

SEXY BABE EXCERPT

ONE

The worst day of my life began with an orgasm.

His, not mine. So what else is new?

His name was Jason Settles, an actor who had that bad-boy thing going on. Jason had long sun-bleached hair, brown bedroom eyes, a perpetual three-day beard and these incredibly perfect white teeth, well, caps really, but this was Hollywood and everyone had caps, or wanted them.

Jason was usually typecast as Sexy and Dangerous, and his girlfriend, Grace Taylor, that's me, was usually cast as the cute, perky, blonde, blue-eyed Girl Next Door. Which, I guess I looked but rarely felt like.

Jason lived on Wonderland Drive just off Laurel Canyon in this little blue bungalow with a hot tub in back. It seemed like every house in Laurel Canyon had a hot tub, some kind of weird remnant of the 70s, I think. It was in that hot tub that Jason and I had first made love. And the answer is no, I didn't get off that night either. To be perfectly frank, I generally need a little mechanical help, if you know what I mean. It kind of freaks guys out, though, when you ask them to use a vibrator on you. Makes them feel inadequate or something. So I usually just fake it and take care of myself later.

Okay, that's probably too much information. Anyway, after Jason's wham bam thank you Grace, he climbed out of bed and went into the bathroom. "You want the shower first?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I need to get home and change. I've got an audition at ten." Then I bolted up in bed. Shit! My agent was supposed to fax the scene to me here at Jason's house. I leapt out of bed and raced to Jason's fax machine. Thank God, the scene was there.

It was three pages. Not bad, I thought, walking back to the bathroom. Usually, the more pages the better the scene. Then I read the character name: Sexy Babe.

"Oh, no," I muttered as I joined Jason.

"What is it?" he asked through a mouthful of toothpaste.

"My character. It's Sexy Babe."

"The role's not even big enough for a character name?"

I scanned the material, just two lines in a three-page scene. This was bad. I was supposed to be reading for guest star roles, leads in pilots, break-out parts in edgy independent movies, not two lines as a nameless bimbo on *NCIS*. "I may not have worked in a while," I said, insecurity filling every pore of my being. "But I'm not doing another bit part."

"Hey," Jason said, "look at the bright side; at least it's not Sexy Babe #2."

The bright side, of course. I'm good at looking at the bright side. In fact, I've got a deep well of eternal optimism. I just have to remind myself to tap it.

“No, Jason,” I said. “The bright side is realizing that this must be some kind of mistake. Someone must’ve sent me the wrong sides. I’ll just call Lucas when the agency opens and straighten it all out.”

I stepped on Jason’s medical scale, reached to adjust the weights, and then stopped. “Who weighs 94 pounds?”

“Who, what?”

“Weighs 94 pounds. The scale is set at 94 pounds, it’s usually set at either 185ish, your weight, or 105ish, my weight. Hey, I know,” I said, trying to be funny. “You’re probably banging the model next door. She looks like she weighs 94 pounds.”

“Really,” Jason said, as he stepped back into the bedroom and started getting dressed. “I hadn’t noticed.”

Okay, about a hundred things wrong with that answer. First, no man could *not* notice how skinny Melody was. She was five-foot-ten, all legs, tits and ass. Second, she traipsed around the backyard in a band-aid sized bikini doing weird Tai Chi exercises every morning. Third, Jason may be gorgeous, but he’s not a very good actor, so he could’ve definitely used a take two on the “Really, I hadn’t noticed,” delivery. And now that I thought about it, he looked guilty as hell.

Then it hit me. “You’re sleeping with her, aren’t you?”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

Whoa, that reading was even worse than “Really, I hadn’t noticed.” Now I was sure. “Jason, stop lying to me. Why don’t you just man up and admit you’re sleeping with her.”

This was where he was supposed to sweep me up in his arms, tell me how stupid I was being, how much he loved me, and then shut me up with a passionate kiss. Instead, he looked at me and said, “All right, I’m sleeping with Melody.”

His words seemed to hang in the air in front of me. I’d asked for the admission, hoping he wasn’t sleeping with her. But actually hearing him say the words hurt more than I could have imagined. I didn’t know what to say, what to do next.

“In fact,” Jason said, filling the awkward silence. “I think I may be in love with her.”

Any confusion I felt was suddenly washed away. “Wait,” I said. “You think you’re in love with another woman yet you screwed me ten minutes ago?”

“I was trying to find the right time to tell you.”

“Yeah, tough decision. Do I dump Grace before I fuck her or wait until I’m done.”

“See, I knew you would turn this around on me.”

“What?”

“That you’d find a way to blame me.”

“I do blame you. Hello! You’re fucking another woman!”

“Because…” He trailed off like the rest of his sentence was obvious.

I tried to think of what would come next and drew a blank. “Because, what?”

“Think about it,” he said, staring hard at me. “It’s all your fault.”

“My fault?”

“I’m not the one with intimacy issues.”

“So you’re saying that if I didn’t have intimacy issues, you wouldn’t have cheated on me?”

“There you’ve said it. And I forgive you.”

“You forgive *me*?”

“What we had was great, Grace. Awesome, even. But it’s time we moved on.”

He grabbed his keys off the counter. “I’m going to the gym. It might be best for everyone if you were gone when I get back.” He walked out the door.

Okay, Jason was a jerk. I knew that. But for the last six months he was *my* gorgeous jerk.

And I always knew Jason was just an in-between guy – the guy after my last less-than-perfect boyfriend and before the long-dreamed-about Mr. Right. But still... Ouch.

Oh, and the worst thing – I weighed 109.

