My Gal Tuesday

INEZ KELLEY

My Gal Tuesday

Of the entire body of Snowcroft's staff, why did I get stuck with the asshole?

Tuesday Morgan deliberately refused to look in his direction, grabbed the wide wicker basket and set off down the aisle, totally ignoring the insufferable, opinionated, loud-mouthed man-candy beside her.

Man-candy? Did I just think man-candy and Grayson Sinclair in the same thought? Good gravy, I need a day off with a super charged Rabbit.

A day off sounded like heaven but heaven would just have to wait. Her to-do list was three miles long. She had worked too damn hard to get 'My Gal Tuesday' off the ground to go belly up now. Snagging the Snowcroft account was just the ticket she needed to move her business from starter-kit to making it. And if doing that meant putting up with *Mr. I'm-Too-Pissy-for-My-Shirt* then so be it. Determination firmed her jaw and stiffened her lip. No one, and she meant no one, was going to ruin this chance for her.

"So what do we have to do with this crap?" Gray picked up a scented candle, sniffed loudly and made a face. "What the hell is this, Ode de Gas Station Restroom?"

"Put that down and don't touch anything, alright?" Tuesday carefully removed the patchouli candle from his hands and drew in an exasperated breath. Why couldn't they have assigned her a nice secretary or a mail boy or even a UPS guy? No, she got stuck with the Vice President of Marketing, AKA a royal P.I.T.A. When he showed up with corporate credit card in hand and announced he was her shopping partner, her jaw clenched so hard, her molars were drafting a letter of complaint to the American Dental Association.

"You're here as *my help*, get it? Snowcroft's sent you to help me, not make commentary on the purchases."

"I'm supposed to pay and make sure these…gifty things are nice enough for the clients and I say that jar smells like shit."

"Leave it to an ass to know that." Once that little quip slid off her tongue she desperately wished she had the power to call it back. The one thing she didn't need was a

reputation for being difficult to work with. That would squash her business before it got on the map.

His thick brows rose far above his widened deep green eyes. “Pardon me?”

“I’m not the governor, I don’t give pardons.” Oh shit. *Hello? Tongue, you are hereby on probation.*

“Keep it up and you won’t be giving any baskets of crap either.” One brow dipped from questioning to irritated, slashing across his forehead in a sharp angle. “You think I’m an ass because I don’t buy into this whole manufactured holiday bullshit?”

“This holiday bullshit is my job, okay?”

Tuesday hooked the empty basket over her arm and rubbed her temples. A headache the size of Mt. St. Helen loomed behind her eyes and it was only going to take a teeny nudge to erupt into a volcanic-sized migraine. Gray could not be described as teeny by a blind man. Glowering at her in indignation, surrounded by candles and incense burners and potpourri, he seemed far too overgrown male.

Weren’t VPs of stuffy sounding jobs supposed to be thin and pale with fishy eyes and damp palms? They were not supposed to mouthwatering, hard-bodied centerfold wanna-bes. Any other time, spending a few hours with a nibble-worthy man would have thrilled her but this man-candy was sour.

“Look, you don’t want to be here. I don’t want you here. But neither of us have a say-so. Let’s just get through it and call it a night, alright?”

“Fine,” he snapped.

“Fine.”

Gray jammed his hands in the pockets of his khakis and scowled at the shelves. “So what do we need here? Smelly stuff. Right?”

“Candles.” Was it possible to see your own eyebrows? Tuesday could have sworn those were her eyebrows dipping into her vision. Her forehead certainly throbbed enough to have evicted the just-waxed-into-submission-last-week arches. “Why else would I drag you to The Candlewyck? We need candles, a potpourri sachet and incense for each cabin.”

One hand jerked out of his pocket and his long finger pointed to the fat green candle jar. “Not that stuff.”

"Of course not. Patchouli is not a Valentine's Day fragrance. Think sweet, sultry. Sexual."

Tuesday left him standing by the discount rack and went off searching. She needed space from him. His anti-Valentine's Day attitude reeked like raw onions. How could anyone hate a holiday about love? It made no sense to her but frankly, she couldn't waste time thinking about it. Snowcroft's request had come in at the last minute and she was scrambling.

My Gal Tuesday was her baby, her brainchild, her pride and joy. The one woman operation fit her life just fine. She got to shop on someone else's tab, put together adorable and stunning packages or find that special gift just for the hard-to-please person in your life. Making a purchase she knew was perfect was like finding a treasure without a map. Word of mouth from client to client meant everything to her business.

She wouldn't have gotten the Snowcroft's Resort call if she hadn't tucked her business card in the thank you basket sent to the main office by a grateful and satisfied patron. He had gotten her card from his mother-in-law who got it from a bridal shower Tuesday had been commissioned to buy for. Word of mouth was gold. Or, in actuality, green. Cold hard green cash. She needed this exposure if she was going to grow and she needed the capital Snowcroft's was promising.

If that meant sucking it up and shopping with Grumpybutt, she would do it.

"Here." An orange jar nearly smacked her in the nose and she jerked her head back. Gray pushed it toward her again. "This is decent. And it isn't like flowers or vanilla or some other smelly junk."

"What's wrong with vanilla and flowers?"

Gray curled his lip. "Nothing if you're a woman. But these are supposedly for couples' gift baskets. 'Couples' implies more than one person and statistically, most of those couples include the male gender. Men don't want girly stuff. You said sultry and sexual. That is sultry and sexual for a guy."

