

Getting Sweeter

A Sapphire Falls short story

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Delaney stared at the mason jars in front of her.

They didn't look, or taste, right.

She was no cherry cobbler expert, but this looked nothing like the cute little cherry cobblers in jars on Pinterest. And if this was what cherry cobbler tasted like, she had no idea why Tucker was so enamored with it.

She sighed.

This was supposed to be *super easy*. The blog she'd gotten the instructions from even said so.

To be fair, the recipe hadn't been difficult.

It just hadn't turned out well.

It was possible the cornstarch in the recipe was important.

She hadn't had any, and hadn't been able to recall a single time she'd ever known anyone to use it in cooking, so she'd figured it was sort-of optional.

Maybe not.

She also hadn't had buttermilk, but really, how different from regular milk could it be? And surely vanilla extract was an okay substitution for almond extract.

Delaney was still pondering her failure when she heard Tucker's truck tires crunching over the gravel at the front of the house.

A quick look at the clock confirmed that she'd timed the cobblers to come out of the oven to coincide perfectly with Tucker getting home.

Too bad they really sucked.

Delaney quickly donned her oven mitt and grabbed the baking dish that held the four mason jars. She turned, searching for a hiding spot. They were still hot so she couldn't stick them just anywhere. She couldn't put them back in the oven because she was using that for a roasted chicken later.

Maybe.

Unless she decided to just boycott the oven for good.

But dang, the brownies she'd managed to throw together last week had really turned Tucker on. He claimed that he didn't care that she didn't cook or bake but his reaction to those mix-from-a-box brownies had been...nice. Better than nice. Hot. Amazing even.

Worth working to pit six cups of cherries that afternoon.

Delaney glared at the jars she held. What a freaking waste. She could have gotten the rocking horse she was making for Lauren and Travis's baby completely sanded and painted in the time the damned cobbler had taken her. She supposed she could have opted for the already-pitted frozen cherries, but she'd been feeling full of herself after the brownies.

Next time she'd buy the whole stupid cobbler, put it in her own pan and stick it in the oven five minutes before Tucker got home.

"I'm home!" Tucker called from the living room.

Delaney panicked.

She headed straight for the back door, pushed the screen door open and tossed the mason jars, baking pan and oven mitts into the backyard.

She ran back to the sink and began filling it with water, intending to cover the dishes with soap bubbles.

In spite of having a perfectly functional dishwasher.

She plunged her hands into the soapy water as Tucker came into the room.

She was definitely going to have to distract him to keep him from wondering why she was washing dishes.

“Hi!” she said brightly, smiling at him over her shoulder.

Too much, Delaney. You’re going to make him suspicious.

Tucker grinned at her. “Hi.”

His grin, as usual, made her forget what she was doing for a moment.

“Were you baking?”

He sniffed the air and Delaney immediately remembered what she’d been doing.

Covering up her mess.

“Uh. No,” she lied, turning back to the sink full of water.

“It smells like you’ve been baking.” He moved in behind her, wrapped his arms around her waist and rested his chin on her shoulder. He spread his hands over her stomach, rubbing them back and forth, dragging the soft cotton of her shirt over her skin.

She shivered as swirls of heat started under his hands and spiraled out through her body.

She leaned back against him. “I suddenly don’t remember what you said.”

“I said it smells like cinnamon and sugar in here.” He put his nose against her hair. “*You* smell like cinnamon and sugar.”

He pressed his hips into her butt and Delaney felt how hard he was.

She laughed. “I can’t believe baking makes you horny.”

“I can’t explain it. But there’s something about you baking—especially because I know you don’t really like to do it,” he said, moving her hair to one side and kissing her neck. “Makes me want to do *lots* of naughty things to you as a thank you.”

She laughed again but it was with less humor. He really liked a girl who could bake.

She was really not a girl who could bake.

“Those brownies you made were the best things I’ve ever tasted,” he continued, pressing his lips behind her ear and adding a flick of his tongue. “Just because you made them for me.”

Aw, that was nice. But then she frowned. “Hang on. *Just* because I made them for you?”

