



She's No Angel (Sweetheart, South Carolina Book 2)

By Kira Sinclair

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Lexi's Diet Tips for Naughty Girls

Chocolatier Lexi Harper shares her secrets for having your cake and eating it—and him—too!

1. When a craving hits, give in! It's amazing what you can do with some melted chocolate and an equally melt-in-your-mouth guy.
2. Just a tiny taste will do...unless it's a taste of architect Brett Newcomb with his icy blue eyes and killer body.
3. Then work it off—big-time! Treat yourself to all the wicked-hot sex you can get. No calories!

So, go for it. After all, too much of a good thing can be sinfully delicious...

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Double winner of the National Readers' Choice Award, Kira Sinclair writes passionate contemporary romances. Her first foray into writing fiction was for a high school English assignment, and not even being forced to read the love story aloud could dampen her enthusiasm...although it did make her blush. She lives out her own *happily ever after* with her husband, their two daughters and a menagerie of animals.

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Chocolate was Lexi Harper's drug of choice. The only thing that could beat the decadent taste of that melted goodness was really stellar sex. Unfortunately, her hips proved that chocolate—even the gourmet stuff—was easier to come by.

Which is probably why she'd opened her own shop. There was something about baked goods that made everyone happy. You couldn't frown with a piece of fudge in your mouth. It was physically impossible.

Well, for everyone except Mrs. Copeland, who could frown no matter what.

"Alexis Harper!"

Sighing, Lexi suppressed a cringe and turned to look at the self-appointed grande dame of Sweetheart, South Carolina.

"I'll be with you in just a moment, Mrs. Copeland," Lexi said in her sweetest voice. Even if it killed her she'd be nice.

Mrs. Copeland pinned Lexi beneath a steely glare that was specifically designed to have her spine snapping straight and Lexi jumping to do her bidding. She was intimately acquainted with the look and had been since the age of ten.

"I've been waiting here for almost fifteen minutes," she barked.

Old habits were hard to break and a residual shudder ran down Lexi's spine. While she was growing up, Mrs. Copeland had been her etiquette instructor. On the third Saturday of every month for eight years, Lexi's mother would ship her off for several dreadful hours where the woman delighted in pointing out every flaw, gaffe or perceived slight.

Who really needed to know the proper way to pour tea or where to sit the governor if he should happen to agree to dinner? Lexi had certainly never run across the need for most of the things that Mrs. Copeland viewed as more important than breathing. And what little she had used would have been covered by human decency and politeness.

After one particularly embarrassing incident involving mustard, a Siamese cat and licorice when she was twelve, Lexi had begged her mom not to send her back. But there were certain things that happened in Sweetheart, and attending Mrs. Copeland's etiquette classes was one of them. Along with the debutante ball.

Just the thought of it sent another shiver of remembered dread down Lexi's spine. God, she'd been such a spastic klutz back then.

"Everyone else has been waiting just as long, Mrs. Copeland. Longer, since they were here before you."

Off to her left, in front of the caramel apple display, Mary Beth Hereford snickered. Lexi didn't know Mary Beth well, but despite that, the two of them shared a knowing glance that immediately bonded them.

Mrs. Copeland's mouth tightened into a hard, unpleasant line. She didn't say anything else, but the unpleasant knot in the pit of Lexi's stomach didn't ease. And it wouldn't until the horrid witch left. Lexi wanted to hate herself for letting the woman get under her skin. Mrs. Copeland couldn't hurt or embarrass her anymore. But logic apparently couldn't trump remembered misery and years of ingrained dread.

Pushing the unpleasantness aside, Lexi focused on the rest of her customers. She cut and boxed a set of chocolate-dipped, rum-soaked caramel apples for Mary Beth. She was hosting Bunco, a dice game, tonight. Mr. Arcella had stopped in for a box of assorted truffles for his wife. It was their twenty-fourth anniversary. Lexi slipped in several of Mrs. Arcella's favorite flavor—champagne—even though he didn't ask for them.

She spent another five minutes answering the questions of a woman she didn't recognize. The woman wanted to know about Lexi's herb-infused aphrodisiac chocolates, which probably meant she was from out of town. The best thing Lexi had ever done was start advertising those on the internet. Customers had been coming out of the woodwork ever since.

The line finally cleared and Mrs. Copeland was up. Turning to the woman, Lexi braced herself for whatever unpleasantness was coming—because it always did. The woman viewed it as her personal crusade to point out everyone else's flaws while simultaneously breaking as many of her precious etiquette rules as humanly possible.

