

Cherry on Top – Some Like it Rough

Chapter One

The hot water jets massaged and soothed her muscles, bringing her fully awake. “I’m so not a morning person,” Cherry muttered to herself as she slapped a hand against the tile wall of the shower to keep herself upright.

As the heat continued to do its job, Cherry grabbed her pink puff and spurted some bath gel onto it. She ran the sponge over her arms and shoulders, down her ribcage, then dipped it between her thighs. The instant the soft sponge touched her clit an image sprang to mind.

Dante Ricci. The man who haunted her dreams and drove her crazy with his intense blue eyes and dark good looks. They’d never shared more than a few hellos and yet she always had the impression he saw right through her, as if reading her thoughts. He was a dangerous man to any woman, but that didn’t stop her from wanting him. Craving him. His sculpted body, square jaw and sensual mouth were pure sin. Fantasy material for certain. And she’d had plenty of fantasies over the last four months since moving to Zanesville, Ohio.

Cherry dropped the sponge and grabbed the removable showerhead from the hook on the wall, then ran it over her body. She closed her eyes and let her mind conjure up an image of Dante, nude, kneeling in front of her, taking her clit between his teeth, licking and suckling her pussy.

She drifted the pounding streams over her breasts, increasing her pleasure, then down to the juncture of her thighs. She gasped and flung her head back when the water hit her throbbing center. Each nerve ending came alive. She imagined Dante’s fingers plunging deep inside her aching hot core as she stroked and petted her glistening pussy, her body convulsing. She laid her head back against the shower wall and lifted her foot to the ledge, exposing her flesh, then dipped two fingers deep as the water teased her clit.

Cherry trembled with anticipation, her entire body alive with sensation. She squirmed against the onslaught, as she envisioned Dante’s mesmerizing gaze, dark, tousled hair and powerful body. Her lower body started a sweet rhythm that drew a whimper out of her. Cherry pulled her fingers free and cupped her left breast, squeezing and massaging with the sort of force she imagined Dante using. She pinched her own nipple, torturing herself further. As she slid the water jets over the inside of her thigh, coaxing a moan from deep inside Cherry’s chest, her soft, wet pussy throbbing and aching for release, then back to her clit again. The swollen mass of nerve endings pulsed as wicked images of Dante fondling her, licking her to completion, drove her over the edge. She slammed her palm against the wall and rode out the climax, shouting Dante’s name as she came.

Cherry placed the shower head back on the hook and took a moment to catch her breath, legs shaking, her body still pulsing with little aftershocks. It wasn’t the first time she’d started her day this way, and it wouldn’t be the last. She wished she had the nerve to approach the sexy owner of the business next to her massage therapy center. One of these days maybe it really would be him in this shower with her.

“Yeah, and I’ll suddenly sprout wings and fly.” Whom was she kidding? She was too damn shy to approach a man like Ricci! Thanks to her jerk of an ex-husband, she was just way too unsure of her own appeal.

She finished washing and turned the water off, then forced herself to forget about things that could never be, and concentrated on the task at hand, which was making Serene Comfort a success. She had clients coming in who needed her to be in top form and she refused to let them down. Word of mouth was a powerful promotional tool and Cherry hoped the more people who left her center happy, the more business she’d have. She wouldn’t let anyone derail her from making her business a success.

“There, that’s the last box. Now it’s official.”

“You’ve been doing business for two months and now it’s official?”

Cherry laughed. “Wade, it’s never official until the last box is unpacked. Surely you knew that.”

Wade picked up another donut and took a large bite, then mumbled, “By your way of thinking I’ve yet to be moved into my apartment and I’ve been there for three years.”

“You just don’t understand the female mind.”

“And no man ever will, baby.”

Cherry stopped and stared at her friend. He’d been there for her through it all. The divorce, the tears, and the worry of what she was going to do with the rest of her life. He’d never once complained. Heck, she still wouldn’t have the shop if it weren’t for him. He’d been the one to show her the empty space, then he’d helped her set up the loan at the bank. She owed him so much. Tears welled in her eyes. “I can never repay you for everything you’ve done for me these last four months.”

Wade’s head shot up. It was always like that with him. He picked up on the slightest hint of sadness. She’d never quite understood how he could read her so well.

When he placed the chocolate iced donut back in the container and strode across the room, she knew what was coming and welcomed it. His big strong arms wrapped around her shoulders and pulled her against him in a tight embrace. “You don’t worry about repaying me. I’m just glad we found this building so cheap. It worked out perfectly.”

