

Valentine's Cowboy

By

Starla Kaye

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Starla Kaye

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Chapter One

What she needed was a big Cupid dartboard on her office wall and a few darts. Then she could toss the darts at some strategic places. The vision almost made Valentine Hart smile. *Romance, patooi!* Probably a bad attitude for a professional romance therapist, but there it was. *Romance sucked!*

If she was really lucky she would never receive another overly mushy card that professed how wonderful or how beautiful she was—in the most generic ways. She would never sit through another candlelight dinner for two where the man insisted on choosing her meal, unconcerned with what she really wanted. She would never endure having another handsome man seduce her with sweet talk, and then attempt to make her “see the stars” as he had his way with her body.

She sat back in her big leather executive chair, swiveled it to look out the window of her corner office, and tried to force the memory of the night before far from her mind. Not possible. It had been too awful. The blind date from hell, even if that was a bit cliché. It was such a shame, too. At first glance of the GQ fashioned stockbroker she’d had such hopes for the evening. Hopes that were dashed almost from the moment he sat down across from her in her favorite, very romantic little Italian restaurant. It would be a long time before she’d feel up to going there again. He’d soured her on that, too.

She squeezed her eyes shut and slowly shook her head at the sadness of it all. Shoulder-length hair dusted her shoulders. The effort didn’t get rid of the memory, but it did make her slightly dizzy. Or maybe she was dizzy and light-headed from lack of sleep lately, or from frustration. How about all of the above?

Why did the men she dated forget about her being a highly skilled professional and only see her blond hair, only think of her as ditzy? Why couldn’t men see past her unfortunate perfect Barbie doll figure? Weren’t there *any* men—make that *available* men—out there who thought with more than their dick? Men whose blood actually flowed all the way to their brain and could make conversation. Decent conversation, that is. More than about their flashy, over-priced car or their high-tech apartment with a playboy’s dream bedroom. Wasn’t there any man who could talk about more than his amazing skills between the sheets?

She heaved a disappointed sigh and looked again out at the sky burdened with thick gray clouds holding the promise of another depressing winter day. Perfect. She was already depressed about the whole issue of romance. Okay, she had to admit that never wanting any of those romantic things again was a bit dramatic. Normally, she liked all of that. But she hadn’t had much luck with any of it, beginning with her failed marriage. *Insert heavy sigh here.*

She was a professional, an independent woman quite capable of running a business and handling her life. She had a sensual, loving side that was apparently going to waste away if she continued in her rut of dating the wrong men. She didn’t want to be a man’s substitute mother, major “oh yuck!” Or be his caretaker. Too many of the men she’d dated in the last year seemed to be looking for those skills in a woman. If not those traits, then they wanted a brainless playmate in bed, particularly one who praised their super-stud abilities. As far as she’d been able to tell “super-stud” merely meant the man had a penis and knew where to stick it in his partner of the moment for his pleasure alone.

Okay, she was in a seriously bad mood.

Her thoughts returned to the male Cupid dartboard idea. She smiled wickedly, knowing exactly where she would toss that first dart.

Then the image of Cupid changed to her ex-husband. She cringed and quickly put many layers of clothing on “Cupid.” How could she *not* have sensed he was at heart a gay man? Why had she had to catch him enthusiastically having at it with their former neighbor before she slammed into the wall of reality? That was so not an image she wanted to keep in her mind! Even worse, why hadn’t she been horrified, angry, felt betrayed? She’d simply given him the divorce and wished him happiness in his next relationship.

And she’d not found a really hot relationship of her own since then.

Her breath caught in her throat as she figured it out. *I’m a lesbian!* That had to be the answer. But she didn’t remember ever paying all that much attention to what another woman looked like. She didn’t remember ever wondering what another woman would be like in bed. Maybe she’d been suppressing those things because she’d been married. Yes, that had to be it. *No. Well, maybe.* Oh, she was confused.