“That was a really sweet thing to do,” he said, against her ear. “You deserved everything I did for you that night.”

“Uh, huh, great.” She turned in his arms, pulling her sudsy wet hands from the water and linking them behind his neck. “But you liked them because it was a sweet gesture?”

“I loved them.” His hands settled on her hips and he brought her closer, leaning to nuzzle her neck again and inhaling deeply.

“But not because they were actually good?”

“Well, they were...” He trailed off as he lifted his head. “They were good,” he said.

But he didn’t meet her eyes.

“They were?”

“So why do you smell like sugar today, Laney?” he asked instead of answering. “You made me something, didn’t you?”

“You ate three of those brownies,” she said.

“Does it really matter how many I ate?”

“But you ate *three*. Didn’t you?” She grabbed his chin when he tried to kiss her instead of answering. “Did you eat three of those brownies or not?”

Finally he sighed. “Not.”

“But...” She frowned. “You and the boys finished the pan off in like two hours.”

“The pan got empty of brownies within two hours,” Tucker agreed.

Delaney narrowed her eyes. “What did you do?”

“We tossed them.”

“Tossed them?”

“Threw them out.”

“You did?”

He looked apologetic. “We took them out to the compost pile.”

“They were that bad?” Damn. It wasn’t like she loved baking or anything, but after the brownies, she’d thought maybe it wouldn’t be so bad once in awhile as a surprise. And she had definitely loved the effect on Tucker. Except that... “Was that pity sex?” she asked as the thought occurred to her.

He laughed. “Pity sex?”

“You felt bad for me because I’d tried to bake and messed it up. So you acted like it was this big, awesome deal and made me feel like you were so turned on by it, when really you were just trying to cover up that it all sucked.”

He gripped her ass and pressed his hard cock against her zipper. “There’s no faking this. I want you, all the time, every day, all day. But that you even *tried* to bake for me did turn me on, Delaney. That *was* a big, awesome deal.” He lifted her and sat her on the edge of the sink, stepping between her knees and cupping her cheek with one hand. “Now tell me what you made today.”

Crap. Messing up the brownies wasn’t good, but that didn’t make her feel *terrible*. It had been a first try and Tucker liked brownies, but they weren’t his favorite. Her ruining them wasn’t the worst thing.

Cherry cobbler on the other hand...

She sighed. “Cobbler.”

Tucker’s hand on her face froze. He stared at her. “What?”

“I made cobbler.”

He actually licked his lips. She almost laughed.

“You made me cobbler?” he asked, his voice husky.

“I *tried* to make you cobbler,” she corrected. “It sucks too.”

He looked around. “Where is it?”

She winced. “Back yard.”

“You threw it on the compost pile already?” he asked.

“No. Just in the yard.”

He stepped back and she slid to the floor, following him to the back door.

“I panicked,” she tried to explain. “They had just come out and you had just walked in and I didn’t want you to know...”

He pushed the back screen door open, staring out.

Delaney leaned around him.

Four glass jars lay on the grass, one smashed, the other three in various states of broken. Golden chunks of crust and gooey red cherry goo covered everything.

“You killed the cobbler,” he said sadly.

“Trust me. It sucked.” She headed back for the sink. She might as well clean everything up. But for some stupid reason, she was really bothered by her inability to pull off a simple baking recipe.

She picked up a spoon and ran the dishrag over it.

The door slapped shut behind her.

Tucker didn't say anything. She didn't say anything.

But suddenly she was filled with a feeling of absolute failure. She threw the spoon into the water and spun to face him.

“I'm sorry, Tuck,” she said. “I don't know why I can't get this right.”

And she'd been feeling so confident after those brownies.

He frowned. “You don't have to be *sorry*. You tried. That means a lot.”

“But for God's sake, how hard can this really be?” she asked. “You know, making it for you tonight was about you. I wanted to surprise you. And I wanted to turn you on. And I wanted you to know that you're worth the time pitting the stupid cherries. But now...” She trailed off as she thought about those damn cherries. She still had a bowl full of pitted cherries. She hadn't looked at how much she needed ahead of time and had ended up with twice the amount she could use in the recipe. At least she hadn't been so brave as to try to do something daring like doubling a recipe.