Tuesday refused to let the exasperated sigh loose. It lodged in her chest and she studied him over the candle rim. Arrogance painted across those broad cheekbones and regal nose. The firm set to his lips dared her to challenge him. Even the front lock of dark hair arced over his brow, defying convention. But his eyes, his eyes were a question in

evergreen. Uncertainty and eagerness lurked under the foresty shade and her sigh turned from exasperated to gentle. He was trying in a completely clueless manner. She overturned the jar to read the label. Sunset Afterglow.

She cracked the lid and closed her eyes. *Sensual stretches in pale waning light. Sleepy snuggles and stolen kisses. Leisurely sex with no time crunch. Moist mouth trailing her neck. Silky dark hair slipping through her fingers.*

Her eyes snapped open. Whoa. Major libido slippage. Capping the glass jar, she gulped a throatful of intense want and avoided looking at him. No fantasizing about grumpy-butted shopping partners. No. None of that.

Still, the candle was perfect even if the color was a bit non-valentines. "Okay, this works."

The grin that lifted his cheeks transformed his face. *Mr. Stick-in-the-Mud* fled on a smile and *Mr. Wow, Really?* replaced him. "Seriously? It's what you were looking for?"

"No." Those cheeks fell and his brow angled down. "But I can work with it. If you think this is what would appeal to the male part of your couple clients, then let's work off that. Compromise, Gray. You give some, I give some and we might make it through this shopping trip with a little less blood, okay?"

"Deal." A slight nod bobbed his chin and smile ghosted across his mouth. Okay, that was alarming. It made his lips seem so… kissable. His gaze dropped down her body, the slow slide like hot cream on silk. A buzzing awareness zinged through her bloodstream. He was checking her out!

In a matter of minutes, he was loading boxes holding candles, incense and sachets in Sunset Afterglow into the back of a company SUV. Tuesday climbed in the passenger seat and checked off her list. He slid into the driver's side and keyed the ignition. "Now where?"

"Amaruso's. Unless you think men wouldn't like chocolate."

A hearty chuckle filled the vehicle. It was deep and rich and stunned her to the roots of her hair. Gray *laughed*? Would wonders never cease? Next thing you knew he would behave like a normal human being.

"Chocolate is about the only thing men enjoy about this stupid holiday."

"What do you have against Valentine's Day? What did it ever do to you?"

Streetlight combined with moonlight slanted across his face, kissing his skin with a silvery tone. The vehicle's purr melted into the night and blended with his slow drawl. Funny, she never realized how erotic his voice was. Probably because the only time she had heard it had been accompanied by a snort or a sneer. But here, alone, cradled beside him in the bucket seats, it flowed like melted butter.

"One day a year, women and card companies pressure men into ordering flowers, springing for dinner and buying jewelry all in the name of love and profit. No thanks. If I want to buy dinner or roses or whatever, I'll do it because I want to, when I want to, not because some calendar says I should."

"Do you even have girlfriend?"

The vehicle slid into a parking spot before the chocolatiers' shop. "Not right now, no. But even if I did, I'd still think it was a rip off."

Tuesday shook her head and sighed loudly. Digging for her list, her oversized work bag shielded her face. "Christmas has the Grinch and Valentine's has Gray."

"Hey, just because you've swallowed this whole cupid-infested holiday, don't make me the bad guy." They climbed out and Gray clicked the lock behind him, the faint *be-beep* loud in the frigid air. "I can be the most romantic guy out there when I feel like it. I just hate feeling like I *have* to do something."

"Well, you're in luck," Tuesday quipped. "You're single and unattached this Valentine's Day so the only woman you have to please is me and all I want is for you to stop griping."

"No, you want me to pay for all this junk. I carry the card, I get to gripe, end of story." *Was that a smile that twinkled in his eyes?* No way, it had to be a weird reflection of the lights. How could he be enjoying this little verbal back and forth? And that was certainly not a sexy little smirk that lifted the left side of his lip higher than the right.

Decedent smells assaulted her nose as Gray held the chocolatier's door for her. Tuesday stopped to suck in a deep lungful of the calorie laden air. Behind her, Gray did the same and his soft moan warmed her nape. "God, this place smells like heaven."

Heaven was the tingles and chills that swept down her spine at that richer-than-chocolate voice. Damn, she should add batteries to her list and hurry her horny ass home. Firming her lip, she set off toward the adult section. For some strange reason, she had a

great deal of trouble concentrating on the body paints, the Lover's Dust and the edible panties with Gray standing so close. His coffee-colored brows rose high on his forehead when he read the label of one jar.

"Chocolate ganache lube? Wow, that could get ugly."

Tuesday jerked the bottle from his hand and scowled. "Stop touching things. Just look for one thing that says playful and sexy to you and let me handle the rest."

"Are you this bossy in bed?"

Whiplash could not describe the sudden speed when she whipped her face to his. "You'll never find out."

A leisurely sweep of forest eyes slid from her face to toes and back again. The slow drawl heightened his whisper to an erotic glide of flushed skin on damp sheets. "Pity."

He managed the impossible. He left her speechless. Her stunned gaze never left the broad lines of his back as he strolled away from her, cocky swagger to his step. If that wasn't a flirt, then her name wasn't Tuesday. A sudden warmth flooded low in her belly and a gnawing hunger bloomed. The khaki pants cupped his too-fine ass just right and her palms itched to follow.

She jerked her head back to a display of adult goodies and forced her throat to loosen. Yeah, time to get the stuffed shirt out of the Valentine's shopping loop before she did something completely crazy… like flirt back.

