

"Really," he said. "Scout's honor."

"You were a scout?"

"I was a lot of things."

She laughed. "I bet you were." She looked at the flowers again. "You did good, Ving. These are really pretty."

"You two know I'm still here, right?" Sam cut in. When neither of them acknowledged her presence and kept staring at each other, Sam rolled her eyes. "Jesus, get a room already." She took the flowers. "These need water." She turned to leave but not before she mumbled something about them needing a good cold dousing too.

After she left, Ving let his glance move over Jenny's summery dress. "You look beautiful."

"Thank you." She looked at his khakis and dress shirt. "You clean up pretty nice yourself."

"Ready?" he asked. She nodded and he slipped his arm

around her waist, anxious to get to know her better. Twenty minutes later, they sat across from each other on a blanket at the park, the sun setting in the horizon.

Ving laid out the food the neighbor's kids had helped him prepare and uncorked a bottle of wine. When he caught Jenny grinning at him, he narrowed his eyes. "What?"

She waved her hand over the food. "I didn't expect this. I figured we'd be sitting in some fancy restaurant."

"Sorry to disappoint—"

"I never said I was disappointed."

"Good. And I have a confession. It was Marley's idea." He grinned. "I think her mom lets her watch too many romantic comedies. She's going to grow up with far too many expectations," he said, chuckling.

"Marley?"

"One of the little girls I was babysitting. Marley is the oldest girl, Kate is the youngest. Andy is the one who knocked you into the pool."

"Do you babysit often?"

"Their mom is a nurse and a single mom. She's a shift worker and money is tight, so I do what I can to help out."

"That's very sweet of you."

"Not really. I actually just use them to pick up chicks. Girls dig a guy with kids, you know."

Jenny laughed. "It's puppies guys use, not children."

"Shit." He shook his head. "I always get that mixed up. I guess now I have to get a puppy."

"I'm sure Garrett can help you out with that. He and a bunch of the guys are training shelter dogs to help bomb-hunting soldiers on American soil. From what Garrett said, there are many unexploded bombs across the country left over from former training camps during the wars." He sat there listening to her, then she narrowed her eyes. "Wait you already know all this, don't you?"

“Yeah.”

“And you let me go on and on anyways?”

“I like listening to you talk.”

She rolled her eyes. “You talk for a while.”

“Okay, well, I’ve signed on to help the guys. I even made a trip to the shelter this morning.”

“You did?”

“Of course.”

She glanced around the park, then said quietly, “You know. I think you might be too good to be true.”

He pitched his voice low and sidled closer. “I can be bad,” he murmured, only half teasing.

She grinned, took a sip of her wine, then exhaled slowly. “I like this. I like it a lot, Ving.”

“I like you a lot,” Ving said.

“You don’t even know me.”

“I know enough.”

She pursed her lips and stared at him. “Maybe I don’t.”

“Okay, what do you want to know?” he asked, holding out a container of grapes to her. She popped one into her mouth and her eyes narrowed as she chewed. “What kind of name is Ving, anyway? Is it short for something?”

He laughed. “Now you sound like your roommate.” He took a sip of his wine. “Speaking of your roommate, you two seem...”

“Different?”

“Yeah.”

“We’re not so different.”

“She’s full of piercings and tattoos.”

Jenny gave him a wry look. “Who says I’m not?”

“I saw you in your bathing suit, remember?”

She arched a brow. “It was a one-piece.”

“So you’re saying I’m going to find all kind of interesting things when I see you in a two-piece?” As he visualized it a

tremor moved through him, because he knew he'd find all kinds of interesting things, indeed.

"Maybe." She crossed her legs and nibbled on a piece of cheese. God, she looked so sweet and inviting it was all he could do not to lean in for a kiss. She chased the cheese with a sip of wine, then said. "Sam and I go way back. I was a teen when my father died, and I went through a rebellious stage. I hung out with the wrong people, did the wrong things. Sam was part of that crowd, and was just as lost as I was."

Ving put his hand on hers and gave a squeeze. "I'm sorry about your dad. Garrett has never talked much about him."

"We all grieve in different ways." She took another sip of wine and Ving refilled her glass. "Anyway, if it wasn't for my mom, and not giving up on Sam or me, who knows where we'd be today. She enrolled Sam in art classes, and now she makes and sells her own jewelry. It was swimming lessons for me. Now I'm a lifeguard and give lessons. I really love it."

"Your mom sounds terrific."

"She is. How about your folks? Are you close?"

"We are. They live in Tallulah, Louisiana, and I visit as much as I can. Now that I'm out of the army I'll be able to see them more."

"What did you do in the army?"

"Apache pilot."

"Really, wow, I'm impressed."

He grinned. "As you should be."

She whacked him and when he feigned hurt she rolled her eyes. "So I guess it is true."

"What true?"

"That all pilots have God complexes."

"Funny, I heard the same thing about lifeguards."

"Hey," she said, her laugh dissolving. But he wasn't sure if it was because of his teasing or the fact that he had shifted to

sit beside her, their legs touching, the heat of her body messing with him in mind-fucking ways.

“This is...nice.” She leaned back on her elbows and looked up at the dark sky. “I’ve never been on a picnic date before.” She turned to face him and her hair fell over her shoulders. “You’re just full of contradictions, aren’t you?”

“Meaning?”

“You’re just different from most guys. Like I said, I’m beginning to believe you’re too good to be true.”

He dropped down onto his back, rolled onto his side, and flattened his hand over her stomach. “And like I said, I can be bad. If that’s what the lady wants.”

She looked back up at the sky. “I...uh... It’s getting late. The park will be closing soon.”

He moved closer and his cock thickened against her leg. He felt a quiver move through her. “I’m not ready for this night to end, Jenny,” he whispered.

She angled her head to see him, went quiet, thoughtful for a moment, then said, “Let’s go.”

“Where?”

“I’ll only tell you if you tell me what Ving is short for.”

“Forget it,” he said. “The only time that will cross anyone’s lips is when the priest says it on my wedding day.”

“We’ll see. I’ll get it out of you yet.”