Baby steps.

But she glared at the bowl of cherries. “Now it's a challenge. It's like the minute something is a recipe rather than building plans, I become stupid. I hate that feeling.”

She was a carpenter. She'd been doing renovations and restorations on houses for years. She *built* things—cupboards, tables, rocking horses—with her own two hands. The same two hands that couldn't seem to make a pan of sugar, flour and butter come together into anything edible.

“You're not stupid.” Tucker moved in, taking her face between his hands. “You're amazing. I don't need you to make cobbler to think that. And I don't need you to make cobbler to know that you love me.”

She nodded. “Well that's good. Because my next attempt might suck too and I don't want that to be a reflection on how I feel about you.”

“You're going to try again?” He didn't sound overly enthusiastic about that.

“Yes. Why?”

“It's just...” He glanced at the bowl of cherries too. “Those cherries don't deserve to be smashed all over my backyard,” he said. “It's not really their fault...”

“I really think your obsession with cherries and cherry cobbler is a little over the top. Maybe you should just get over it,” she said, turning back to the dishes.

Tucker chuckled and moved in to prevent her from turning completely. He took her hips in his hands and held her still. “That's only because you haven't had really good cobbler.”

She shrugged. “I don't care.”

“What if I told you that I could make cherry cobbler your favorite dessert of all time right here, tonight?” Tucker said. “Would you promise to never again abuse a cherry like you did today?”

She swatted his arm. “I didn't *mean* to abuse them.”

Tucker grinned at her. "I know. It just *hurts* to see them all over the yard like that."

"Well, I'm not that crazy about cherries, honestly."

She preferred strawberries. Even blueberries.

Tucker covered his heart with his hand. "Don't. Please. Don't make this any harder than it already is."

She rolled her eyes. "And my favorite dessert is German chocolate cake." Especially the frosting.

"I can make you like cobbler better."

"Better than German chocolate *frosting*?" she asked. She and Tucker had had a lot of fun with that frosting. She knew he was a fan.

His grin turned wicked and he nodded slowly. "Oh yeah."

Okay, there was no resisting that smile. Not to mention the challenge.

"Fine. You're on."

"Awesome." Tucker went straight to the bowl of cherries and shook them. "Okay, rule one—you have to do whatever I say. Rule two—you have to sample as you go. Rule three—every time you complain or give me attitude, you have to take off an article of clothing."

Delaney laughed. "I accept all of those rules."

He lifted an eyebrow. "No attitude at all? Not even one complaint?"

She grinned. "I can't believe you're making me do this." She put a little whine in her tone.

"Better. Take your shirt off."

She stripped off her hot pink T-shirt with the red streaks on it. *Cherry red* streaks to be exact.

"The boys are at your mom's for dinner and then they're going to go with your dad to catch nightcrawlers," she said. "In case you were wondering."

He hadn't even asked.

Tucker picked a cherry out of the bowl he held and gave her a smile. "I know. I was just over there."

Her heart melted. He took such great care of them all. He'd become a dad to *four* all at once. And he'd been amazing. He'd jumped in with both feet and was a total natural. She had no idea how she would be doing any of this without him and she couldn't believe that she'd actually considered doing it without him for even one minute.

"Did one of them tell you that I was baking today?" she asked, walking toward him, her body heating under his study of her not-sexy-in-the-least white bra. But she didn't need lacy, barely-there underwear. Tucker made her feel beautiful and sexy and wanted twenty-four-seven.

"Jack might have mentioned that you had bowls and measuring cups out," Tucker confessed. He picked another cherry out of the bowl and held it to her lips. "You know what measuring cups do to me."

She did. She absolutely did. She grasped his wrist and licked the cherry, and his fingertips, before sucking the fruit into her mouth. It was tart. Really tart. And she grimaced slightly.