Feeling a headache coming on, she swiveled her chair back around to face her desk and the reality of her daily world. Her appointment schedule covered the monitor. No sign of a blank hourly space for the next month. Business was booming, which should make her feel great. Unfortunately, as a momentarily romantically challenged partner in a romance therapy business, she felt stressed instead. She couldn’t handle clients right now. She couldn’t find a way to offer advice to improve a relationship, or to suggest intimate little rendezvous ideas. She couldn’t face another hopeful couple seeking romantic bliss.

She needed a vacation. Now!

She glanced down at the wedding invitation from a sweet young couple she’d counseled the last couple of months. Shelby Thompson had absolutely blossomed during the sessions. Shelby had come completely out of the passion-suppressed state she’d been in due to having been raised by a stuffy, strict, domineering older brother. He wouldn’t even leave his precious ranch to go to the wedding in Maui. Boy, if she could get her hands on the man...or maybe toss a couple of darts his way.

Maui! Perfect!

Before she could talk herself out of it, she punched the line for the firm’s receptionist. “Tracy?”

“Yes, Ms. Hart?”

“Clear my schedule for the next two weeks, beginning today. I’m going on vacation.”

Her heart raced at the spur of the moment decision. For too long the business had consumed her. She’d worked hard to help get the firm established. She’d sacrificed a lot of personal things, including her dream of opening a bed-and-breakfast and hosting retreats for women recovering from bad relationships. She was the reigning Queen of Bad Relationships. She’d been spinning out of control for too long.

It was time to get away, time to calm down, and time to figure out her life. Maybe even come to grips with her momentary sexual-orientation confusion. Something made only more confusing when her next mental image was of a darkly tanned, muscled, male luau dancer. Then another image popped into her head, one of a cowboy sitting atop a powerful horse, the cowboy’s well-defined chest was shirtless. She was a bare chest lover. Well, a nice taut butt was pretty intriguing also.

What was she thinking! The cowboy looked suspiciously like the photo Shelby had shown her of the doesn’t-have-a-clue-how-to-raise-a-sister older brother.

She forced away the image and reiterated her message to the receptionist, “Rearrange my schedule. Now!”

“Val? Val, what are you talking about?” came the horrified voice of one of her two partners, Abby Tarrington, obviously standing near the front desk. “You can’t leave! That’s just nuts!”

Valentine supposed the decision could be seen as “nuts,” but she didn’t actually care. She’d been working a ton more hours than either of her partners. Her choice, yes. But now she was making a new choice. “I have two partners—of which *you* are one—who are more than capable of handling the firm’s appointments. I’ve covered for both of you many times.”

“Yes, but—”

“No *but*s about it, Abby! The beaches of Maui are calling me far away from Kansas City. Far, far away from Greg-of-bold-hands, and Thinks-he’s-super-stud-but-isn’t Paul.”

She cringed at the mention of her last two dates, especially GQ guy. Again wondering how it was that she attracted such jerks? Was there something on her forehead that flashed: *Need laid. Accept all ridiculous come-on lines.*

She sensed Abby getting ready to launch into a lengthy protest and cut her off. “I’m burned out, useless as a romance therapist. I’m taking a break. Taking it now! Figure out how to deal with the schedule.”

* * *

Nine freaking hours on an airplane. Sam Thompson hated cramped spaces. He hated flying and everything about it. You didn’t even get decent meals anymore. A pitifully small bag of dried out pretzels, maybe. Or you could pay for a snack, which he refused to do. The cost of the ticket was bad enough. And there were crying babies with frustrated mothers. The flight attendants weren’t much better, after the first couple of hours they were pretty harried. Never again would he go through this kind of hell. His sister owed him big for this! It was bad enough she wanted him to put on a tux and give her away in marriage. He couldn’t even remember the last time he’d worn a suit.

He felt his lip curling in a snarl. He didn’t want to give Shelby away. He didn’t think that fiancé of hers was good enough for her. Not that his love-struck sister cared two cents for his opinion. Disrespectful brat, even if he loved every disrespecting inch of her. He’d been older brother and substitute parent for over twelve years, since their parents had died and he’d been forced into the role and management of the family ranch. He was life experienced. She wasn’t.