I burst out Jason’s front door fifteen minutes later. My arms were filled with the detritus of our six months together. A box filled with make-up, tampons, toothbrush – you know, that stuff. I balanced a pile of clothes on top of the box and tried to talk into the cell phone wedged into my shoulder. “Sexy Babe? Come on Lucas, it’s got to be some kind of mistake.”

Lucas Abrams was my agent. We hooked up when I first got to town -- yes we slept together and no, I didn’t. Actually it was more a fling than a thing; he came to a showcase where I performed a scene from *Carnal Knowledge*. He’d just been promoted to an agent at Pinnacle Artists after making the “mail room to assistant” odyssey. He liked my work, and signed me. We went out that night to celebrate, had too many

Cosmos, and ended up back at his place. We both admitted it was a mistake in the morning, agreed our working together was more important than our sleeping together, and we've been platonic ever since.

“Actually,” he said. “The fax was a mistake.”

“I knew it.” I reached my seven-year old red Miata convertible, dumped my crap in the back seat, and took proper hold of the phone. “I mean, you promised me no more bit parts. So when I saw --”

“Not that kind of mistake,” Lucas interrupted. “More like the ‘you’re not a client anymore so we’re not sending you out on auditions’ kind of mistake.”

“What?”

“Times are tough, Grace. Too many actresses, too few parts. So the partners have decided to trim the client list.”

“If this is a joke, it is so not funny.”

“No joke. Look, I fought for you, I did. But the partners just looked at the bottom line. Each year you’ve booked less and less work.”

“But we’ve been so close! I almost landed that Cameron Crowe comedy six months ago. And you said I was the second choice for the CBS pilot.”

“I was being nice, Grace. You were a bust in both auditions.”

“What?”

“You’ve got tons of talent, don’t get me wrong. But you’re just not the same actress I met five years ago. It’s like the passion’s been sucked out of you.”

“Do you have any idea how hard it is to learn two or three parts a day, drive all over town auditioning — seeing the same actresses trying out for the same roles — and almost never getting hired?”

“I do. But you used to be excited to have all those auditions. Now you dread them. Does that tell you anything?”

“It’s hard not to get discouraged, Lucas. But I’ll do better, I promise. Give me another chance; I’ll be the new improved Grace Taylor, you’ll see.”

“I’m sorry, it’s out of my hands. Stop by anytime to pick up your head-shots and demo reel.”

“Lucas, no, please...”

“Prove us wrong, kiddo. Go out there and become a star.” He hung up.

I promised myself I wouldn’t cry on the drive home. I made it twenty feet. Tears of anger, frustration and humiliation poured down my face. I was crying so hard traffic was a blur so I turned on the windshield wipers. They scraped uselessly against the bone-dry glass and when I realized how stupid I was, I started laughing.

Then my old optimism came roaring back. Hey, it’ll all work out, I told myself. I had tons of actress friends who would be happy to introduce me to their agent. And guys hit on me all the time. So fuck Jason Settles. Grace Taylor was available again and Hollywood was full of hot guys.

It was about a fifteen-minute drive from Jason’s house to my apartment in Westwood. Or should I say, apartment about to go condo.

Would you pay \$560,000 for a 400 square-foot, one bedroom apartment in a thirty-year-old building? Me neither. Never mind the fact I had no money and lousy credit. The apartment was shabby, the walls were paper-thin, the refrigerator rattled, the toilet ran, and the shower stall smelled like rotten cheese.

My lease was up and, since I wouldn't buy the shithole, they were kicking me out. I had twelve days to vacate the premises. To be honest, I hadn't even started looking. I was kind of hoping Jason would ask me to move in with him.

Idiot!!

I heard the phone ring inside the apartment. I was holding the box in one arm and the armload of clothes in the other, but I managed to dig my keys out of my purse and let myself in. I dumped my stuff on the chair and dove for the phone like a lifeline. "Be someone I know and love."

"Will I do?" I recognized the voice instantly. Madison Stone, one of my best friends. We met at an audition for the TV show, *House*, both reading for a newlywed who's got a brain tumor and only Dr. House's quirky brilliance can save her. If I was the Girl Next Door, Madison was usually cast as the Drop Dead Gorgeous. Madison had incredible red hair, a killer body and this oozing kind of sexuality that usually left guys tripping all over themselves. And, if she'd been a better actress, she could have been a star. But to be honest, and she was the first to admit it, Madison was a little stiff. She always seemed to be "acting," was never able to disappear into the role. But she worked it. She was in two different acting classes, and a cold reading workshop. Madison did book a lot of print work and enough commercials to keep her in a nice apartment, let her shop at Barney's, and treat us to hundred-dollar lunches at the Ivy.

“Oh, thank God, Madison. You won’t believe the day I’m having. Jason dumped me and my agent fired me.”

“Oh, sweetie, I’m so sorry. I never liked Jason, though. None of us did. But your agent is a different...” Madison tailed off. A beat later her voice was louder, angry.

“What the hell are you doing here?” She was talking to someone else in her apartment.

“Madison, who’s there? Are you all right?”

“Get away from me.” She sounded scared now. Near panic.

“Madison!”

She screamed. Then I heard what sounded like a punch, followed by another scream, shattering glass, the thud of the phone hitting the floor, and then the line went dead.

Oh shit. I quickly called her back, but it just rang. And rang. Not good.

Madison only lived a couple of blocks away, so I thought about running over there and rescuing her, then got real. I’m an actress, not the Bionic Woman. I called 911. It was busy. Ten-fifteen on a Thursday morning and 911 is busy! I called again. Busy. Goddamn L.A. I grabbed my purse and bolted out the door.