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CLUB

# Barely Legal LIZZIE T. LEAF

Aspen Mountain Press

## **Praise for the writing of Lizzie T. Leaf**

### **Dead Faint**

"Although there are a lot of laughs in this story, it is a powerful read with a romance that is intense and sizzling. If you've never read a story by this talented author, I would strongly suggest you get on it right away. You will not be disappointed at all." Valerie, Love Romances and More

"This has been one of the most FUN reads I've had in a bit. I truly enjoyed watching the way all these wonderfully wierd and wacky characters played off one another while pulling together a storyline that was cohesive, well rounded and yet entertaining. I love a story that can make me laugh aloud as I read and this one did several times. I hope to read more from Ms. Leaf." WitchGiggles, Alternative-Read

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Hilarious and hot!! STRUCK BY LIGHTNING brings the mythological gods to life! Brimming with sizzling love scenes, an interesting plot, romance, suspense and charismatic characters, this is a hard book to put down until you have finished the last page. This is the first story I have read by Lizzie T. Leaf, but I found it to be enjoyable and look forward to reading more of her works. I have put STRUCK BY LIGHTNING on my 'recommended read' list." Dottie, Romance Junkies

"Mythology, humor, romance and sex make Leaf's clever paranormal a fast and engaging read filled with laughs, plot twists, strong mortals and mischievous immortals." 4 ½ Stars, Page Traynor, Romantic Times Book Reviews

### **Warning**

This e-book contains erotic scenes that some may find objectionable. Store your e-books carefully where they cannot be accessed by younger readers.

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## Chapter One

“Were you this much of a son-of-a-bitch when I married you?” If she had a gun in her hands right now, Katherine knew she’d have no problem using it. His brains splattered against the white upholstery in the limo would definitely be the punch of color her interior design school instructor talked about in class today.

Ignoring her question, Rex looked out the tinted limousine window. “Smile, darling. We’re almost there.”

“Smile? How the hell do you expect me to plaster a smile on my face and walk down the red carpet five minutes after you confess you’re fucking your assistant?”

The numbness that assaulted her body would make it difficult to stand, let alone strut down a carpet lined with paparazzi and television interviewers. All she wanted was to tell the driver to take her home so she could retreat to her bedroom, curl into a ball in her king sized bed for one and make the world go away.

Granted, she and Rex had grown apart the past few years. When she’d heard rumors of his flirtations and confronted him, he’d always denied them—that is until a few minutes ago when she jokingly remarked about his new assistant, “Honestly honey, I don’t see why you hired Trisha. She doesn’t seem to have a brain in that beautiful head the way she messes up your appointment calendar.”

He’d bitched about the young woman’s latest screw-up since they’d left the house.

Rex's lips had curled up into the sarcastic smile that always signaled something hurtful was about to come her way. "True enough when it comes to business, but her saving grace is she's young and fucks like a rabbit."

"What?" Stunned, she'd stared at him unable to believe he'd so casually admitted his infidelity. In the past, he'd at least had the decency to deny it.

"Oh please, darling. Don't take on the hurt wife tone with me. How long has it been since you've had any interest in sex?"

Anger bubbled up inside her and blasted to the surface. How dare he insinuate it was her fault their sex life had become non-existent? "Consider that your own doing, husband." She hadn't attempted to keep her voice calm.

Rex pushed the button to close the window that separated them from Ed, their driver, and glared at her but she didn't stop...couldn't stop the flow of words. The world needed to hear what a bastard she was married to.

"You're the one who turned away when I tried to initiate intimacy. After a while, I gave up." Crossing her arms, Katherine scooted over to the far corner of the back seat. Hurt and anger spewed out. "Besides, I discovered a long time ago rabbit sex didn't do it for me. You two should be perfect for each other since you're both so quick."

"Don't be catty darling, it's not becoming. Speaking of which, have you looked in the mirror recently?" Rex's voice had become flat, a tone that always indicated boredom. "Really, you're looking like a woman turning forty and who wants to bed that?"