She didn't disappoint. "Aphrodisiac chocolates. That's disgraceful, Alexis Harper."

Lexi bit her tongue and swallowed the automatic response at not only the woman's acerbic tone but at the use of her given name. No one, not even her own mother, called her Alexis anymore. But Mrs. Copeland despised nicknames.

"Heaven only knows what your poor mama thinks about those..." She waved her hand at the artfully sensual display beneath the glass. "...those things."

"Why don't you ask her, Mrs. Copeland?" Lexi suggested, a calm, fake smile curling her lips. She folded her hands on the glass countertop and leaned across as if she were imparting a secret. "Better yet, why don't you ask Daddy at the council meeting tomorrow night? Mama took some home just last week."

Mrs. Copeland's eyes widened and then narrowed dangerously. "Well," she huffed. "I shouldn't be surprised. You always were a hopeless cause, Alexis Harper. My one true disappointment as an educator."

If Mrs. Copeland was an educator then Lexi was a supermodel, something that was so far from the realm of

possibility as to be pure fairy tale.

Lexi boxed Mrs. Copeland's selection of iced petit fours and, though it galled her, decorated the thing with her signature red gingham bow.

"At least you've found a way to make a living from your love of sugar," Mrs. Copeland offered with a sharp smirk. "Although I never would have expected you to slim down nearly as much with all this temptation around. Bless your heart, there wasn't a Saturday you came into my class that you didn't have a smear of chocolate somewhere, was there?"

Lexi gritted her teeth and jerked her mouth up into the approximation of a smile. And hoped her eyes weren't glaring daggers the way she feared.

"Yes, ma'am. I'm real lucky."

"Good breeding helps," Mrs. Copeland offered as a parting salvo with a glance up and down that left the unmistakable impression of her opinion. Apparently, in Lexi's case, good breeding wasn't quite enough. Although the old biddy's opinion wasn't exactly a news flash.

When the bell tinkled and the door snicked shut, Lexi slumped tiredly against the edge of the display case. A few moments. That's all she needed, and then she could handle closing up the shop.

"Why didn't you put her in her place?"

The low, smoky voice startled Lexi, and she jerked her spine straight again.

A man she'd never met stood in the far corner leaning against her shelf of prebagged goodies. She'd been so preoccupied that she hadn't noticed him.

"Because it would have been wasted breath, and I try not to waste anything."

His arms were crossed negligently over a wide chest. The line of his body stretched out, long and tempting. Tight jeans clung to thick thighs and Lexi had no doubt that if he turned around she'd get a nice view of a high, round rear. Her body reacted immediately, coming alive at the presence of a virile male in the center of her world. She clamped down on the buzz of female interest.

He was a stranger, and after what had happened a few months ago, she didn't trust strangers.

He studied her with cool blue eyes that had another knot of unease forming in her belly. Lexi didn't like being watched. Nothing good had ever come from being the center of attention. As the mayor's daughter, everyone in town knew her and thought her life was fair game for comment. The perils of living in a small town.

For a long time she'd struggled to figure out who she was. There were so many loud voices in her head telling her what she should do, how she should feel and what she should be. Finding a place where everyone else's opinion of her didn't matter had been a hard battle.

She was happy with the life she'd built. She had a good business, wonderful friends and she'd come to terms with her own weaknesses. Most days she was good, although every now and then old ghosts resurfaced.

His scrutiny made her uncomfortable. And warm. He straightened and stalked across her shop with a predatory grace that left her mouth dry as cotton. All bunching muscles and laser focus. He smiled and her stomach tightened.

She didn't want to notice the way his bottom lip pulled up in the center. Or the brush of dark brown hair that touched the curve of his ears. She didn't want to notice him at all.

Breaking the hold he had on her, Lexi dropped her gaze and fiddled with the boxes beneath the display counter. Stacking and restacking them, despite the fact that they were already perfectly straight.

"What's good?"

"Everything," she answered without pause. Every single thing in the ten-foot-long case had been handmade. By her. And since quality control was a major concern, she'd personally sampled everything. Once and only once. Followed immediately by at least five miles on the treadmill currently sitting idle in the office at the back of her store.

It was either that or go back to being "Piglet" Harper. A prospect she did not relish. The nickname might have been cute when Gage, her brother, gave it to her as a baby, but right around middle school the charm had disappeared. Unfortunately, the name hadn't.

"I need something for dessert."