He blew out a deep breath in an attempt to calm down. It didn’t help. Shelby had used her sweet, innocent pleading voice on him the second time she’d asked him to come to the wedding. She’d never taken “no” very well. His initial resistance had finally melted like chocolate in the sun. He’d be donning a damn tux, looking like an idiot. Cowboys weren’t meant to wear fancy duds like that.

Smoldering at the upcoming humiliation, he thought again about his destination. Maui. *Maui!* Cowboys didn’t belong in Maui. At least not *this* cowboy. If he didn’t love the imp so much... If she didn’t wind him so easily around her delicate little finger, he would have put his size twelve boots down and flat out said *No!*

As he attempted to find a more comfortable position for his six-foot-four-inch frame, he grimaced. He should have forked out the money for first class. But he didn’t like wasting money, not when the ranch he was so damn tired of running needed every penny he could get his hands on. He hoped like hell he could talk Shelby and Dale into changing their minds about taking over Dale’s family’s tour business on Maui and take over the ranch in Kansas instead. It was as much

hers as it was his.

He'd been thinking for months now how badly he wanted free of the ranch. He wanted to return to veterinary school to finish his degree. The dream he'd given up at twenty-two and had only resurfaced again when Crowley's old veterinarian told Sam he wanted to retire. But he'd been waiting on Sam to finish his schooling and take over the practice. *Damn*. He wanted to do that so bad he could feel the longing clear down to his bones. He had to convince Shelby to do her duty with the family ranch.

Forcing aside the thoughts for now, he attempted to stretch out the kinks in his back and only ended up feeling worse. At least he didn't have someone sitting next to him. A few minutes ago the pilot had announced that they'd be landing in Maui in another hour. *Seven days on what had once been a volcano, now professed to be paradise. It's a damn tiny piece of land surrounded by water*. The idea alone made him shudder. He missed the rolling flint hills of Kansas already.

"Have you been to Maui before?" the early-twenty-something blond across the aisle asked cheerily, interrupting his bout of self-pity.

"No," he stated simply, hoping she'd give up on him.

She'd spent a great deal of time trying to engage him in conversation, even though he hadn't tried to encourage her in any way. He had just finished a five-year relationship with a woman he'd been comfortable with. He wasn't exactly upset about the break up. He'd never had much luck when it came to finding a woman as passionate as he'd like her to be, or one that really sparked a need in him to mention the idea of marriage. Still, he wasn't particularly interested in the dating scene again just yet. Certainly not with a peppy cheerleader type. In comparison to her, he felt ancient and decrepit, even if he was only thirty-three.

"You'll love it!" She all but bounced in her seat in excitement. "Everything is so green, except the flowers, of course. And there're tons of flowers." She winked at him in a way he suspected was supposed to be flirtatious. "It's warm, too, for February. Bikini sunbathing weather, in the low 80s. I've got *the* cutest, tiniest bikini and can't wait to wear it."

He didn't want to think about her in a bikini, or about her at all. Not that he didn't appreciate a woman's body in some skimpy pieces of fabric. Or flat-out, bare naked. But he preferred a woman much closer to his age. A woman with a little meat on her bones, too. He preferred a woman who had some experience with a man and all the wonders that could be shared by good lovemaking. Miss Barely-Out-of-Her-Teens was scrawny, like too many of the high-fashion models these days. He sure didn't want to think that she knew much about heat between the sheets.

"I like cold weather," he finally said to discourage her.

It worked. Her eyes rounded and she looked like he'd slapped her. With a final shake of her head in disgust, she gave up on conversing with him. *Thank God*. She plunked her headphones back on and returned to watching the in-flight movie. He went back to reminding himself how much he loved his sister, enough that he was on his way to Maui. The last place he wanted to be, except to convince Shelby to take over the ranch.