"Thank you for the compliment." She'd spat out in response. "After all I'm on the verge of turning fifty."

"Right. I forgot." He stared out the window and she knew he assessed the crowd that waited outside the theater. They were there to cheer the celebrities as they exited from the line of limousines waiting to discharge their occupants for the premiere of another Rex Holland money maker. Turning toward her, his eyes raked over her body. "Well, I must say you're in better shape than a lot of women in your age bracket, but I

can't afford to feel old. Sorry darling, but my attorney will contact you to make arrangements for our legal separation."

Deflated, Katherine sat back against the seat and fought back tears. She'd be damned if she let him see her cry.

Why should she be surprised that her time had come? When she met Rex, she'd been twenty-four and an up and coming Hollywood starlet, the next 'It Girl' according to the tabloid buzz. Instead, once he'd settled the messy business of the wife at that time, Katherine Graham became the next Mrs. Rex Holland. As the wife of an internationally known movie producer, there'd been no need for her to work. More to the point, Rex discouraged her from accepting the acting offers that came her way. He wanted her to concentrate on her new featured role as eye candy to an older man and set aside her own dreams. Like a fool, she did as he suggested and added not taking a stand to a growing list of regrets.

Now, twenty-five years later, it was out with the old and in with the new once again. Only this time, Rex Holland wasn't forty-one. At sixty-six, he'd look like the damned fool he was, sporting a twenty something on his arm, no matter how good she told him he was in bed.

"We're next." Their limo inched forward. "Remember to smile and for God's sake, be nice to Trisha when we get to our table."

The bastard actually expected her to make nice with his mistress. "I'm not going. Have Ed take me back home." Katherine huddled in the far corner of the limo.

"You're going, darling. You're going to be the doting wife in your last walk down the red carpet." Rex grabbed her hand and pulled her from the safety of her corner. The pressure became more intense as she resisted and she cried out in pain when his large palm moved up her arm and shook her none too gently.

\* \* \* \*

"Katherine. Katherine, wake up. You're dreaming." Focusing her eyes, Katherine realized the shaking came from Monique Williams, her best friend and seat companion. They were on a flight to Las Vegas from Los Angeles and she'd drifted off to sleep as she listened to Monique's voice outlining what they'd do the next six weeks. That was a long time to kill in Las Vegas in order for Katherine to establish her Nevada residency. They needed a plan of action or they both would go insane.

"Honestly, cherié, that must have been quite the nightmare you were having the way you whimpered and squirmed in your seat."

The hint of a French accent in Monique's voice, something she'd picked up from her mother who'd never let anyone forget she was French, grew more pronounced when Monique became distressed. Of course, there were also the times she brought it forth to impress some sweet young thing she was toying with, but right now Katherine knew it was concern for her that brought forth the childhood habit.

"It was." Katherine unfastened her seatbelt and stood. "I need the restroom."

The last thing she wanted to do right now was relive the dream with Monique and get one of her friend's "I told you so" looks or, worse yet, comments. Monique had spent a lot of years telling her what a lying scum Rex was and that she should dump his ass, but at this moment, she didn't want to hear it.

Shocked when she saw her reflection in the harsh florescent glare of the small mirror, Katherine splashed cold water on her face and stared at the woman facing her. In this light, she could almost understand why Rex traded her in for a newer model. This was the face of a hag, pale and drawn. When did the change happen and how did she miss it? Did she really look as bad as the reflection or was the stress of the upcoming few weeks affecting her more than she thought? Patting her face dry, she applied a little makeup before exiting the confined space. On the return trip to her seat, she squeezed past the flight attendant who shot her a concerned look. *Yeah, I really look bad.*

"Are you going to tell me about the dream?" Monique had barely given her time to sit down before she started the questioning. The haughty look that only a French



woman, or in Monique's case, a woman raised by a French mother, could perfect crossed her face.

Katherine knew if she didn't share, the subject wouldn't drop. "I'd rather not talk about it, but if I don't, you won't let me rest. I dreamed about Rex's confession night."