“Yes. It was the first good thing to happen since Brody decided I was in the way of his happiness.”

“Brody is a bastard. He’s out of your life and if you ask me you’re better off.”

“Thanks, Wade. It’s odd, but I do feel like there’s been a weight lifted. It’s scary to think I could spend three years with a man and not really know him for the snake he is.”

“Just remember, not all men are like Brody. There’s a gem out there for you, I know it.”

“My white knight,” she murmured.

“Damn straight.”

The bells on the door chimed and she stepped out of Wade’s arms to see who it could be, she didn’t have another appointment for an hour. When Cherry saw the man filling the doorway, she cringed. Dante Ricci from the financial consulting business next door and if the scrunched brows were any indication, he wasn’t any happier to see her than she was him. Her morning foray in the shower sprung to mind and her cheeks heated. Dante’s mouth curved, as if he knew her naughty little secret. Damn annoying man.

She stiffened her spine. “Can I help you?”

“I’m here to schedule an appointment.”

Her eyes shot wide. “You are?”

He stepped forward. “Got a problem with that, Ms. Dubois?”

She had to step back. It was pure suicide to stand so close to a man like Dante. He exuded power and masculinity. Cherry wanted nothing to do with either. At least that’s what she kept chanting to overactive libido.

“I’m booked up today.”

“I’m free tomorrow,” he countered.

On shaky legs, she walked around the counter and grabbed her appointment book from the shelf underneath. When she flipped it open and realized she had a slot open at the end of the day the following evening she winced. “I can fit you in at five, does that work?”

“Great. See you then.”

He started to leave and for a moment she was distracted by the way his black suit pants stretched over his tight buttocks. My god he was delicious to look at! The bells on the door brought her out of her lustful musings. “Wait! I need to know how long you want. I offer a half hour, forty-five minute and one hour massage.”

His gaze moved south, had Cherry not been watching him so closely she would have missed the quick peek at her cleavage. “Definitely an hour,” he growled, then he walked out.

“Wow,” she breathed.

Wade snapped his fingers in front of her face. “Earth to Cherry.”

“He’s really...something.”

“He wants you. Bad.”

Cherry’s cheeks heated, again she thought of her little masturbation session that morning. “He wants a massage bad, not me.”

Wade tapped her nose and murmured, “No, babe, he wants you. The massage is a ruse.”

She frowned. “In that case, maybe I should cancel the appointment. It’s not appropriate.”

“Listen to yourself. Not appropriate? You aren’t married anymore and you did nothing wrong by giving him an appointment. If things get hot and heavy, you’ll handle it.”

“You have more confidence in me than I do, Wade, because I’m not sure that man can even be handled.”

Wade laughed and grabbed his bottle of apple juice. “Trust me, with a body like yours, you’ll handle Dante Ricci just fine.”

“Are you flirting with me, Mr. Harrison?”

“Hell no! That’s like flirting with my sister.” he gave a mock-shudder. “Gross.”

Cherry shook her head. “Gee, thanks.”

Wade took one last swallow of his apple juice then handed her the empty bottle. “Thanks for breakfast, Cherry darlin’, but I need to scoot.”

She took the bottle and rose on her tiptoes to place a kiss on his cheek. “It was the least I could do considering all the work you put into this place. I still wish you’d let me pay you for the wallpaper you hung.”

“No. and if you dare bring up payment again, I’ll spank your ass.”

“Ooh, kinky,” she teased.

He leaned down and whispered into her ear, “You have no idea, baby, no idea.”

As he turned and left, Cherry could only stare. In all the years they’d been friends, Wade had never once said anything sexual to her. It must have been the August heat getting to him. And while he was a handsome devil, it wasn’t his voice and mesmerizing eyes she’d been dreaming about for the last few weeks. No, that dubious honor went to Dante Ricci. The dark haired Italian

with the brooding good looks and dangerous aura, who just happened to own the business to her right. And now he wanted a massage. She'd have his flesh beneath her fingertips, his big, hard body on her massage table. The thought sent a shiver of awareness to her core.

As she placed a clean sheet on the table she thought of how hard Brody had worked to make her feel inferior. When he realized she would never be the meek little wife he so badly craved, he'd sent her packing. She'd been left floundering with no home and no money. Thankfully, Wade had stepped up and given her a place to stay. Once it sank in that she was going to have to find a job, it had been Wade who'd reminded her of the massage therapist license she'd earned before marrying Brody. The one smart thing she'd done in the three years of marriage to the jerk was keep her license renewed. Thank God for that at least.