Gray had captured the attention of the saleswoman, which only proved that the woman smelled money through the thick candy scent. Manicured fingernails in a frosty pink traced along his forearm as she held out a bounty of samples to try. Tuesday saw red. Only because those tasters were not anything like she wanted. Not because that feminine hand was drawing lazy circles on his arm and offering more than the candies on the platter. The box of triple fudge body paint hit her basket and she stormed to her shopping partner. She opened her mouth to remind him they were on a time schedule and he popped a small, thick square on her tongue.

"I like that. What do you think?"

She thought he could have warned her. Chewing quickly, the caramel and chocolate morsel seemed to grow in her mouth. It stuck in her teeth and coated her throat. Great, she had to look like a squirrel gnawing acorns with her cheeks bulging from the too large

bite. Gray watched her the entire time and a heated flush warmed her working jaw. Something richer than the fudge lurked in his eyes and sent a shivery spiral through her blood stream.

Forcing the glob down, she shook her head. “No. Too thick. We need something lighter, softer.”

“I thought women liked thick. And those are really good.”

“Gray, yes, they are delicious.” She sighed and tugged him away from the cocoa-pusher. Trying to relay the mood, she took both his hands in hers and let her voice drop to a phone-sex purr. “Close your eyes and picture a romantic night. You and your lover are in a playful mood in a luxurious resort cabin. Soft music is playing. Candles are lit and there is a sensual perfume in the air. You’ve taken a shower together, the soaps and touches heated up your blood. Wine is poured. The fire is crackling. The bedcovers are turned back. There is a whole basket of goodies just for you two. Body oils, candies, more wine. It’s adult play time. Now, do you really want your lover picking caramel out of her teeth?”

She opened her eyes and nearly drowned in his sultry gaze. Sweet caramel swirled with creamy chocolate mixed with the mental picture she’d painted and, for one brief flash, she wondered if his kiss was as addictive as the candy. His thumb lazily sweeping wide over the back of her hand created a deep ache between her thighs. His gaze dropped to her mouth and she quickly slicked her tongue out, afraid some stray tendril of caramel lurked there. A swallow worked his throat, the thick cords tightening for an instant.

“So show me what you’d like your lover to sample that night.” Thicker than the confection-laden air, his voice melted her bones.

Oh, way over-loaded statement there. She didn’t even like this guy and here she was reduced to a quivering puddle of panty pudding from one touch. She had to force her muscles to tug her hands away from his.

The saleswoman sneered behind his back. Determined to save him from the platter-bearing vamp, Tuesday grabbed onto his sleeve —avoiding actually touching him— and pulled him toward an elegant display. Together they selected an assortment of cookies, creams and chunks. He laughed over her choice of Nookie Cookies and a fizzle of

pleasure warped through her. Gray insisted on something more masculine so she added a chunky bar of dark chocolate with a liquor center. He nodded his approval.

Each item was ordered and boxed. The saleswoman, now lured more by commission than attraction, fawned over Tuesday as much as Gray. He signed the credit slip then bought his own box of Nookie Cookies, which he handed to Tuesday while he loaded the candy treats in the SUV.

"What? I'm hungry. I haven't had dinner yet."

"If you eat all these, you're going to get sick," she warned.

Gray snapped the hatch down and smiled at her. "So I'll share them with you. Open the box, partner, and let's go."

Tuesday wasn't sure which warmed her more, the vehicle heater or Gray's smile. She slid the ribbon off the box and peeled back the gold wrapping. Crisp wafers and smooth chocolate shared with a gorgeous not so volatile near-human pushed her libido into the whoa-girl zone and she held the box out.

"Care for a little nookie?"

A completely too-sexy lift of his brow sped up her pulse. "Tuesday, if you're offering, I'm not stopping at a little."

"Cookies, Gray, cookies."

"Pick me out one. I can't do that and drive."

Somehow she thought he could manage the feat just fine but there was something innocently erotic about feeding him. She plucked one small square from the lining and held it to his lips. He took it, skimming her fingertip with the edge of his tongue.

She should yank her hand back. Clearly, she was over her head. Gray must have had a Master's degree in Flirtology and she was an undergrad. But something refused to allow her hand to move as directed. Instead, her fingers glided over his bottom lip, across his chin and down his neck. He turned his head, a fiery glow in his mossy eyes that belied the cool color. "Where to now?"

"Wine," she murmured. "The Grapevine."

He flicked his eyes to the road and back to her. She pulled her hand away but he caught it, lacing his long fingers in hers. "Wine it is."

Something shifted in the universe. Maybe Pluto got pissed at not being a planet anymore and shimmied into Neptune's orbit or the Big Dipper sprung a leak. Nothing else would explain why Grayson Sinclair looked at her as if she was dipped in chocolate and spread out on a dessert buffet. And why in the hell couldn't she make her hand listen and pull away from his touch?

The Grapevine's brightly lit storefront held the cosmic power to let her tug her fingers from his. A weird pang of loss settled in her stomach. Tuesday chose to believe it was that she'd eaten two Nookie Cookies on an empty stomach rather than that she liked his touch. That thought was safer, hypoglycemia over horniness. But when his palm rested on the small of her back entering the store, the thought fizzled like a dead sparkler. Point blank, she was attracted to Grumpybutt.