"That prick. How can you waste your dreams on him?" Monique's black eyes flashed dangerously. "I spit on him. If I see him, so help me I will spit on him."

One could never fault Monique's loyalty. She had a number of other qualities that weren't always endearing, but she was loyal to a fault to those she cared about. Katherine could envision the hot-headed woman walking up to Rex with his latest bimbo on his arm and spitting in his face. The ensuing scandal wouldn't cause her to blink an eye. Monique thrived on scandal.

"Thanks. I know you would, but why give him the pleasure of more publicity? This divorce is going to get him enough limelight."

Monique had convinced her that in order to move on with her life, she needed to be done with the marriage. The decorating business they planned to launch was on hold until Katherine got the community property issue settled. "After all, chérié, why did we spend all those hours studying to become interior designers if we're going to sit on our asses?"

Rex had dumped her three years ago and like a bee, he spent his time flitting from flower to flower, using the excuse his wife wouldn't divorce him when the latest arm trophy wanted a gold band on the left hand.

Katherine had reached the point she didn't want just a separation, so the idea of a Las Vegas divorce seemed to be the quickest instead of having a legal bog-down in the California court system for years. Rex's lawyers delighted in playing their little games and running up their clients' fees. Plus, no way in hell would Rex Holland split their assets down the middle and the courts in California would let him have his way.

*That's okay, Mr. Holland. Nevada is a community property state and I don't think you have as much influence with the judges in Las Vegas as you do in Los Angeles. I will get what's mine*

*– or at least make you think I’m going to try – so that you make a quick settlement I can live with.*

Katherine pressed her forehead against the window and focused on the lights of the Las Vegas Strip snaking below as the plane approached McCarran airport. Another chapter of her life was about to begin.

\* \* \* \*

“Welcome to your new home.” Monique tossed her Prada bag on the sofa and Katherine dropped her own beside it.

The penthouse condo was one of Monique’s collection of homes, ranging from a small lavish apartment in Paris to a couple of large rambling homes in LA and Miami, and too many others Katherine couldn’t remember. This newest acquisition was at the Windsor Arms, the ritzy tower of privately owned apartments attached to the Windsor Hotel and Casino. Billed as “the place where royalty wants to gamble,” the newest strip extravaganza lived up to its promise. Katherine had toured Windsor Palace outside London and what she saw here was every bit as royal as its namesake, from the lobby to this exquisite penthouse.

Not a bad place to spend the next six weeks needed to establish her Nevada residency, Katherine mused as she took in the soft colors and silk fabrics. Just to make sure there was no issue about it, Monique had created a rental agreement which she had Katherine sign. Leave it to her friend to make sure the legal details were covered. After all, that’s how Monique ended up with this place in her latest divorce.

“Damn, I can’t believe after what I paid for these shoes they hurt my feet.”

Katherine watched Monique slip the four inch stilettos off and reach down to massage her aching feet. “Hey, you’re the one who has to play Fashion Queen. I gave up walking miles in torture devices like that years ago.” She stuck out a sneaker clad foot to demonstrate.

“But, my dear, look how ugly they are.”

"I'd rather have comfort over style when I'm hoofing it through airports. Besides, they go with jeans." The casual observer would never connect her, in her jeans and sneakers, and the stylish woman in Chanel as traveling companions, let alone friends.

Monique's long straight hair stayed black with the aid of their mutual Beverly Hills hair stylist, who also made sure Katherine's highlights gleamed against her honey-blond locks to hide the silver in her chin-length bob.

Monique's thin and chic frame was a couturier designer's dream client, whereas her off the rack clothes always required tailoring to accommodate her full bust and small waist.

Their friendship had been instantaneous as children. Monique was a dark-eyed little doll with black curls tied back with ribbons and dressed in lace, whose mother treated more like a work of art than a daughter. On the other hand, Katherine was a tomboy more comfortable climbing trees than putting on a dress for the cotillion lessons her mother made her attend. At their first meeting, they had assessed each other and decided they liked what they saw.