He licked the same fingertips she just had and nodded. "We need sugar."

She reached for the canister on the counter beside her. "Your wish is my command."

She lifted the top but he didn't reach for a measuring cup. Instead he took his wet finger and dipped it in. Then he beckoned her closer. She stepped up.

"It is my firmly held belief that sugar makes everything better," he said.

“Everything?”

“Everything. But,” he added. “I am willing to test the theory.”

He ran his sugary fingertip over her bottom lip, then leaned in and licked it clean.

“Hmm. Maybe better, I gotta be honest.”

“Is that right?” She shook her head. “That’s a good way to not get kissed anymore if there’s no sugar around. And there’s no sugar around a lot.”

“Negativity,” he told her. “Lose the jeans.”

Her eyes widened. “That was negative?”

“Talking about me not getting kissed? Definitely not positive.”

“But you’re the one who said licking my lip is better with sugar.”

He nodded. “You’re right. That was unnecessary.” He set the bowl of cherries down and stripped off his shirt. “I apologize.”

She took in the sight of him shirtless and simply couldn’t muster any ire. “That is apology enough.”

He grinned. “Lose the jeans.”

“What? We just agreed that *you* were the negative one.”

Tucker reached out and grabbed the front of her jeans with one finger, tugging her closer. “But you talked about not kissing me. That is never allowed.” He popped the button on her jeans and pulled the zipper down. “Got it?”

She shivered as desire spiraled through her. “Got it.” But Tucker pushing her jeans over her hips and down her legs and then running his work roughened palms back up her thighs as she kicked the jeans free was in no way a detriment. “Got it.”

He licked his finger and stuck it in the sugar canister again. She decided against telling him that was kind of unsanitary when he pulled down one of her bra cups and swirled the sugar over her nipple before leaning in to lick and suck it clean.

She arched closer with a little moan.

He lifted his head. “Pretty sweet. I’ve got to say.”

“Tell you what,” she said, breathing harder. “You keep saying that stuff and the only time I’ll ever suck on any of *your* stuff is if I have a sugar bowl nearby.”

He laughed, completely unaffected by her threat. He dipped a cherry into the sugar and held it to her lips again. She sucked it into her mouth, sure to add some suction to his finger.

“See, the sugar makes it less tart,” he teased.

“You think I’m tart?”

“Completely.”

She grabbed the back of his neck and pulled him in for a quick, hot kiss.

Of course, quick kisses didn’t happen much around Tucker and he put both hands on her ass and she pulled her up against him for a long, hot kiss.

But he let her go before she was ready.

“We’ve got cobbler to make,” he told her.

“*Nothing* will distract you from that cobbler?” she asked, reaching behind her and unhooking her bra.

“Would it help you enjoy this more if I told you there was going to be *a lot* more food on skin and licking involved with this project?”

She had to laugh at that. She did toss her bra to the side but she nodded. “Okay, let’s see if you can actually make me like baking.”

He looked like she'd just given him a shiny new dirt bike to play with. He'd been trying to convince her that dirt bikes were awesome too and she had to admit, the times they'd used the bikes in ways they weren't intended to be used, had really made her more interested in watching Tucker ride them otherwise.

He dumped the cherries from the bowl into a big glass measuring cup. "Six cups. So we need about a half cup of sugar."

She grabbed the recipe. "This says a third."

"I think I just demonstrated that things are always better with more sugar." He dumped a half a cup into the bowl and stirred.

"You know, it's not really fair to judge my cobbler attempt based on erroneous instructions then."

He chuckled. "I didn't have a chance to judge it before you killed it."

"Whatever."

"That sounded a little negative," he told her with an eyebrow up.

She looked him straight in the eye as she hooked her thumbs in the top of her panties and pushed them to the floor.

"Now that's what I'm talking about," he said appreciatively, still stirring. "Naked baking."

"Maybe that's why none of the other girls worked out," Delaney said. "They didn't bake and cook for you naked."

Many had tried to win Tucker's heart with their skills in the kitchen. Their *real* skills—making food and stuff—rather than the skills she demonstrated. Like tearing out all of his cupboards, moving his sink and cutting a new window.