The divorce hadn't been pretty, but thanks to the lawyer Wade had hired, she'd been compensated nicely for the way Brody had treated her. She'd found a place of her own and took out a loan to open Serene Comfort. Now all she had to do was keep it open.

She glanced at the clock on the wall and realized her client would be there soon. She put thoughts of failed marriages and gorgeous looking Italians to the back of her mind and got to work. After all, making Serene Comfort a success was sure to be the best sort of revenge against Brody.

The next day, Cherry's nerves were shot. She'd been anticipating Dante's massage all day, even contemplated cancelling it to keep from having to face the man who sent her thoughts scattering and her body rioting out of control. As the clock struck five, Dante strode through the door. Right on time, she wasn't surprised. He seemed like a precise sort of man. She instructed him to undress to his own personal comfort level and wrap the folded sheet around his lower half, then lay face down on the table. Five minutes later she returned to the massage room and saw that Dante had done exactly as instructed. She noticed his clothes folded neatly in the chair. He'd stripped down to his birthday suit. She really wished he hadn't done that.

Cherry took a fortifying breath and said a silent prayer to get through the massage without fumbling, then went to work. First, she turned on the music and dimmed the lights just enough to create a relaxing atmosphere. Then she grabbed her oil out of the warmer and squirted a small amount onto her hands and rubbed them together.

"I'm going to start on your back and work my way down. The blanket will cover you at all times, except for the part I'm working on. If I'm using too much pressure, say so. This should feel good, not painful."

He nodded and somehow even his silence seemed dangerous. She worked on his deltoids first, then the trapezius. The heavy muscles proved difficult. He was much stronger and thicker than any man she'd massaged. She had to use more pressure than what she was used to, and Dante had a lot of tension. She frowned. "You should come in at least twice a month. You have knots on top of knots."

“Mmm, I would have been coming once a week since the moment you opened had I known how good you were.”

A zing of delight ran through her veins. “I’ve had my license for awhile, but I’ve only put it to use since I opened two months ago.”

“I know how long you’ve been here. You bought the space that I wanted to use to expand my business.”

“Oh. I didn’t realize.”

“I know.”

She worked her way over each vertebra, taking great care to massage each one. As she reached his gluteus medius, she covered the part of his back she’d just worked on and asked, “Are you comfortable with me working on your buttocks?”

“Go for it, I’m not the shy type.”

She choked back a laugh. Yeah, she’d just bet he wasn’t the shy type. Cherry started on his buttocks. She removed one side of the blanket at a time, keeping his other buttock covered. He groaned several times and she grinned. There was something about giving another individual this type of stress release that always had her smiling with pride. She loved her job and when she made people feel good, made them forget their cares, it was a rewarding feeling.

“So, Mr. Ricci, what do you do exactly. I know your business is financial consulting, but what all does that entail?”

“I help people select the right sort of investments. Showing them how best to save for the future, dealing with pensions and the like can mean retiring early or working until you can’t work any longer.”

Cherry slowly but methodically made her way down his thighs, finding and massaging several pressure points along the way. “So why did you want the space?”

“I’m considering bringing in other certified advisors, which will hopefully expand my client base and theirs.”

She noticed his low voice, as if nearly asleep. She carefully massaged each foot, then broke contact and said, “Now, you can turn over. Just drag the blanket as you go.”

Dante slowly slid to his back, his eyes closed, a drowsy expression on his face. He looked...boyish. Wow, he really was getting the most out of the massage. Cherry squirted more oil on her hands and began to work on his forehead and temples. With easy, flowing movements, she made her way down his jaw, where she carefully massaged the chords in his thick neck. She kept going, keeping her pace precise, her inner timer warning her that she needed to keep moving or get off schedule.

“That scent, what is it?”

“Cherries.”

He muttered something she couldn't quite make out, then said, “I told you about my business now you tell me about Massage Therapy.”

As she made her way over his torso, she talked. “When I received my license I got a job working in a Chiropractor's office and slowly built up my clientele. After a few years, I met Brody.”

“Who's Brody?”

“My ex-husband. After we married, I quit working and we began trying to have children. It never worked out though.”

“I'm sorry.”

“Me too.” She mentally pushed the sadness away and focused. “Anyway, after the divorce, I moved here.”

“Where did you live before?”