Katherine survived the cotillion and Monique grudgingly learned to catch a baseball. Later, they both attended the same private women's college and to the chagrin of both their mothers, they opted to head for Hollywood. The only positive result from the college experience, as far as either of the young women was concerned, was the discovery that Katherine could act and Monique attracted men like flies to honey, something she thought would be an asset in the land of dreams.

The cruel town didn't greet them with open arms when they knocked on studio doors. Katherine waited on a lot of tables to come up with her share of the rent and sometimes most of Monique's share too.

Monique worked in a dress shop and temptation was too great for the fashion conscious girl. By the time some paydays rolled around, Monique owed most of her check to the shop owner. Tired of the paycheck-to-paycheck life style, Monique set her sights for an older man who, of course, was loaded and soon married a billionaire. That

was the first of many husbands who either died or bored her after the marriage met the prenuptial timeline and she got the money agreed upon upfront.

"I can afford it, darling." Monique wiggled her toes. "I just hate spending money on shoes that are all style and no comfort. This is the last pair of this designer's shoes I buy." She picked up the offending objects off the floor and stood. "I'm ready for dinner. Let's get changed and check out the landscape. You are in the first bedroom on the right." On the way to her room, Monique casually tossed the pair of seven hundred dollar shoes in the wastebasket.

*Check out the landscape.* That was Monique for, "Let's check out the casino and see what young, good-looking guys are staying at the hotel." Monique's husbands were always old and rich, but her playthings were young and handsome.

"Are you still sitting out there?"

Damn, Monique must have x-ray vision; she'd yelled the question from the back of the condo.

"Moving." Katherine battled the depression that threatened to overwhelm her as she made her way toward her bedroom. It was sad to think that twenty plus years of her life were for naught. She bit her bottom lip to keep back the tears that stung her eyes.

Who was she kidding? Was she really upset about putting the final nail in a marriage that had been dead for years or was she still reeling from hurt pride? Her ego hadn't recovered from the fact her husband left her for another woman...a much younger woman.

God, she'd hated the skinny, platinum blonde with the pumped up boobs the first time she met her. When Trisha only acknowledged their introduction with a nod before she turned and batted her baby-blues at Rex and gushed over his tie, Katherine had repressed the urge to throw up on the expensive Oriental rug in her husband's office.

Maybe Monique was right. Business venture or not, it was time she moved on with her life. Heck, maybe she'd even check out the younger man market that her friend

regularly haunted. But unlike the sassy raven haired beauty, she'd stay away from the ones that were barely legal.

## Chapter Two

Lost in the fictional world created by the book he picked up on the way home, Corin Rankin lifted his head and sniffed the air.

"For cripes sake, Blaine, do you think you put enough stink on?" Corin's eyes stung as his roommate sauntered past, dressed for the night's hunt.

"Hey, the chicks dig a fine scent, especially the older ones. Has to be a little stronger for them to appreciate it though." Blaine's lewd laugh left little doubt as to the meaning of his comment.

"You'd better hope their olfactory nerves are dead and they're blind to boot."

"What you talkin' 'bout, Dimples?" Since Blaine had met Gary Coleman, he'd become obsessed with the Different Strokes star and played on Coleman's line from the show.

"Too much time in the tanning booth has added another layer to what can only be described as a fixation and when you smile, the white glow against that George Hamilton skin is going to blind them. The only relief their eyes will get is the gap between your front teeth."

In appreciation of his roommate's comment, Blaine expanded the grin to show more teeth and in addition shared a one finger salute of gratitude.

Corin laughed and returned the salutation. He knew Blaine thought the deep tan looked great with his bleached blond hair. Personally, Corin didn't see it. In a few years, the younger man would look like a prune and he'd be lucky if he dodged the skin

cancer bullet. Even the older women Blaine preferred wouldn't want him in their beds. His wrinkly skin would remind them too much of the fruit they ate to stay regular.