"I never said they didn't bake and cook for me naked," he told her, setting the bowl down and peering at the recipe sheet. "Lemon juice. That's right."

He started to reach for the bottle of lemon juice but she grabbed it first and held it away from him.

"They cooked and baked naked?"

He shrugged. "A couple did."

She arched a brow.

"Okay, maybe three of them did."

"Did you make *cobbler* with them?" she asked. "Like *this*?"

He shook his head quickly. "No. I've never licked cherry cobbler filling off of anyone but you."

"You haven't—"

"But I will."

She studied his face for a moment. "So how did the naked baking go down?"

He grinned at her choice of words, but instantly sobered when he saw her expression. "They were in here, naked, a couple wearing only an apron, baking when I got home. One made cookies, one made something else. I don't even remember."

She narrowed her eyes. "Really?"

He sighed. "Okay. One cobbler. But not cherry."

Why had she started this conversation? She didn't really want to know. "There was no strip baking?"

"No. But I have to say, I'm not noticing a huge improvement in your attitude."

"Tucker."

“Okay, sorry.” He shook his head. “This is sexy as hell, D, and it’s about to get even better. I barely remember any woman before you anyway and, clearly, none of them stuck. You don’t ever have to bake a single crumb for me and I am yours forever. But if you’ll let me coach you through this cobbler and lick cherry filling and cinnamon and sugar off of you, I promise you that it will be the best moment in this kitchen *ever*.”

She felt her irritation fading quickly. He was right. None of those girls had been invited back for naked baking. He was all hers. And she could lick cherry filling and cinnamon and sugar off of *him* too.

“Fine. I’m in.” She handed him the lemon juice.

He leaned in and kissed her, then turned to the bowl. He opened the top with one thumb and poured.

“Tucker!”

“What?”

“You can’t just dump it in. You have to use a measuring spoon.”

He frowned. “It says one tablespoon.”

“Yeah.” She held up the tablespoon. “Like this.”

He shrugged. “That’s about how much I put in.”

She stared at him. “How do you know that?”

He shrugged again. “I don’t know. My mom’s been eyeballing measurements forever.”

Delaney huffed out a breath. “Okay, well, I’m a beginner. So no more dumping. We’re measuring stuff.”

He nodded. “You got it. Sorry.” He glanced at the paper again. “You want to measure out the cornstarch?”

Oh yeah. That. “Um, we don’t really have any cornstarch.”

“Okay, then the flour.” He looked around. “Where’s the almond extract?”

“Couldn’t find it. Used vanilla.” Which was probably completely wrong.

“That’s probably okay,” he said, moving to one of the cupboard. “But I do have almond.” He pulled out a little bottle.

Of course he did.

She sighed. “What’s this about the flour? We’re doing the dough now?”

“Not yet. The flour for the cherries.” He stirred the extract into the mixture.

She frowned at the paper. “Flour?”

“The flour you used instead.”

“Instead of what?”

He stopped stirring. “Instead of the cornstarch.”

She just looked at him.

“You didn’t use cornstarch *or* flour?”

“Do you really think that I knew you could substitute flour for cornstarch, Tucker?” she asked, her voice rising slightly.

He chuckled, then tried to cover it with a cough. “No. You’re right. Okay. So you just made it without?”

She shrugged.

“Laney, when you’re putting together a project and you don’t have any screws, you don’t just go ahead and put it together without them, right? You either get some or you substitute something else.”

She rolled her eyes. She hated when he was right.

He went on. “So, the cornstarch is to make the filling thicken and you can use white flour in place of it.”

“Great,” she muttered.

If he needed a new ceiling fan installed, she was his girl. If he wanted to convert his shower into a Jacuzzi tub, she was all over it. If he wanted a new coffee table or a rocking chair or new cabinets in the kitchen—like the one she slammed shut after pulling the canister of flour from it—she was the go-to girl.

Who the fuck cared that you could substitute flour for cornstarch?