* * *

The phone rang in the living room/kitchen area and interrupted Valentine's dream of lying on the beach at sunset. She had just reached the point of moaning in increasing need as a tall, dark, and delicious man went from kissing her senseless to nibbling his way down to a

breast he had slid free of her bikini top. As her frustrated body fought off losing the sensual dream, she squeezed her eyes more tightly closed and hissed her annoyance. *Death to the intruder!*

Her body still tingling in anticipation of the wonders that were not to be, she opened her eyes and was startled that the bedroom had darkened. She'd only lain down for a short nap to get over some of the jetlag headache. Short had evidently turned into quite a few hours.

Resigned to the loss of her mystery lover and fulfillment—at least in a dream—she rolled off the bed and tromped to the other room. The sounds of the rolling waves crashing against the shore through the balcony door she'd left partially open nearly drowned out the persistent ringing of the phone.

“Hello,” she said cautiously into the receiver. She held her breath, hoping her partners hadn't tracked her down here to the Papakea Resort already. But they would have called on her cell phone anyway.

“Is your condo okay?” Shelby asked anxiously. “We can get you another one if it's not. Dale's family reserved six of the condo buildings here in the resort for the next two weeks.”

Sinking onto one of the white rattan barstools at the counter between the kitchen and the living room, Valentine smiled. Shelby and Dale had been terrific ever since she'd called and warned them she was on her way to Maui. They'd met her at Kahului Airport and driven her here to this place of absolute beauty. Shelby had talked nonstop the entire drive about all the exciting plans they had for their wedding guests the week before their Valentine's Day wedding. And Shelby had insisted that she take part in each and every event planned. So much for time alone to think about her life. Still, it all sounded like such fun that she figured she could use her second week here to deal with all of that stuff.

“Val?” Shelby asked again, sounding concerned about the lack of response.

“Sorry, spaced out for a minute,” she apologized. Her gaze shifted out the sliding doors of her third floor condo to the exquisitely landscaped grounds. Vast areas of finely bladed green grass, bushes of dark pink bougainvillea lining one side of the sidewalk leading to the kidney-shaped pool and cabana surrounded by towering coconut palms. Miles of brilliant blue water lie directly behind that, defined by the line of white waves rolling to the light caramel-colored sandy beach. “I so love this place,” she said on a sigh. “No wonder you and Dale want to live here.”

Shelby snorted. “We won't if Big Bro gets his way.”

Valentine felt her protective instincts bursting to life. Big Bro already had a lot to answer for, in her totally biased opinion! “Now what has he done?”

“He wants Dale and I to take over the ranch back in Kansas, which is crazy. Dale's from Maui. He wouldn't have a clue how to run a ranch, even if he wanted to, which he doesn't.”

Shelby heaved a sigh much too heavy for someone so young. “I'm being torn between wanting to please my brother, and wanting to make my fiancé happy. Dale is furious with Sam for even asking this of us.” She hesitated. “I hope the two of them can be civil to each other this week.”

“This week? Are you telling me your sainted brother has relented and decided to come here after all?” She was stunned, and pleased at the same time. She couldn't discuss anything Shelby had told her in confidence, but she would find some way to make her displeasure with him known.

“I did everything but cry over the phone to get him to come. He caved when he finally understood this is something I really, really wanted of him.” Her tone turned gentler. “I love him, and he loves me. Life hasn't dealt him a fair hand, but he's always tried to do the best he could.”

“Whoever is in charge of dealing out ‘life’ cards deals lots of unfair hands.” She didn’t have much sympathy for the man.

Shelby was quiet a second before saying thoughtfully, “Sam’s wanting us to take over the ranch really surprised me. It’s been his world for so long. Now I’m beginning to think there are things about him I never knew.”

Then she lightened up and said, “I called to remind you about the mai tai party and hula lessons tonight down by the pool. You’re coming, aren’t you?”

Valentine had considered passing on it since she was functioning on so little sleep. But she couldn’t resist the excitement in Shelby’s voice. Besides, she loved mai tais. And learning to wiggle her hips in a semblance of a hula—which is exactly all she’d be doing she was sure—sounded kind of fun. “Count me in.”