"Yeah, well at least I don't have divots in my cheeks."

Corin flipped a finger in his friend's direction. It wasn't the first time and, safe to say, not the last time his roommate made fun of his dimples. "You should be so lucky. That's probably why you're so oiled up with that shirt opened to your navel, if they get close enough to touch you, their hand will slide right down to your belt buckle."

"With any luck, before the night's out someone's hand will slide further than that." Blaine gave a wicked leer before he twisted the top off the beer he pulled from the refrigerator. "So, you going to sit around here all night or are we going to party?"

Corin shook his head. "You go ahead. I think I'm going to stay in and read. This new book I picked up on the way home is pretty good."

Besides, the few times he had gone out with Blaine to cruise what his roommate called the Cougar scene had been a bust. He seemed to attract women who opened a conversation with, "Let's go to my place and discover each other." When he was out to get laid, he wanted a little more foreplay than that. He'd like to at least know the woman's name and maybe a little about her interests, other than getting him into bed.

"Not gonna happen, birthday boy." The surprised look on Corin's face drew a laugh from Blaine. "Thought I'd forgotten, didn't you? Hell, you're getting old."

"Thirty-two isn't exactly over the hill." He resented Blaine's constant digs about the seven years' difference in their ages. *Wonder if he pulls that crap with the women he hangs out with? May explain why his relationships only last a couple of weeks.*

"Borderline, my friend. In a few years, none of those fine Cougars will find you of interest."

"I still don't understand why you go for older women given your level of maturity." There, he'd got his shot in, though maybe it brought him down to his friend's level. A lot of times, Blaine acted more like fifteen than twenty-five.

"The same reason younger women go after dirty old men...for what they can get and it's not always sex." Blaine held up his wrist to demonstrate his meaning. The gold

Rolex, a parting gift from his last admirer, looked at home on the tanned arm. "Takes the pain out of being dumped, don't you think?"

"If you say so." There were times Corin wasn't sure who did the dumping, but one thing was certain; Blaine always came out of the relationship with a token to remember the conquest.

"Hey, get your ass in gear. The night's a wasting."

"Okay. Okay." Corin stood and reached for the shirt he'd draped across the back of a chair when he got home. "Where are we going?"

"Thought we'd hit Stallions first and have a few drinks. If there's nothing happening there, we'll see where the night leads us."

*Groan. The last thing I want is to spend my night watching Blaine in action. Since he's between Sugar Mamas right now that's exactly what will happen. If I'm lucky, we'll get home with the rising sun. Better attempt to establish some ground rules before we leave, though in all probability I'll end up taking a taxi home if I don't drive.*

"You know I hate hanging out where I work on my nights off." Blaine seemed to think the club where they bartended and danced was his home-away-from-home. Corin thought picking up women there was asking for trouble. Too much like dipping into the office pool in the corporate world. True, the hunting was easy and they came in all shapes, sizes and ages. "One drink and then I'm out of there."

"Read you loud and clear, man. Let's hit the road." Blaine grabbed his keys off the coffee table. "I'll drive. You haven't ridden in my new toy, yet."

Corin had heard enough about the Corvette (one of Blaine's thankful ladies presented it to him before she left for Europe to meet up with her husband) to make him curious. Maybe he should loosen up a little and flow with the night's events. After all, he wouldn't see thirty-two again.

\* \* \* \*

"Katherine Holland?"



Hearing the woman speak her name, Katherine nodded.

"I'm Anna Blake, Mr. Martin's private secretary. Please follow me."

Katherine and Monique followed the chic young woman down the thickly carpeted hallway to an end office. Turning the door knob, the every-hair-in-place blonde faced Katherine and started to say something until she saw Monique shadowing them. Raised eyebrows and a disapproving frown conveyed the message only Mrs. Holland should be admitted to the hallowed den.

"Eees okay, darlink. I know Monsieur Martin."

Katherine bit back a grin as Monique slipped into "Haughty French Bitch" mode.