Her gaze slid along that butt as he bent to pull a bottle off the lower shelf. A tingle of anticipation tightened her nipples. He murmured something about sweet reds versus tart whites and a brilliant flash of that sexual sunrise fantasy burst into her head. She whipped around, sucking in a cooling breath. Not happening. No way. This was a condition spawned by the romantic atmosphere she was shopping for, the sexual overtones shadowing her emotions. It would pass as soon as she got out of his presence and delivered all thirty-five baskets, collecting her money and never laying eyes on his chiseled face again.

She let Gray do the haggling with the manager for the best price on the best wines in the budget he'd outlined for her. It gave her an uninterrupted moment to visually caress the lines of his shoulders and back, imagining what if. The ease in how he paired compliments with economic cunning enthralled her. He wheeled and dealed like a master. Unfortunately that led to wildly erotic thoughts of his mastery between the sheets.

Luckily, holding the door while he and the manager carted the boxed bottles to the SUV thrust those images to the back of her mind. The short jaunt to a music store was made with light teases and flirts. Gray only moaned over a few song choices and actually named a few surprising additions to her list. The bored teenager compiled and downloaded forty CDs with a nice, romantic selection of music, slapped them in printed paper sleeves Tuesday had printed and boxed them up without bothering to look at either of them. He shoved the box at Gray and turned back to his computer screen.

Gray had several leering suggestions at The Bath House about which soaps held the most appeal. She managed to corral him into a simple yet elegant bar and liquid set of Spiced Orange. The erotic images of him lathering her skin she kept to herself. The creased list in her hand trembled as she realized their next stop. She nibbled her lip and wondered if she could tweak the list of basket contents and still do her job.

"Now where?" The hatch closed with a sharp thunk and her eyes slid closed in resignation.

"The Pink Pussycat."

Gray stopped and stared at her. "A sex shop? These baskets are supposed to be romantic, not x-rated."

"It's the best place to get bulk condoms, oils and lubricants." There, that sounded professional, didn't it? It wasn't like she planned on adding a purple jelly vibrator to each basket. Just subtle props to ensure the mood. The vibrator she'd deal with later, at home, alone.

His eyebrows rose with a wicked grin. "Okay, you're the expert in that area."

"Not that kind of expert!" she snapped.

"I didn't say a word." He chuckled. She childishly refused to look in his smirking direction the entire drive to the boutique. Pink and purple cats in miniskirts pranced in neon splendor in the darkened window. Advertisements for DVDs and toys in a swirly script hung in silent mockery of her mortification.

"Why don't you stay in the car? I can carry anything ou—"

"Oh hell no. I wouldn't miss this shopping trip for anything."

"You are such a man," she growled under her breath.

"Thank God for that, sweetheart."

Tuesday grumbled, walking around the SUV and popping the hatch. She had to climb in the back and lean over the wine to reach the sachets. A warm, firm hand landed on her butt.

"Don't freak. I'm not copping a feel, just keeping your skirt from flying up in this wind. I wouldn't want you to flash oncoming traffic." The palm on her ass smoothed along the bottom curve. "Feel free to flash me all you like, though."

"Get your hand off my butt." She swatted behind her ineffectively and his chuckle grew. True to his word, he never did more than hold her flimsy skirt down while the chilled air swirled around her thighs. When she wiggled out of the back, Gray dropped his hand. Tuesday clutched the sachet tighter and strode into the shop, ignoring his poorly-hidden smile.

Warm air rushed her face along with a slightly plastic smell and the pulse of rap music. A center aisle led to a brightly lit glass counter and on both sides, rows upon rows of vibrators, dildos, lubes and BDSM toys hung in vivid displays. The walls were lined with everything imaginable, and some jaw-dropping paraphernalia Tuesday could only wonder about. A hallway led back to a DVD selection room that she had no intention of letting Gray venture into. It was bad enough he'd had his hand on her ass. She did not need to be standing beside him while he scoped out 'Hot Oral Hunnies part four' or 'The Adventures of Indiana Bones'.

But it was kind of amusing watching him check out the décor. His gaze landed on a displayed black double dildo hanging above the counter. At three feet long and several inches in diameter, it was an impressive if impossible toy.

"Holy shit. Talk about feelings of inadequacy. That thing is… who uses something like that?"

"You'd be surprised," purred a sultry voice from the side aisle. A tall blonde unfolded from where she'd been stocking, cracked her bubblegum and gave them a wide smile. Cat was decked to the hilt for her job. Huge hoops dangled from her earlobes. The hot pink vinyl micro-mini skirt and white fishnets only made her long legs longer. A tight tee emblazoned with a picture of Captain Jack Sparrow stretched across a bustline that read '*I'd walk his plank*'.

"Hey, girlfriend, long time, no chat."

Gray's eyes widened and Tuesday grinned at her high school friend. How Cat could still look twenty-five amazed her. "Hey Cat. I need supplies for a quickie and knew you'd been able to cut me a deal."

Cat's green eyes slid up and down Gray's body like satin on leather and she arched a brow. Tuesday stopped the question before it was asked. "He's the moneyman, that's all. Cat Hart, Grayson Sinclair."

"Chickie, you have got to stop the quickies and go for marathon." Cat licked at her lip with a flirty little tongue flick. "You sure he's not the quickie job?"

"Supplies," Tuesday muttered before Cat could get on a roll. The woman was a living, walking, breathing sex machine. She could find something erotic at a funeral, had in fact, done the director of the Heavenly Rest Funeral Parlor during her Aunt Edna's viewing. She thrust the sachet at Cat. "Here, trying to make up some goody baskets basing around this fragrance."

Inhaling deeply, Cat cocked her head. "Lemme think. I think I have some stuff in the back that could work. Browse while I go search."