“Great! I think it starts in an hour. Wait until you see the Hawaiian stud muffin they’ve got lined up to man the bar in the cabana tonight! Hotter than hot, I tell you.” She giggled. “Don’t tell Dale I said that. He thinks *he’s* a stud muffin, too. And he gets kind of jealous.”

She hung up after agreeing to keep Shelby’s secret. She slumped against the counter. Why couldn’t she find a stud muffin of her own? Then she remembered what she’d concluded back in her office: that maybe she wasn’t meant to have a relationship with a man. That maybe she’d been dating the wrong gender.

An image of a hunka-hunka burning love flashed into her mind and she slumped even more. The image definitely wasn’t of a woman. No, it’d been that same image of the bare-chested cowboy sitting on an enormous horse she’d had before.

She hung the image away. Clearly she wasn’t trying hard enough to get in the right frame of mind. She’d spent too many years believing she was attracted only to men. It was a habit that was all. A person could break habits. She would. Men had given her nothing but disappointments for as long as she could remember. She was moving on!

* * *

Sam stood on his third floor balcony nursing one of the beers his sister had thoughtfully provided him in the condo’s refrigerator. She had tried to get him to come down to the mai tai party at poolside, but he’d begged off. It was all he could do to stand here for a few minutes and take in the view. Back home he never seemed to have time to notice the sunsets or the sunrises. They just happened. He worked from before sunrise to after sunset. He felt guilty for being here and leaving the ranch duties to his foreman. But Jake was more than just the foreman; he was Sam’s friend. A friend who seemed to love the ranch more than Sam did.

He took another swig of the cold brew and listened to the sounds of waves rolling into the shoreline. It was loud, much louder than the quiet of the Kansas flint hills he was used to. Yet he found it soothing. He figured he would get some good sleep tonight and he needed it.

Then his hearing picked up on the music being played by a trio with a guitar, an odd drum, and a keyboard. Definitely not country music, but it didn’t grate on his nerves. Along with the music a woman was announcing something about it being time for hula lessons. That had him noting a dozen women of various ages, including his sister, heading for poolside where the lessons would evidently take place.

He smiled in amusement, and then yawned. Maybe he ought to pass on watching this and go catch some serious zzzzs.

Before he could move away, his sister waved to a woman at the cabana bar and called her

over to the lessons. Curious, he watched until the woman stepped out of the shadows and he muttered, “Well, hot damn!” Blond, beautiful, and built. The three Bs he was so fond of.

The woman nearly tripped coming down the steps from the cabana, but caught herself on the railing and laughed. Even with all the noise of the ocean rolling in and the sounds from the party, he managed to hear the very feminine laugh. It warmed him. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d laughed, or the last time he and his previous girlfriend had laughed together. There’d been a time when laughter came easily to him. Before his parents had been killed in the auto accident. Before he’d taken on more responsibilities than a young man should have to. He cradled the sweet, carefree sound to him, and decided he wanted to hear more of it from closer.

By the time he strolled through the gate at poolside the hula demonstration was in full lesson. Each of the young women had donned fake grass skirts that hung to mid-calf. Most of them sported either skin-tight T-shirts that stopped inches above the navel or bikini tops. He frowned for a second as he noted Shelby wore one of the bikini tops. He didn’t like seeing so much of her exposed to one and all. His gut reaction had him wanting to toast her butt, but then he had no say in the matter any more. She was grown up now. A fact that had him feeling sad and empty. Must be the empty nest syndrome he’d heard that mothers sometimes went through. ‘Course he wasn’t her mother, but he had raised her from age six on.

That soft, sensual laugh he’d heard before curled around him as the blond who’d caught his attention accidentally bumped hips with Shelby. Shelby bumped her back, giggling. The shapely blond sported a hot pink bikini top and full breasts that had his mouth watering. Those enticing breasts bounced rhythmically as she attempted to get back into the hula motion. He’d be dreaming about this for days, maybe longer.