She dutifully measured three tablespoons into the bowl.

“Three more, babe.”

“It says three.”

“Three of cornstarch. You double it for flour.”

She gave a little growl of frustration, but dumped more flour in.

“You don’t have any more clothes to take off for being negative,” he said.

“Whatever shall I do?”

“Maybe I should make you lick some sugar off of *me* every time you’re less than sunny about this,” he said thoughtfully.

She had to laugh at that. “That’s not really a punishment either, Tuck.”

He winked. “Maybe I should spank you.”

She crossed her arms. “Not if you want any of that cherry goo anywhere near me.”

He continued to stir, watching her with a gleam in his eye. “I don’t know. I think maybe you’d be into it.”

“You really want to take that gamble?”

He seemed to be thinking about it, but finally shook his head. “Not today. I *do* want this cherry goo near you.”

She peered into the bowl. “That doesn’t look that good.”

“We have to cook it first.”

“It has to be warm? Doesn’t it get hot in the oven when you bake the whole thing?”

He seemed puzzled. “Of course. But you have to cook it on the stove top first to make it into the thick gooey filling. They call it compote.”

Oh.

She got busy retrieving the baking powder and baking soda from the cupboard she’d returned them to.

“Laney? You didn’t cook it on the stovetop?”

“It was all taking longer than I thought it would and I knew you were on your way home, so I was thinking it would thicken up or whatever in the oven.”

“Not without the flour or cornstarch,” he muttered.

“Did you seriously just say that?”

He laughed. “Sorry. This is good. See, you’re not a bad *baker*, you’re just bad at following directions.”

“Tucker,” she said warningly.

He carried the bowl to the stove and grabbed the pot she’d used earlier from the sink. “Rinse that out?”

She did and handed it over. He dumped the cherry mixture in and turned up the heat.

“Medium-low. You gotta be gentle with it,” he said, stirring the pot. “It will only take about ten minutes. It will start to thicken up and look like pie filling.”

“I don’t understand why you couldn’t just use pie filling,” she said, watching him.

“Well, you could.”

Delaney froze. “What?”

He looked over at her. “You could just use cherry pie filling. Or even grab frozen cherries and use those to save some time with pitting the fresh ones.”

Her eyes narrowed and Tucker must have realized that he’d just said something really wrong.

“But the fresh are so much better,” he quickly added.

“Uh, huh.”

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Tucker bit back his grin. He’d been doing that a lot since walking into the kitchen.

Damn, Delaney baking for him—even if she sucked at it—was hot. He couldn’t explain it, had tried over the years in fact, but there was something about a woman making stuff for him that really got him going.

It wasn’t particularly feminist of him, he could admit, but there was no denying that he liked having someone trying to please him that way.

Of course, he felt the same way when Delaney made him cupboards or a bookcase or changed out the shower head in the bathroom.

But now she was standing in his kitchen, bare assed naked, helping him make cobbler.

Okay, watching him make cobbler.

Still, this was already the best cobbler he’d ever had because she’d tried to make it for him and now, even after that failure, she was still willing to learn and try again.

Delaney didn’t fail well. She didn’t do it often, but when she did, he knew it made her crazy.

“Okay, see, it’s starting to thicken up,” he said, trying to distract her from the thoughts that she could have cut several steps out of the recipe with pie filling and a can opener.

“Yeah, yeah, big deal.”

So she wasn’t learning and trying again particularly gracefully.

She was adorable and sexy even when she was grumpy.

“You want to use the jars again?” he asked as he removed the pot from the burner.

She shrugged. “I thought that was cute. Country-ish.”

And again he fought a grin. “Country-ish it is.”

She set the jars on the counter and Tucker spooned equal amounts of the compote into each. He set the pan in the side of the sink without water, but then ran his finger along the edge where some of the fruit mixture was cooling. He turned to her.

“Tell me this isn’t delicious.”

He held it up. She took his hand and guided his finger into her mouth, sucking gently, then running her tongue up and down the length.

He felt his cock jerk at the sensation... and the knowing look in her eye.