Her four inch heels made her taller than Gray and leant an extra sway to her hips. Tuesday couldn't blame him for watching Cat stroll to the back. Hell, she watched, too, and she was definitely a sausage over tuna type gal. Gray caught her looking at him watching Cat's ass. He colored and ducked into an aisle. "So what kind of stuff should I look for?"

"You're a penis owner. You handle the condoms." Tuesday strolled into a different aisle. "Nothing wild or quirky here, think function. Nothing will kill a mood faster than a green glow-in-the-dark light saber aiming toward your wookie."

A hearty chuckle rang through the empty store. "Got it. How many?"

"Grab a couple you think are okay and we'll have Cat sell us boxes wholesale so there are a few in each basket. Make sure you get a French tickler and at least one non-latex in case of allergies."

Gray's head popped up over a rack of strap-on dildos and buttplugs. "You think of everything, don't you? You made sure there were no peanuts in the chocolate and the oils were hypoallergenic. I never would have thought about any of that crap."

"That's why you handle the money and I handle the goods," she quipped, but the gaiety was forced. Something in his gaze trapped her, held her captive until her breath caught in her chest. "When you're not being an ass, you're not bad company, Gray."

He rested his arms on the top rack, oblivious to the equipment hanging on her side under his head. "We're not a bad team, huh?"

"No, we're not," she whispered. Her fingers curled tight until the sharp bite of plastic pulled her gaze from his. Good gravy, she was clutching a Hello Kitty Vibrator guaranteed to make the pussy purr in pleasure. She shoved it away and avoided his eyes.

"Alright, chickie." Cat, her savior in fake leather and Johnny Depp screen-print, hefted a box to the glass counter and called them over. "I have your Cranberry Craving massage oil, tingle cream in Orangalicious Orgasm, Pomegranate Passion nipple rouge and Deepthroat's Dark Cherry Splurge."

"I know I'm going to regret asking this," Gray muttered, rubbing his brow. "But what the hell is all that?"

Cat tisked and shook her head. "Sad. You're one of those missionary men, aren't you? The kind that thinks doing it doggie-style makes for a kinky night?" She blew a huge pink bubble then cast sympathetic eyes at Tuesday. "Buy batteries, honey."

Bright flares of color stained Gray's cheeks but Tuesday saw the fire snap in his eyes. He might be embarrassed but he was also insulted. She dove into the box and tried to diffuse the Grayson bomb ticking beside her. "You know what massage oil is. Tingle cream is just that, you put it on your lover's skin and it tingles."

"Great stuff right on the cli—"

Tuesday shot Cat a glare. "And the nipple rouge darkens a woman's skin, like lipstick."

"Forget that crap then." Gray tossed the sample tube back on the counter. "Most men prefer a woman's nipples whatever color nature made them. What's that cherry stuff?"

Tuesday wanted to crawl in the box but modulated her voice to a business level. "It's a flavored numbing gel."

Gray frowned. "Numbing? Why would you want numb anything?"

Cat cackled. "You've obviously never been a bottom or deep-throated anything."

"No, sorry, straight man," Gray deadpanned and tossed a handful of condoms on the counter. He looked into Tuesday's eyes. "Condoms, some normal, some ribbed, one French tickler and one lambskin for allergies, none glow-in-the-dark. Those alright?"

Tuesday nodded but looked to Cat for final approval. Cat shrugged. "For a gift basket, sure, they work. So no nipple rouge, what about the rest?"

"No numbing gel but yes on the orange cream and oil." Tuesday decided. "Now, we need a fun thing, like sex dice or something."

"No, not those stupid dice." Gray shook his head. "Have you ever tried to really use those things? They're a joke, something a bunch of drunk bridesmaids think is funny. Let's find something a little more… manly."

"Cock rings on aisle three," Cat offered with an evil grin.

Gray growled. "A muzzle would work…or a ball gag... duct tape if you're desperate enough."

"Ooooh, not so vanilla after all, are you, moneyman?"

Tuesday grabbed Gray's hand and tugged him away. Just her luck her best friend and her shopping partner rubbed against each other like a bumper on asphalt. She darted down the second aisle, stopping in front of the adult games section. For several minutes, Gray declined every product she held up.

"Fine. You find something then!"

He didn't hesitate. He grabbed a pack of 'Layola' edible skin markers. Six colors of fruit flavored naughtiness to draw anything you desired on your lover's body. A wickedly mischievous grin lifted his lip.

"Do you have any tattoos, Tuesday?" She shook her head and the wickedness seeped deeper into his eyes. His heated breath bathed over her neck as he leaned close to whisper in her ear. "Want one?"

A sudden image flashed of Gray leaning over her, doodling on the small of her back. It sent a wave of heat directly to her panties. She grabbed the pack of markers and a smaller pink package caught her eyes. The Goddess of Flirtation grinned down on her. With a naughty arch in her brow to match his, she palmed the box and handed it to him.

Sunbeams wrote hate mail to his grin. It lit up his eyes and spread over his face like springtime. "Temporary nipple jewelry? That might be interesting. Am I safe in assuming your nipples aren't pierced then?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" She stuck her tongue out.

His gaze dropped to her breasts. "Is that an offer?"

Four little words that couldn't have been more sinful if they were dipped in the river Styx purred in a sultry rumble. Something spiraled hard and fast from her chest to

between her legs, an ache that increased as her mind toyed with forbidden images of him, her and a whole lot of naked flesh…and two tiny silver hoops.