He joined a group of men standing around the fence admiring the gyrating hips of the nearby beauties. Dale couldn’t take his eyes off Shelby, but he managed to say, “We didn’t think you were coming down for this.”

Sam’s attention was fully focused on the curvaceous blond in the pink top and grass skirt that swayed to give hints of long, slender legs. “Found I couldn’t resist the temptation.”

The men stopped speaking; their entire concentration on the females innocently torturing them. He certainly felt tortured and big time aroused. His vivid imagination stripped away the pink bikini top and freed those soft, plump breasts. He stripped away the fake skirt as well. His erection swelled to amazing proportions and he ached.

All too soon the music stopped and the women hugged each other in happiness. Then his luscious blond beauty suddenly stiffened in the embrace of the hula instructor. She paled and looked in panic around the area. An instant later she’d raced across the cement and launched herself into his arms.

Instinct had him wrapping his arms around her and trying to keep them from falling over since he’d nearly lost his balance. She looked up at him with blue eyes revealing how tipsy she was. She gave him a goofy smile, which he found oddly cute.

He held her even tighter to keep her upright. Holding the shapely bundle of sweet-smelling woman was definitely not a hardship.

“I see you’ve met Valentine,” Shelby said in amusement as she walked over with Dale.

Valentine? Valentine? He vaguely remembered the name, an odd name at that. Fitting, though, he decided.

He shook his head as the woman in question clung to his shirt to remain on her feet. “Not exactly *met*, Shelby. She sort of flew into my arms.” He glanced down at his pretty blond and

smiled gently as she struggled to focus on him.

“I’ve pretty...pretty much decided,” Valentine started. She blinked but still couldn’t seem to focus. “I’ve decided I’m not...not a les...lesbi...lesbian.” She grinned at him. “You’re mighty handsome, Handsome.” She batted her eyelashes and giggled.

Shelby studied her friend curiously. “I don’t know what she’s talking about. But I think she’s had one too many mai tais.” She continued to watch him holding Valentine, her expression turning speculative. “I’ve never seen her like this; it’s a whole other side of her.”

“Mai tai?” Valentine swiveled in Sam’s arms, brushing her bottom against the part of him that had grown rock hard as he’d held her. “Sure! I’ll...I’ll take another one.”

“No, I don’t think so, darlin’,” Sam countered as she began crumpling in his hold.

He scooped her into his arms rather than let her land on the cement. He didn’t understand her mumblings about lesbians, but he sensed she was most certainly *not* one. Mainly because she’d looked at him as if she wanted to strip his clothes off right here and have her way with him. Damn if the idea hadn’t appealed to him. But his sister was here. Well, and everyone else. And he didn’t do that sort of thing. At least he never had before.

“Dr. Hart, are you okay?” Dale asked, while she looked dazedly his direction.

“Can’t feel my legs.” She giggled. “I’m floating.”

Sam had stiffened when Dale called her *Dr. Hart*. Now he knew who she was. *Dr. Valentine Hart*, the counselor his sister had gone to with Dale. A romance therapist. An occupation he didn’t understand at all. Why anyone, especially his sister, would want or need to go to someone for advice on romance was beyond him. And ever since those sessions, Shelby had been different. More independent. Yeah, she’d seemed happier, but he figured that had more to do with the upcoming wedding than some therapy sessions.

“Val,” Shelby said, gently touching Valentine’s cheek and pushing the fine strands of blond hair from her face. “I think you need to go to bed. You’re exhausted, and you’re... well, you’re definitely wasted.”

Valentine reached up to touch his jaw and the beard stubble there. “Can I take stud muffin with me?”

Shelby met his gaze and laughed. “The ‘stud muffin’ is my brother. He’ll take you to your condo, which, as it happens, is right next to his.”

Valentine had a second of awareness, enough to recognize the words ‘brother’ and tie it to Shelby. She tried to roll herself out of his hold and nearly made them fall, but he was strong enough to prevent it. Still, she managed to huff, “I’m annoyed with you!”