“Not bad,” she agreed.

“Let me see.” He dipped a finger into the residual cherry goo, as Delaney called it. It was still warm but not hot enough to burn. He swiped it over her collarbone and followed the sweet streak with his tongue.

She took a deep breath.

“Yep, delicious,” he said, reaching for another finger-ful. He wiped this one over the upper curve of her breast before licking, then sucking the cherry taste from her already sweet skin.

He started to reach for more, but she beat him to it, swiping a glob from the side of the pan and wiping it over his abs just above the waistband of his jeans.

She went to her knees, running her tongue over the stripe of cherry. And then some.

He was just reaching for her hair and the fly on his jeans when she popped back up to standing.

“Yeah, I kind of like it.”

Tucker cupped the back of her head and brought her up onto her tiptoes to cover her mouth. He kissed her deeply, stroking his tongue over her lips and then along her tongue, drinking every bit of cherry and sugar from her mouth.

Her cheeks were pink and she was breathing raggedly when he let her up for air. With his hand still in her hair and his eyes on hers, he opened the drawer beside his hip and found a spoon. Without looking, he dipped the spoon into one of the jars, searching for a whole cherry. He set the spoon and the cherry on the counter to cool slightly as he turned Delaney and lifted her onto the countertop beside the jars.

“I love the way you remodeled this kitchen,” he told her. “So much more counter space.”

She laughed lightly. “Just what I was thinking.”

“Lay back.”

She did, but stayed propped on her elbows so she could watch him.

He moved one of her legs so her heel was propped on the edge of the counter and then nudged her knee so it fell out to the side, exposing her fully to him.

“Damn, you’re so beautiful,” he told her. He ran one finger over her bare mound to her clit. He felt the shudder of desire go through her.

“I don’t remember this step on the recipe page.” She was slightly breathless.

Tucker grinned. “See, *this* is why you thought the cobbler you did was no good. This is an important step.”

“You *always* include this step when you have cherry cobbler?” she asked.

He laughed. “Only when I *make* the cobbler.”

“And how many times have you made cobbler?”

He glanced at the jars of cherry filling next to her. “Half of one time.”

Her smile was so sweet, he almost grabbed her and kissed her again.

But he was way too tempted by the sight before him—Delaney spread out on the countertop, cherry cobbler filling at his fingertips— to get *too* romantic.

“Get ready to move cherries up to the top of your favorite fruit list,” he told her, reaching for the spoon he’d set on the counter. The cherry on it was now just slightly warm and he picked it up with his fingers.

Her eyes widened. “You think so, huh?”

“I do.” He dropped the cherry on her mound, right above her clit.

She gasped.

He smiled.

With a fingertip, he rolled it down to her clit, the thick cherry syrup they’d made leaving a sticky red trail. He pressed it against her clit and Delaney groaned. Then he rolled it lower. The cherry slid along her sweet cleft, picking up sweet juice from her body while leaving its own

sweet juice behind, until it came to her hot opening. With his eyes on hers, he pressed gently, nudging the cherry just inside.

“Oh my God. That’s so dirty, Tuck,” she breathed.

“Yeah.” He got on his knees and licked over the sugary trail, pausing to suck gently on her clit, making her writhe on the counter, before continuing down. He licked and sucked, thoroughly eating up every trace of cherry, until he finally found the cherry tucked inside of her. He curled his tongue around it and sucked, pulling it into his mouth.

He rose and stared down at her as he chewed and swallowed.

“Holy crap,” was her reaction.

“Best damned cherry cobbler ever,” he told her sincerely.

“We’re not even done.”

“No. No we’re not.”

He opened his fly, freed his throbbing erection and pulled her to the edge of the counter. He thrust once, hard, burying himself in her fully.

They moaned together and he paused just a moment. He breathed in the delicious scent of cherry and sugar and cinnamon and knew he was destined to get hard every time he smelled any of the above from now on.

She noticed his moment of reverie though and laughed. “I swear I could just wrap myself up in a pie crust when I come to bed and you’d be in heaven.”