Pushing past the stunned secretary, Monique made her entrance. "James, darling," she purred, floating across the room toward the man who jumped out of his chair and came around the large desk to meet her. Lots of cheek kissing sounds and laughter floated from the room.

The blonde shrugged and mumbled something that sounded like "guess she does know him," as she walked away. Katherine almost felt sorry for her...almost. *That'll teach her to tangle with someone older who gives finesse to the snooty game. Monique may not have invented it, but she had perfected the attitude and no snippy young girl could one-up her. Ahh, the world of pretty young women when faced with reality.*

Oh yeah, Monique knew James Martin...very well. The attorney wasn't rich enough for the sexy woman's husband collection and he was too old for her 'boy' collection. He was a barracuda in the courtroom when it came to disputed divorces, plus he had a son that Monique had long ago added to her totem count.

Over drinks, after one of Monique's marriages had come to an end and they celebrated the large settlement awarded her, the subject of her attorney and his son had come up. Katherine asked if the father knew she'd taken his son's virginity.

When Monique had a few martinis in her, any inhibitions she may have had evaporated into an alcohol haze. "Of course, darling. Why do you think he introduced us? That's a man who cares for his son's future love life."

"How thoughtful," was the only response Katherine had come up with at the time. She still didn't have a better comment.

"Katherine, come meet your attorney."

Monique waved her over to where she and James now stood with their arms around each other's waist. No matter how much the sultry divorcee denied any type of personal relationship with the handsome attorney, their familiarity with each other indicated something different.

"Katherine." James released his grip on Monique and moved forward to take Katherine's hand. "I understand things may get a little nasty when we have your husband served with divorce papers." Perfect pearly teeth flashed against nicely tanned skin that reflected a lot of time on golf courses. "Shall we get down to business?" The look in the man's eyes appeared to be one of delight at the thought of a looming battle.

Two hours later, Katherine thought her head would explode. How the hell would she know all the details about their finances? The first day of their marriage, Rex put a set amount of money into her checking account and gave her two credit cards in her name. "These should take care of your shopping sprees," he'd joked when he handed her a no-limit American Express and a Platinum Visa which were paid through one of his corporations by one of several assistants. To her, it felt like she'd been handed the world.

It was a good thing she didn't spend the monthly deposits in her checking account very often. Fortunately, she'd been smart enough to transfer the accumulating balance into a savings account and CDs every few months. Once the papers were served, she was sure Rex wouldn't be so generous about the deposits. She could probably kiss the credit cards goodbye, too.

James laid the papers he'd been going over on the desk before he pulled off his glasses. "So, according to this pre-nuptial agreement you're entitled to a million dollars if the marriage lasted five years and then a million for each year the marriage lasted after that."

Katherine nodded. That was a lot of zeros and she would have enough money to live on comfortably as well as to invest in the business she and Monique planned to start. Her loving husband probably had it in mind to dump her before the five years, but for whatever reason never got around to it.

"Well, I think we can do better." James steepled his fingers and placed them in front of his lips as he leaned back in his chair and stared up at the ceiling, deep in thought. "I've fought these old pre-nups before and come out on the plus side for many of my clients. Your husband's worth a hell of a lot more than the paltry twenty million you'll end up with if we concede to this crap." He pointed to the papers in front of him. "California is a community property state and so is Nevada."

"Darling, you deserve more." Monique leaned over and squeezed Katherine's hand. "Look at all the years of embarrassment he put you through with his dalliances, especially the last couple."

They both had a point, but she still had mixed emotions over ending her marriage. She'd been raised to believe that when a couple made a vow before God, it was forever. Now, she not only was breaking her vow, but was out for what she could gain financially. At what point did getting what was rightfully hers become greed? The purpose of setting up house in Las Vegas was to expedite the divorce instead of going through a long, drawn-out California court battle. But, on the other hand, she had put up with a lot of shit from Rex and the night he admitted his infidelity rushed forward. Anger replaced the need to resolve things quickly.