He juggled her into a better position and scowled down at her. “I’m pretty pissed at you, too.” That said he strode through the gate that Dale held open and down the sidewalk toward their building. Halfway there he asked, “I assume you have your key.”

She was almost totally gone, but gazed at him long enough to shake her head. “Lost it. I don’t know...don’t know where.” With that her head thumped against his chest and he knew she’d passed out.

Shelby raced up behind them, obviously having heard Valentine’s comment. “I can go to the front desk and get another key for her.”

Sam was strong, but carrying the dead-weight of a passed out woman down the sidewalk for the length of two buildings and up three flights of stairs, and then holding her while he waited for his sister to return was more than he could do. “Just get my key out of my back pocket. She can sleep it off tonight in my bed. We’ll deal with the lost key issue tomorrow.”

“You can’t sleep with her!” Shelby gasped.

He scowled at his sister and walked faster. His arms were starting to cramp. “Did I *say* I would be in bed with her? I’ll take the sofabed.”

“Oh. Well, okay.”

A few minutes later Sam carefully spread his drunken sleeping beauty across his bed. Shelby quickly tugged off the grass skirt, saw him staring in pure admiration at Valentine’s long naked legs beneath the skimpy bikini she wore, and pulled a blanket from the closet to cover her friend.

She spun to face him, narrowing her eyes. “Touch her tonight and you’re a dead man.”

He returned her scowl, for the second time tonight thinking she needed her butt warmed. Instead he said, “You’ve sure gotten sassy ever since you started seeing this here therapist.” He wasn’t about to admit that he knew he’d be fighting the urge to crawl into bed with the beauty who called to everything male in him. “Scoot on back to the party. Dale will be missing you.”

She walked to the outer door and glanced back at Valentine. “You be nice to her. She’s more than my former therapist, she’s my friend.”

“I’m always nice,” he grouched.

With a roll of her eyes, Shelby left. Standing there alone, he slowly looked back into the bedroom. The blanket might as well be invisible. He’d seen every delicious inch of Dr. Hart and it was etched on his brain. Annoying as that was, his cock was so rigid that he knew this would be a long night. No doubt about it, he wanted the little romance therapist...for a little romancing.

He chuckled, amused at his bit of wit. Yeah, he wouldn’t mind at all kissing those perfect pink lips and proving to her once and for all that she wasn’t even close to being lesbian. He chuckled again, wondering how in the world she’d gotten that crazy notion. He’d seen her eyeing the bartender, the waiter, and a couple other men as she’d danced. Her looks had been pretty damn heated, definitely admiring. Yep, that lesbian business was a dang crazy notion.

She rolled onto her side and a bare leg slipped out from under the edge of the blanket. His breath caught. Hell of a nice leg.

As he tried to force his feet to turn away, he stood there for several long minutes. He needed to stop staring at the sleeping blond in his bed. In order to finally walk the other direction he had to come up with reasons why she irritated him. She’d caused some kind of change in his sweet, innocent sister. Now she wasn’t easily intimidated by him, which he actually was glad about. Now she hugged and kissed both Dale and him in public more often, something he was a tad uncomfortable with.

He started undoing the sofabed and pictured Valentine Hart as he’d first seen her: tipsy and tripping down the cabana steps. He didn’t approve of anyone, especially a woman, getting so drunk they didn’t know what they were doing. There were a lot of crazies in the world who could and would take advantage of them in the wrong situations. She deserved to have her pert little backside heated up just for that. And then there was the whole throwing herself into a stranger’s arms, not that he—the stranger—minded. Still, that was something else she should be spanked for.

Unfolding the bed, he blew out a deep breath. If he kept on thinking about reasons to spank the hot female in his bedroom, he’d never get a lick of sleep tonight. Worst part of it all was that he wanted to touch her so bad that he was willing to come up with unreasonable reasons to take her over his knee. If he couldn’t slide between her legs and into her warmth, at least he could lay a hand to the soft flesh of her bottom.

He jerked off his clothes and flung himself bare-assed naked down on the sofabed. Then he flipped onto his side. He was too damn hard to sleep on his stomach. Hell.