

Chapter One

I heard the driveway gravel crunching beneath the tires of his pickup truck, so I “accidentally” sprayed myself with the hose. It was an irresistible impulse. It was my day off and I’d been washing my car. My husband and I had been working a lot of overtime lately, with no time for recreation or even chores. And I knew how much he loved seeing me in a wet T-shirt.

The water was cold, and my nipples rose into hard little peaks. The truck’s engine turned off, and I heard him striding closer. I pulled off my ponytail elastic and shook my long, dark hair into what I hoped would look like an auto-show model’s mane. The metal of the car was warm in the midsummer sun, so I turned around and leaned back against the trunk, displaying myself for him. Then I froze.

“My god, you’re a sight for sore eyes,” said Jack. His blue eyes sparkled in his tired face as he looked me up and down. “I had a terrible day and fell asleep at the wheel on my way home. I nearly wrecked the truck. But you always make everything all right, Lila.”

He pulled me into a tight embrace despite my wet shirt and leaned down to kiss my neck. He slipped his hand in between our bodies to tweak my stiff nipple. “I love you, sweet girl. You’re the nicest wife a man could ask for,” he whispered.

I couldn’t speak. I couldn’t move. The love seemed genuine and his physical reaction was undeniable. The only trouble was that Jack wasn’t my husband. He was

my boss. And in my entire life before this afternoon, I'd never so much as kissed the man.

An hour later, he was still in shock. I'd changed into dry clothes, and now I sat at the dining room table, watching him walk in circles around my big all-purpose room that overlooked the river.

"I didn't buy any of this furniture," he finally said.

"Of course you didn't. This isn't your house," I said, trying to keep my voice from shaking.

He clenched his hands over the top of the futon we—my husband and I—used as a couch. "You and I bought this house five years ago. You said you'd always wanted to live in a little house by the river. Our agent saw the listing, and once you saw it, you wouldn't look at another house."

"Ryan and I bought it five years ago because I'd always wanted to live in a little house by the river, and we found it by chance when we were down here kayaking."

"Since when do you go kayaking?" he demanded.

"Since Ryan asked me to try it on our third date! Seven years ago!"

"Seven years ago you'd been dating me for six months."

"Jack." I tried to calm down. "We have never dated. Ever. You've been my boss for almost eight years, you've been my husband's best friend since college, and while after this many years you and I are very close, trust me when I say I'm positive we never hooked up. You're married, for heaven's sake."

"I'm what?"

"Married. To Allison. I was at the wedding along with the rest of the team." There were a dozen of us who worked at Jack's small truck dealership, and most of us

had been there for years. There weren't a lot of employment options in southwest Virginia, which is like one big small town, and Jack was a good guy and easy to work for. When he wasn't out of his mind, that is.

"Allison? I'm married to someone who believes in fairies? She's a nutcase! How the hell did I wind up married to Allison?"

"Why the hell are you yelling at my wife, Jack?"

We turned and saw Ryan leaning against the doorway. He wasn't angry, but I could see he was ready to take action if that's what was needed. I ran over to him and flung my arms around his neck. "Jack's gone crazy. He thinks he's married to me and lives in this house," I whispered.

Ryan kept a strong arm around my shoulders as we turned to face our friend and employer. I leaned into my husband, inhaling his marvelous, masculine scent. He was the lead mechanic for the dealership, and I loved the way the oil and the orange hand cleaner combined with his own smell. He was a little shorter than Jack but much more muscular thanks to all the heavy lifting he did during the day. His pectoral muscles were rock hard, and his biceps were as big around as my thigh. Well, the lower part of my thigh, anyway. With thick black hair and deep brown eyes that were always sparkling with humor and fun, he was every woman's dream and my reality.

At the sight of us, Jack's shoulders slumped. "I don't understand what's going on. I thought maybe this was some kind of joke. I'm not laughing, though."

"Let's back up," Ryan said. "I just got here, so start from the beginning."

"I left the dealership early after fighting with shipping manifests all day," Jack began. "I must have fallen asleep

at the wheel, because one minute I was driving home the back way on the old Coller Road, and the next minute there was a loud banging noise that scared the hell out of me. I went off the road and barely got control of the truck. Had to pull over a minute, but I shook it off. I pulled into the driveway, and I saw Lila..." He trailed off.

Ryan glanced from Jack's odd expression to my fiery red face and began to smile. "Lila was washing her car, eh?"

Jack looked up. "How'd you know?"

Ryan grinned. "I saw the hose and the bucket. She's a terrific woman who knows how to cheer a man up after a long day at work."

"Ryan, listen, I thought she was my wife," Jack stammered.

"I'm standing right here," I said.

Both men looked at me for a moment.

I started to babble. "So, Jack greeted me with enthusiasm, I shoved him off, I changed clothes and let him come inside after he promised not to come near me again. He swore he knew his way around this house but the furniture was wrong, and that's basically where you came in, honey."

Ryan turned to Jack. "You've been here often enough, man. You should know your way around the house."

"The master bathroom's toilet doesn't flush very well, so we never let people use it during parties. There's a slow drip from the hot-water tap out in the laundry-room sink. The left shutter on the east window of the dining room bangs when it's storming outside. And something in the garbage disposal squeaks," Jack said.

We stared at him. "You could have known that stuff from me or Ryan complaining," I said slowly.

Jack sighed and looked at me. “Your nickname as a child was Boodle Boo, and you hate it. You have a tiny Libra symbol tattooed on your hip. You got it when you turned twenty-one, and you put it in a place that would be hidden by a swimsuit so no one would know. And your favorite thing is to be bent over a desk and taken from behind when there’s a chance someone might walk in at any moment.”