

Grits and Buggies

“No, no, no,” I said, shaking my head. This could not have happened to me. Sure I’d heard about unscrupulous gangs who got rid of their unwanted puppies by placing them in unattended shopping carts, but damn, I’d only been gone for thirty seconds top. Okay, so maybe I’d been gone a little longer. Somehow I knew the puppy, who had made itself comfortable in my buggy, didn’t want to hear it was the cute blonde’s fault it had taken me a couple of minutes to grab a bag of organic oatmeal.

I mean, what could I do when she flashed me a smile that lit up her green eyes and dimpled her cheeks? I’ll tell you what I did. I used my five-inch height advantage to get the last bag of stone-ground grits. The one she had to have or the following morning would be shot. I admit I was thinking about sharing the following morning with her as I got on my tip toes, plucked the bag off the shelf and basked in the glow of her smile of thanks. Hell, I might have even zoned out for a couple of seconds when she put her arms around my waist and gave me a quick hug. But the cute blond Labrador puppy in my buggy didn’t care about any of that.

I made the mistake of looking into its big brown soulful eyes. It was too much after being under the onslaught of blondie’s smile. I folded like a John at a hooker’s convention and started thinking of arguments that might fly with my five-year old greyhound, Thomas, who’s told me on numerous occasions he enjoys being a single child. Thomas doesn’t use words so much as growls.

“I hope you know the trouble you’re causing me.” I tried to look stern and failed miserably. I know at one time I had a backbone, but over the years it had softened to gristle. The puppy licked my face as if in apology and I was totally gone. Thomas would just have to understand drastic times and all.

Accepting my fate, I picked up the pup to discover I’d given birth to another boy. Feeling better than I should have, I steered my buggy through the open-air market to the dog food section and tried to come up with a name. Buggy was the obvious choice, but I’m sure there are quite a few of those already.

“So, you like hugged her and everything and she still didn’t ask for your number? Something is wrong with her. Did she see your butt? ‘Cause for a white girl, you got some junk in your trunk.”

Stephanie rolled her eyes and managed not to laugh along with her friend Latisha. “I think she’s just shy.” She sighed. “Gorgeous, but shy.”

“Just as well,” Latisha said with a sly smile. “You’d need a step ladder to kiss her with your short ass.”

“Vertically challenged, thank you. And she looked strong enough to lift me up and hold me close for awhile,” she added with a dreamy smile as she imagined locking lips with tall, dark and silent.

“Then what you should have done is grabbed a handful of that long, black hair, pulled her down to your level and kissed her senseless.” Latisha demonstrated with the cloth shopping bag she always carried. “The bigger they are, the harder they fall.”

“Now that might have been worth a trip to lock up.”

“Might?”

Stephanie blushed under Latisha’s knowing smirk. “Whatever. Let’s go grab some cat food and go home.” *So I can think about her in private.*

Shit, I thought, looking at the ten different kinds of puppy food, *when did they get so much variety?* I lifted the pup out of the buggy and let him sniff the different brands. He sniffed every bag, then turned to look at me as if trying to figure out what to do next.

“Okay, now you get to pick one.” I swear he nodded before turning back around and reaching for the third bag he’d sniffed. Obviously, the gangbangers had left me with a genius. “That’s what I’ll call you, Genius.” He barked and licked my chin.

“Genius, huh? That’s a nice name.”

The voice sounded all too familiar. I looked down and there she was, all five feet and an inch of her. “Uh...hey.” Damn, I’m smooth. When she stepped closer to pet Genius, I almost dropped the poor guy. So, I’m a little klutzy around beautiful women.

“He’s a handsome fellow. Buggy baby?”

I could only nod under the onslaught of that dimpled smile and twinkling green eyes.

“I’m Stephanie Gray,” she said and held out her hand.

“Uh...Sabrina Swafford.” When I took her tiny hand in mine, I almost sighed. I could have stood there all day, holding her hand and looking into her eyes. And maybe I did.

“Okay, so when *are* you going to exchange numbers.”

I wasn't sure which one of us was more embarrassed, since Stephanie and I both sported red cheeks. I didn't know the newcomer, so I had to assume she was talking to my Stephanie. That had such a nice ring.

"Latisha," Stephanie said, sounding more like a groan than a greeting. "Meet, Sabrina."

"Hey." Latisha gave me the once over, in the best-friend-looking-out-for-a-friend kind of way. "Can Stephanie get your number?"

My "Huh?" was almost drowned out by Stephanie's, "Latisha!" Even a bright red face looked good on my Stephanie.

"You know you wanted those digits," Latisha said.

"Maybe *I* wanted to ask."

"Then ask."

Latisha gave us each a 'get with it' look before she left us alone.

"She's always like that," Stephanie said quietly, gazing down.

"You're lucky then," I said. That got her to look up. "I wish I had a friend who would do that for me."

"Yeah?"

Her smile made me tingle. "Yeah. Coffee?"

"Yeah."