“Columbus. Not a huge move, but one that seemed necessary at the time.”

“A fresh start.”

She smiled. “Pretty much.”

“So, do all your clients undress completely?”

The question seemed so far out of left field, but she answered him anyway. “They always have the option of leaving their under garments on. Knowing in advance how thorough they want me to be, helps save a lot of embarrassment.”

“Have you ever had a man insist on keeping his boxers on?”

She rolled her eyes. “Of course. Most men aren't very modest, but there are a few who are.”

“How many people do you massage a day?”

Cherry noticed his voice wasn't quite so steady. He was so relaxed she doubted he even knew half of what he was saying. “Depends. As you know, I offer one hour massages, but I also offer half-hour and forty-five minute massages. The shorter times are basically targeted towards a specific problem area. For instance, I have a few clients who deal with carpal tunnel syndrome, the half-hour is perfect for that. Also, one pregnant woman comes to me for her feet. She has a

lot of swelling so I focus on her legs and feet. On average anywhere from ten to fifteen people a day.”

“And you work Monday through Friday?”

She finished the massage by smoothing out the tension in his arms and hands. “Yep. Five days a week keeps me afloat.”

“That’s a lot of work. It can’t be good for you to be on your feet like that.”

Cherry stepped back and admired her handy work. He was oiled from head to toe. With his tousled dark hair and sleek muscles, he looked like a calendar model. Sex and sin. And he was noticeably aroused. Oh my, he was huge!

“We’re through,” she managed around the rock in her throat, “I’ll just, uh, let you get dressed.”

Dante’s hand snaked out and grabbed onto her arm. A single tug and she was practically lying across his chest. “Mr. Ricci!”

“If you do this with all your male clients you can bet your sexy ass you’ll have a thriving business soon.” She started to protest, but he stopped her with a hard kiss. His lips were rough and commanding. When he pulled back, they were both panting. “I came here in the hopes of finding out that you’re a fraud. I want this space and I was all prepared to do whatever necessary to get it. But, I can see you’re very good at what you do. It’s obvious you love your work. My only question is, are you dating anyone?”

“That’s none of your business. Please let me go.”

He released her at once, which caused her to lose her footing. She stumbled backwards, just barely keeping her balance. When she moved to leave, he stopped her with another quick demand.

“Have dinner with me tonight.”

“Why? So you can talk me out of my lease?”

He sat up, keeping the sheet in place. “No. I won’t deny I want this space, but I also want to spend more time with the woman who stole it from me.”

“I did no such thing!”

He stood, one hand clutching the white sheet. He was the most forbidding man she’d ever seen. His sheer size alone made her feel vulnerable.

“Whether you realized it at the time doesn’t matter. Not anymore. I just want to spend an evening with you. Is that so much to ask?”

“You’re a client. It’s not ethical.”

“You’re an MT not a doctor, Cherry. Besides having dinner with me is perfectly innocent.”

She rolled her eyes at that bit of nonsense, then spared his growing erection a quick glance. “There’s nothing innocent in your invite and you know it.”

He had the gall to grin. “Okay, so I want you, but if all we have is dinner then it doesn’t matter how I feel, does it?”

“No. I don’t date my clients.”

He was silent a minute, then he said, “We’ll see.”

On shaky legs, Cherry left him to dress. His words flitted through her mind late into the night. The next morning she found herself in the shower again, attempting to stamp out her own wild cravings. And as usual, it wasn’t working for crap.

It’d been a month since that first massage and Dante hadn’t let up once. He had a standing appointment every Friday. His gentle coaxing was whittling away at her strength. He was simply too damn gorgeous. Too dangerous and exciting. It was like saying no to slice of chocolate cake. No woman had that sort of strength!

Today marked his fifth massage and once again he asked the same question.

“Have dinner with me, Cherry.”

It’d been a long time since she’d enjoyed a man’s company. Well before the divorce in fact. Who could blame her if she caved? “Dinner, nothing more. Are we clear on that?”

“Clear as glass, Ms DuBois.” The grin that curved his sensual lips wasn’t at all reassuring.

“Now, go so I can dress in private.”

“Yes, Master,” she answered sarcastically.

His eyes narrowed and she was sure he was about to say something more, but he stayed silent. She took the advantage and left him to dress and went about closing up. When he came out of the massage room, his perfectly sculpted body once again encased in a pair of navy trousers and a white dress shirt, she all but drooled. God, he was one gorgeous man.

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