"Well..." Lexi's gaze swept the case. "For how many?"

"I have no idea."

"A challenge."

He leaned closer to the case. The scent of his aftershave, something clean, crisp and totally male, mixed with the tempting scent of sugar. Lexi's mouth began to water.

"Do you like challenges?" he asked, one eyebrow pulling up in a dare all its own.

He was flirting. The blood pounding furiously through her veins and the interested crackle beneath her skin told her that. But she wasn't going there.

Although somehow she found herself snapping back. "Nope, I like life easy and boring." Which really was the truth. She didn't like drama. She was perfectly content with the nice, quiet life she'd built for herself.

"I can tell." A smile rippled across his lips, but before it could fully form he pulled it back.

She had a great business she could be proud of, good friends, and whenever she had an itch that needed scratching, a big city close enough to provide some pleasant diversion.

It was obvious this man had the skills to be very *diverting*, but after Brandon she'd learned to be cautious with men who walked through her front door.

With a deep breath Lexi broke away from whatever *this* was and focused on her job. "Well, you could take

petit fours, but you don't strike me as a tiny bite of cake kinda guy."

"Uh, no. I don't like tiny bites of anything."

An unexpected shiver lanced through her. Lexi clenched her fists and ignored it.

"There's always caramel apples, but somehow those seem more intimate and since you don't know how many people are coming that probably won't work."

He shook his head.

All of the brownies and cakes she'd made today had sold hours ago. She did have one, a new recipe she'd tried and was planning to drop off to Gage and Hope, her best friend and future sister-in-law, on her way home. She hesitated to sell a product that she hadn't fully vetted, but she'd been perfecting the recipe for the lemon-cardamom cake for months and finally thought she'd gotten it right.

Besides, she didn't have anything else that would work, and she hated to send a customer away unhappy. Especially a new one. Okay, maybe she just didn't want to send *this* one away unhappy. But what was wrong with that? She was big on customer service.

Turning away, Lexi slipped through the curtain into the back. A few moments later she reemerged with a cake covered in rose-scented frosting and candied rose petals.

"Will this work?"

He straightened from the languid slouch against her counter and stared, wide-eyed, at the cake in her hands. The playful, watchful air he'd had disappeared. "That's too pretty to eat."

She'd surprised him. Which surprised her. And possibly pissed her off. What had he expected her to pull from the back? A chocolate cake with canned frosting slapped on top?

"Nonsense," she said, her voice tight with a suppressed frown. Lexi reached down for a box and a bow. "Food is meant to be enjoyed. Savored. Especially dessert."

She handed the box to him. "That'll be thirty-five." His fingers brushed against her hand. His cool blue eyes went from watchful to melting. A zap of electricity blasted up her arms and she almost dropped the cake.

He scrambled to rebalance the weight of it in his palms. "Well, it would have been a shame if something that pretty had hit the floor. Tasting this is about the only thing I'm looking forward to tonight."

Unbidden, a vision of him feeding her bites of that cake swelled in her mind. Her lungs labored to catch a breath, and she licked her lips. She hadn't meant to, but she'd wanted to taste that icing and the skin of his fingers beneath. The flavor of her own lips wasn't nearly as exciting.

His eyes snagged on her mouth. The box crackled in protest as his hands tightened, threatening to crush the cardboard.

The phone beneath the counter rang, breaking the spell.

Oh, Lord, what was she doing? This man was a complete stranger. A customer! He'd been in her store for less than fifteen minutes and her libido was ready to flip the open sign over and drag him into the back for a different kind of workout than her treadmill provided.

Turning her back, she answered the phone. "Sugar and Spice."

"Oh, thank goodness you're still there." Her mother's frazzled voice echoed down the line. "I need a huge favor."

The bell behind her chimed. Lexi turned to see who'd come into the store only to discover it was empty. And two twenties were on the counter.

She should be grateful that he was gone, but her energized body certainly wasn't happy. Tough. Dragging in a deep breath, Lexi held it for a moment before letting it—and the last fifteen minutes—go.

"Alexis Harper, are you listening to me?"

Shaking her head, Lexi refocused. "I'm sorry, Mama, I was distracted. What favor?"

"Please tell me you have something in the case I could use for dessert."

"I just sold my last cake."

"Dammit!"

Lexi straightened. Her mother never swore. This was obviously more than a rampant sweet tooth. "Don't worry, give me an hour and I can make something."

What's this about?"

"I knew I could count on you, Lexi. Be sure to wear something nice."

Users Review

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