"Okay." Katherine stood. She needed to get out of there. It was time to calm her raw nerves and cool her anger. "Do what you need to do while we wait for the clock to tick down on the six weeks waiting period."

Outside, Katherine squinted in the hot Vegas sunshine and fished her sunglasses out of her purse. Stepping into an oven probably felt similar and her body responded with perspiration. All she wanted was to go back to the condo, down a couple of ibuprofen and jump into a cool shower. Then she'd bury herself under the covers and sleep away the next few weeks. Monique had different ideas.

"I called and arranged massages for both of us. After that, we'll take a short nap and get ready to go out on the town."

"The massage I'm game for." Maybe it would ease some of the tension in her shoulders and relieve her headache. "But I'm going to pass on going out tonight."

"Don't be ridiculous, darling. We have to celebrate your impending freedom and the fact that you're going to be a very rich woman."

How Monique held up her hand to admire the sparkle of the huge diamond that weighed it down was a mystery to Katherine.

"Trust me, there is a difference when it's all yours." A wicked glint danced in her eyes and she linked her arm through Katherine's, steering her toward their car as the chauffeur held the limo door for them. "Besides, I heard about a new club from the concierge. Some place called Stallions, and from what she said it's appropriately named."

Katherine slid across the limo seat and sighed to herself. Stallions. The name of the club terrified her as visions of prancing scantily clad men danced in her head. Exactly the type of place Monique would gravitate to. *God help me.*

## Chapter Three

*Here cubby, cubby, cubby.*

Monique's practiced eye didn't miss a thing as she made her way through the mass of humanity packed around the bar. Oh yeah, Erika the concierge at Windsor Arms hadn't given her the wrong scoop. This place reeked of hot young males. A delightful cornucopia of men in all sizes, heights and colors surrounded her. And all of them fell within her guidelines...young with lots of muscles.

Unfortunately, a lot of other women had discovered the same thing. Oh well, not her problem. She hadn't seen anyone she'd consider competition, no matter their age. Even the twenty-something females whose skin tight pants advertised their assets and who brazenly caressed the body parts of the staff, didn't intimidate Monique.

With a well-placed elbow here and a squeeze through spaces only a thin person such as herself could accomplish, Monique pushed up against the bar. She and Katherine hit it lucky when they paused beside the booth occupied by a 'get a room' couple who obviously decided to do just that and take their public display to a more private location. Slipping into one side of the booth as the horny lovers slid out the other, they'd laid claim to their territory.

Between delivering large orders and avoiding grabbing hands, the waiters looked slammed. If they wanted drinks any time before midnight, Monique decided a bar run was in order. Telling Katherine to stay put, she made her way toward her eventual goal

of a couple of martinis. The trip to the bar was also an excellent way to check out the landscape and its inhabitants.

In no rush to get the alcohol buzz started, Monique contemplated how to get Katherine out of her funk. Instead of lifting her friend's spirits, the appointment with the divorce attorney had put the long-married woman into a tailspin. The knowledge that what was never a good marriage, in Monique's opinion, would soon be over appeared to overwhelm the woman. Too bad; the end depressed her friend as much as the night she discovered the facts about the lying, cheating, scum she'd married in her younger, ignorant years. Truth was, the friend she loved dearly was still an innocent when it came to knowing the true extent of Rex's sliminess.

Oh, the stories she could tell her. A movie reel memory from fifteen years ago played through Monique's mind. The night Rex had hit on her.

"How about we skip out of here and have a little private time, baby? I've always had a hankering for this fine ass." Rex's fingers massaged the cheeks of Monique's ass where he'd rested both hands when he came up behind her while she watched the bartender mix her drink.

He might be footing the bill for the lavish party, but the only thing that stopped her from leaving her hand print on the side of the creep's face was the fact he was her best friend's husband. She didn't want to hurt Katherine with the public display slapping him would create.