She ripped the pack from his hand and tugged him back to the counter. Cat snickered over the markers, promising they washed off eventually. She boxed and tallied their purchases, including a discount for volume and an "I text you when drunk" price cut for Tuesday. Gray didn't flinch signing the credit slip but he did frown at the total counts.

"How many condoms are you putting in those baskets? Christ, it's supposed to be for couples for one night, maybe a weekend, not a frat house on spring break."

"Bulk rate," Cat supplied. "They have a five-year shelf life."

"Calm down," Tuesday appeased patting his arm. "Snowcroft is only charged for what I use, not what I buy."

"I just paid for four hundred condoms!"

"So? I have forty wedges of cheese in my car trunk back at the main lodge. I deduct anything you pay for from the proposal. Chill out, Gray, your accountant is showing."

His smirk carved a delicious looking groove alongside his lip. "Well you have enough prophylactic to cover anything I might have showing. You have a voyeurism fetish, don't you? Something with exposing body parts?"

"Excuse me? I'm not the one who was playing 'touchy feelie rub a tushie' outside, was I?"

"Hey, you want to show every car from here to Fifth Street your pink thong, not my problem. I just didn't want some asshole gawking at your ass and plowing into the company vehicle while I was standing beside it."

Searing heat, embarrassment and indignation, bloomed on both her cheeks. "How do you know I'm wearing a pink thong?"

Gray shook his head and sighed. "Hello? I told you, you flashed everything crawling into the back of the Blazer."

Cat leaned her chin on her hand and blew a huge bubble, watching the byplay with keen interest. Tuesday sent her a death glower and the blonde winked. "Sorry, chickie-babe, I like him. He doesn't take your shit but hands it right back. You could do worse than doing him."

"I'm not doing him!" Tuesday snapped.

Johnny Depp winked as Cat shrugged one shoulder. “Well if you change your mind, you’re all set for safe sex.”

Tuesday buried her mortified face in her hands and growled as Gray laughed. He picked up the box and headed for the door, deep resonating baritone echoing through the store. Cat’s giggles provided a melodic harmony. With one last angry frown at her best friend, Tuesday followed him out. Wintry wind whooshed up her skirt and mindful of his knowledge of her underwear, she let him situated the box in the back hatch. Tiny bites of freezing rain stung her cheeks and misted on her lashes.

“Now where?” he asked, snapping the trunk down.

“Main boardroom back at Snowcroft. I have everything else I need there.”

“So we’re done?” Was that disappointment on his face? No, it had to be a trick of the streetlight and neon prancing pussycats.

Tuesday nodded. “You are. I have a long night ahead to get all the baskets arranged. They are supposed to be delivered to the cabins after housekeeping rounds tomorrow.”

The flickers of pink and purple danced in his eyes, flashing one color and then the next, the underlying green so deep it was like calm, still ocean. Still was a good word. Gray went still. His chest stopped rising, as if he held his breath, and he didn’t blink. His hands didn’t move from the hatch and he didn’t acknowledge the light rain darkening his shoulders. Only his hair moved, the wind running through it like a woman’s fingers.

Something froze inside Tuesday and she got caught, snared by his gaze. The rich green mesmerized her, beckoned her closer, lured her but her knees wouldn’t unlock. He took one step, one step that brought him so close she could see each individual eyelash, feel his breath on her cheek, feel the heat the air tried to rob from his skin. Why the hell couldn’t she move away from him? Sleet carried the sharp tang of new pennies and it mingled with the pure masculine essence that was Grayson Sinclair. The impossibly sexy combination would make Yves St. Laurent weep with frustration.

His head bent and Tuesday’s eyelids lowered, her chin lifting to receive his kiss. The door clicked as he opened it and her eyes popped wide. Hot flames blazed across her face. She ducked her head and scrambled into the seat. Gray closed it behind her with a sharp snap.

Of all the stupid hormonal idiotic things to screw up on. How could she have thought he was going to kiss her? He was the Vice President of some suit and tie job, she was Home Business Owner in pajama pants until she was forced to leave the house. He was wine and dine the client over five star dinners, she was Beefaroni by TV-light. So they had a workable banter tinged with sexual innuendo type thing going on. It didn't mean squat. And didn't that just suck?

Gray wiped the rain from his face, started the motor and headed back toward Snowcroft. In fifteen minutes, their time would be over. She didn't even have to report to him or turn over her invoices. Those she would give, with her bill, to an underling. She had no reason to seek him out so this was it. She tried reminding herself she didn't like him, that he was an arrogant, snobby jerk with a stick up his ass. But other things banished those thoughts— his teases, the flirtiness, his tongue stroking her finger, how her hand had lingered on his skin.

Yeah, she needed to get far, far away from Gray as soon as possible before she did or said something stupid. Yet when the chalet-style architecture of the main lodge appeared around a turn, a sad whimper formed in her belly. Gray backed close to the front doors and a security guard rushed out to help them unload. She wouldn't even get to say goodbye in private, which was probably best.

The coldness of the room echoed with masculine chatter as Gray and the guard unloaded the boxes. Several dozen wicker baskets were stacked in empty but luxuriously plush chairs. Gray turned up the heat, took her keys and returned quickly with the guard, both carrying in several crates of imported cheeses and other goodies. Tuesday took off her coat and pushed her floppy sweater sleeves to her elbows. Time to get to work.

"Thanks, guys." She plastered a professional smile on her face despite the dismissive tone she inflected. "Could you close the door so I don't bother any late night guests wondering through the hall?"