He pulled out and then thrust in again, watching her smile die and her eyes nearly cross.

“I like pie,” he said, pulling out and then thrusting again. “But pie isn’t cobbler babe. Wait ‘til we make the biscuits for these things.”

She lifted her legs and linked her ankles at his low back. “Pie, cobbler, biscuits. Whatever.”

He slid his hands under her butt and lifted her up slightly to take him deeper as he continued to move. “Whatever? You did not just say that.”

“I’m telling you right now, if this is what happens when I screw a recipe up, I may never get another right for as long as I live.”

She finished her sentence on a long groan as Tucker picked up his rhythm.

Soon they were both climbing to the pinnacle and Tucker pushed her over the edge just ahead of his climax.

Several minutes later, after they’d floated back to earth, he pulled out and slid one hand out from underneath her. Her legs dangled over the edge of the counter and she’d thrown her forearm over her eyes.

“And now, onto the biscuit dough,” he said.

She laughed. “I might not be able to walk after making cobbler.”

He straightened his clothes and re-zipped. “Yeah, you probably don’t need to bother getting dressed yet.”

She moved her arm and looked up at him. “But we can’t make the dough right now. We don’t have any buttermilk.”

“That’s okay. We can make it.”

She frowned and sat up. “What?”

“We can make buttermilk. You just add some lemon juice to regular milk to sour it.”

She looked up at the ceiling and muttered something that sounded like “you’ve got to be fucking kidding me.”

Tucker decided to ignore that. And not laugh.

He added the tablespoon of lemon juice to the third cup of milk, while Delaney melted the half stick of butter in the microwave. They combined the liquid ingredients, including *vanilla* extract this time, with the dry and then dropped the dough on top of the cherry filling.

Tucker sprinkled cinnamon and sugar over the top—dusting a little along her shoulder and licking it off in the process—and then set the mason jars into a baking pan and slid the whole thing into the oven.

“And that’s how you make cherry cobbler,” he said.

She didn’t look convinced. “We’ll see.”

“I promise you, it will be delicious. And I will be eating it off of you as soon as it’s cool enough.”

She smiled at that and wrapped her arms around him, arching against him.

He pressed her back against the counter behind her, wanting her all over again.

And not because the kitchen smelled like cherry cobbler.

Well, not *just* because the kitchen smelled like cherry cobbler.

He was just kissing his way down her neck when he heard the kitchen door open behind him.

He sighed. So did Delaney.

She didn’t panic about being naked. She was fully blocked by his body.

She peered over his shoulder. “Oh, hey TJ.”

Tucker turned, keeping her behind him. “TJ.”

His oldest brother was standing just inside the back door. His gaze roamed over the clothes scattered over the floor and the baking ingredients all over the counters. He looked at Tucker and took a deep breath, clearly inhaling the scent of baking sweets.

“Cherry cobbler?”

Tucker grinned. “Of course.”

TJ nodded. “I finally understand the appeal.”

Then he turned and left the house.

A moment later they heard his truck start up and drive away.

Delaney was the first to start giggling.

Tucker reached to turn the over off, then swept her up into his arms.

She wrapped her arms around his neck. “What are you doing?” she asked.

He started for the stairs. “What do I need with cobbler when I’ve got my arms full of sugar already?”

“Aw,” she said with a soft smile. “That’s nice.”

He set her down by the bed and stripped out of his jeans and underwear.

When he was naked, he pushed her back onto the mattress and followed her down.

As he was covering her with his body, she asked, “But we are going to finish baking those and actually eat them right?”

He lifted his head from where he’d been teasing her nipple with his tongue. Tasted perfect even without sugar or cherry goo. “You *want* to eat those?” He had every intention of baking them and eating them.

She shrugged. “I actually think I could really like cherry cobbler.”

The sweetest words he’d ever heard. He didn’t *need* cherry cobbler to be happy. But damn, it really did make life a little better.

He lowered his lips to hers and ran his hand over her hip. “And I haven’t even told you about the peach crisp.”

Her groan was swallowed by his kiss.

The End