The guard dipped his chin and closed the door behind him. Gray made no move to leave. Tuesday turned her back to him, grabbing a tall tower of baskets. The room slowly began to warm. She lined both sides of the table with the empty containers, ignoring him. She had work to do, real work. Shopping was the fun part. Assembling was kind of

boring though she did take a great deal of pride in her presentations. She had all thirty five baskets set out and lined with paper before Gray spoke.

"Let's get some dinner before you start. Real food, not cookies. There's a nice little Italian place just a couple miles away, great food, casual, good wine. What do you say?"

Danger, Will Robison, danger!

Her fingers tightened around foil–wrapped cheese wedges and heart shaped crackers. Did Gray just ask her out? Like a date? Did people even date anymore? Wasn't it all hook-ups, Facebook exchanges and booty calls? It had been so long since it happened, Tuesday wasn't sure. Maybe he was just one of those men who didn't like eating alone.

"Are you asking me out, Gray?"

She felt him step behind her, the solid heat of his body inches from her back. Deep, dark and sinfully richer than the chocolates they'd shared, his voice rippled over her nape. "I could just say I'm still hungry and you're a convenient conversation distraction, but yeah, I'm asking you out."

Who fed the butterflies in her stomach pot-laced brownies? As a group, they all swarmed into a massive quivering huddle of munchies cravings. Why would he want to go out with her? Did accidentally flashing her ass send some signal that she was an easy score? Was she? Maybe she was. She was thinking about more than pasta with him. Forced into hibernating since God was in knee-pants, her libido had woken up and noticed way too many things about Gray.

Maybe she just needed a good old-fashioned orgasm. She wanted to start at his earlobes and nibble her way south until she hit ankles. Had all the sex paraphernalia gotten to them? No, they'd started flirting back at the chocolatier's shop. That finger lick in the car sparked all sorts of cravings and now his nearness magnified them. Her pulse fluttered in her throat and her thighs clenched.

The logical part of her brain kicked in, fighting the strangle-hold her libido had on it.

"I don't think that's smart. Technically, for a while, I'm employed by Snowcroft Resorts and isn't that against policy or something?"

"You're an independent contractor, not on steady payroll. Makes the association invalid to all company policies."

Damn, argument one shot down like an in-season duck. Forcing her face to remain passive, neutral and not to betray her desire to lick every inch of his skin, Tuesday turned around. Wow, he was close. If she inhaled deeply, her breasts would brush his chest. Damn her wanton lungs, they filled rapidly, thrusting her bust line a fraction closer. "Still, maybe it would be better if we hold off on any… fraternization."

"Oh, the hell with that," Gray muttered a split second before his mouth descended to hers.

Cappuccino hot and flavored with sweet, creamy chocolate, Gray kissed like heaven with a side of espresso. Not a nervous first touching of lips or a gentle caress, his mouth claimed hers and his tongue thrust inside to coax hers to dance. Damned her betraying tongue, it tangoed with his in a matching beat. She really needed to have a talk with her body someday. Right now, it was too entranced with Gray to listen to her.

A tingling awareness skated over her skin. Sexual chemistry exploded. A low sound rumbled deep in his chest and it stroked something soft inside her, turning it to jelly and wiggling it like Jell-o. The large, warm planes of his palms circled her waist and he deepened the kiss from Wowser to Hallelujah. If he went to Defcon level Holy Shit, she was doing him on the boardroom table, no question about it.

She nipped his lower lip and her butt hit the hard table edge, his heat warming her to her bones. When had her hands crept up and slid into his hair? Like chilled silk, it feathered through her fingers and tugged his mouth closer, tighter to hers. Her body did what it wanted and her thighs parted, inviting him to step between them. Gray palmed her ass, pressing firm and hard until their clothing seemed to be manufactured by Borden's. They evaporated.

Every curve she had cried out for the stony muscles in his frame. She could feel the crisp hair on his chest against her breasts and the growing ridge of his erection.

Gray dragged his mouth from hers, but let his lips trail along her jaw line to lick at her earlobe. "Damn, Tuesday, what are you doing to me?"

"It's called kissing," she murmured angling her head to give him more access.

"Sweetheart, this isn't kissing, this is too good. It's foreplay." His chest heaved with several sucking gasps. "You, lady, are too hot to handle."

Well, apparently not because he didn't stop handling her. His fingers played up her back, down her spine, curving around her hips. The cords and valley in his neck were just too tantalizing. She nuzzled and licked, tasting the salty aphrodisiac of his skin. Cool air wafted along her stomach as his hands slid up, curving over her aching breasts under her sweater. Tightly pebbled nipples thrust into his palms, fighting the thin lace of her bra, eager to feel his touch.

His zipper pressed forward, grinding into her. The friction burned in the best possible way. She sucked in a fast pant, arching into him. His mouth claimed hers again. Defcon Holy Shit went on standby.

How did he lay her back on the table without her noticing? And how could she not notice the hard lines of his body covering hers? And exactly which DNA sequence was responsible for her rubbing against him like a cat in heat? Silky hot and temptingly wet, his tongue traced along her neck. Tuesday fisted her hand in his hair and let her head fall back. The slight move pushed her hips into his and a groan –His? Hers?— filled the cavernous room. His hungry kiss swallowed the noise.

The flimsy material of her skirt bunched, sliding up her thighs until the soft scratch of his khakis ricocheted through her. The intimate valley cradling his hips rocked up and he rolled against her harder. Wetness soaked her panties and an empty clench rippled inside her. Oh God, she was getting hot and horizontal in a meeting room with a guy she couldn't stand four hours ago! And she was enjoying the hell out of it! *Bad body! Down Girl!*

"We can't do this." Her knuckles tightened, gripping his shirt, tugging it loose from his waistband.

"Yes, we can do this." Sharp teeth nipped her neck then nibbled downward. "We're doing this quite well, actually."

Her collar impeded him for less than two milliseconds. A fast yank and twist and he had her sweater up to her chin, his mouth skimming the edges of her bra. He ignored the printed lace and sucked one hard nipple deep. A whimper burst from her lips.

Her hands finally touched skin. They delved under his shirt hem to circle his waist, grab at his back. He was hot. She craved his heat but a whispered warning cautioned she just might get burnt.

"Gray…stop." Every muscle in his body froze. His lips released her nipple with a sigh and his forehead dropped to her chest. Ten to one, he could hear the frantic pound of her heart. Her shaky fingers left his back to stroke through his hair. "Sorry. This is too..."

His very hard, very large erection shifted as he propped himself over her. It did nothing to ease the sweet ache in her blood. Wide, dilated eyes lidded with denied desire searched her face. "Too what? Too good? Too fast?"

"Too everything." Tuesday licked swollen lips that carried the taste of his kiss. She tugged her sweater down. Why did he have to smell so good, taste so good, feel so good? So much good had to be bad. But damn, bad felt good! She struggled against him, pushing him until she could sit up and smooth her skirt down with trembling fingers.

Obvious reluctance slowed his climb from the table top. Deliciously rumpled, his shirt hanging loose, hair disheveled and lust stamped on his face, Gray epitomized blue-balls. Tuesday fought her own longing to lie back and surrender. His hand reached and she jerked away. "I have work to do."

Gray shook his head, ire sparking in his eyes. "Don't. Whatever the hell this is between us, it's been brewing since you plopped your sweet ass in my car. So, okay, we don't get naked right now, depressing as that is. I'll deal with it. But don't pull away from me."

"Gray, please." Hands held up as a shield, she drew a bracing breath. "Look, it's Valentine's Eve, we're both alone and have spent hours arranging goodie baskets for lovers. It's only natural for that to lead to… things that aren't real."

His snort was really not attractive, but it curled his lip in a most provocative manner. "Do you even buy your own bullshit? I have a very real hard-on right now and you tasted too damn real to be an illusion. Don't insult me by blaming some overgrown baby in a diaper on my reaction."

Yeah, Cupid was a little shit with a demi-god complex and a twisted sense of humor. Someone needed to yank that cotton cloth off and use his own arrows to spank his ass. Her breast still tingled from Gray's mouth and her stomach cramped with longing. She mentally slapped her cheeks. *Horny, that was it, pure out right Hallmark-Holiday induced horniness. It wasn't real even if her fingers twitched to pull him closer.*

"I want you…and you want me." Gray leaned in, hands on the table, trapping her in his widespread arms. Her eyes slid closed to avoid seeing her echoed hunger in his gaze but nothing could stop his breath from whispering along her cheek. "Valentine's Day, Easter, Arbor Day, who gives a shit? My interest isn't stirred by a calendar and I really doubt yours is either. Today could've been complete boredom but it was fun. We're good together, could be even better. Tell me the real reason you said stop."

No words came but she opened her eyes, staring deep into his and swallowed. Fear. He scared her in so many ways. Everything about him, from his arrogance to his sweetness called to her, beckoned her. If she gave in just a bit, he could unintentionally consume her. She'd fought too hard and too long to become her own person, her own boss, her own woman. It was so tempting to become his.

He was right. She wanted him, wanted him naked and for even more. But that meant giving over a tiny bit of herself. Already he triggered something more than hormones. She never had been a booty-call girl. The lovers in her life had been that, lovers, not one night stands. Nibbling her lip, she wondered. What type was Gray?

Unbidden fresh memories rushed, stealing behind her defenses. He was arrogant. He was sarcastic. He was a complete prick at times. But he'd worked with her, been willing to bend, compromise and understand her vision. Even when they'd argued, he hadn't berated her or been condescending. They had laughed and enjoyed each other. A tiny hope rushed through her with strength but caution held it back.

She let her hand rise to land on his chest. "I don't play games, okay. If this happens between us, for me, it's not a casual thing. I'd rather never know than regret."

A frown slanted his brows low. "Who said shit about casual and why are you worrying about regrets? You want me to be blunt, fine. I *like* you Tuesday. I find you attractive and funny and sexy as hell. I like that you give me shit back when I get too pushy. Yes, I want in your pants. I want to use every single thing we bought for these gift baskets with you, from the wine to the condoms. But I'd like —and yes, I am asking here so make note— I would like to get to know you better, in bed and out."

The small hope gained power and her mouth curved uncontrollably. Still, she had to regain some level of control here. "I have a lot of work to do tonight, so my panties are

off-limits right now. But I always buy enough supplies for a safeguard, so there will be a basket leftover. Got any plans for Valentine's night, Gray?"

"Yeah." His smile held arrogance, satisfaction and intrigue. She could have stared at it for hours but it dipped to hers. His kiss nipped with just enough promise to melt her bone marrow. "I've got a date with My Gal Tuesday."

~~~~♡~~~~

For more FREE Valentine's reads, visit ROMANCE DIVAS at

http://romancedivas.com/

and Excerpt Monday at

http://excerptmonday.wordpress.com/2010/02/08/january-holiday-reads/
~~~~