Instead, she'd pulled away and turned to face him. She eyed him up and down in her haughtiest manner before she responded, "No thank you. My motto is marry them old and rich; fuck them young and hot. You don't fit either category since you're already married and you're definitely not young or hot."

The stunned expression on his face as she walked away was priceless. Her first thought had been, *I must tell Katherine*, but quickly she realized there would be no telling her friend this story. Monique chose to let her live in the delusional world that her husband was faithful. Now she wondered how good a friend she really was to allow Katherine to ignore the rumors that floated around tinsel town.

"Excuse me."

A hard male body pressed up behind her and Monique managed to twist just enough to get an eyeful. Longish blond hair fell across light blue eyes and his unbuttoned shirt did nothing to hide the pecs that danced when he lifted his arm to yell out the name of someone behind the bar. God, she loved a hard tanned body and this one made the grade big time. Unknown to him, this little cub was the answer to her prayers.

"What's up Blaine?" A bartender had actually made his way down to them.

"Give me a couple of IPAs and whatever this lady wants." He flashed a dazzling grin, revealing a gap between his ultra-white front teeth.

*Never been into gap-toothed smiles, but somehow on him it works.* While they waited for their drinks, Monique relaxed against his unyielding form to give him a hint of what she had in mind, with a few wiggles of her bottom against his most strategic point. It didn't take imagination on her part to know where he hoped things would go. His rock-hard penis pressed along the crack of her ass. Things were looking up.

A corny line from an old movie popped into her head. "Is that a gun in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?"

*Oh yeah, it's going to be a fun night. If only I can get Katherine to relax and take advantage of the smorgasbord offered here, we may end up not going home alone tonight.*

Before her new bar-buddy had a chance to respond, the lights in the room flashed off and on several times and all the noise came to a stop. A song with a fast beat started out softly and grew in volume as the all the males behind the bar kicked off their shoes and jumped up on top of the wooden counter. Leaning further into Blaine, Monique allowed her eyes to travel up the long legs positioned in front of her face and her appreciation of the bumps and grinds this cutie accomplished left her even hornier.

Between the gyrating hunk on the bar in front of her and Blaine's hard cock pressing into her, she knew for sure Surfer Boy would be going back to the condo with her tonight no matter what Katherine decided. She had an itch that needed scratching and not by her own hands.

The music ended as quickly as it started and the room returned to normal. After a quick wipe down of the area where they'd danced only moments before, hot bartenders went back to serving drinks. The crowd resumed their conversations and the noise level once again reached the intensity where ear plugs would be welcome. When two martinis appeared in front of Monique, for a moment she was too dazed to register they were the ones she'd ordered.

"Let's go somewhere and talk," Blaine suggested in her ear. She turned to face him, definitely interested, though she didn't think talk was what either of them had on their minds.

*Down girl. You've played this game too many times to let all the visual stimulation around here mess with your control.*

"I have a friend waiting for one of these drinks. She's holding down the table until I can get back with them. Why don't you join us? Unless," she looked pointedly at the two beers Blaine held, "you have someone waiting."

The blond hunk stared with a blank expression at the extra beer for a moment. "Shit." A sheepish grin turned up the corners of his full mouth. "Yeah, my roommate is waiting for his birthday beer."

Not missing a beat, Monique leaned forward and placed her mouth next to his ear, allowing her warm breath to tickle him. "Why don't you and your friend join us? I'm sure Katherine won't mind." She wanted make sure he realized there would be company for his friend.

"Cool."

*Blondie may not have the most extensive vocabulary I've come across, but I don't want him for his mind.* Monique licked her lips in anticipation at the thought of the fun she'd have later tonight.

\* \* \* \*



The pulsating music reminded Katherine of background for a mating ritual in some of the old movies she watched when she was younger. The obvious stares from some of the men at tables around her, made her wish she'd insisted she and Monique go to the bar together. *She frigging left me to the wolves and, knowing Little Miss Hot Pants, who knows when she'll drag her ass back here.*

Straining to locate a glimpse of Monique, she finally located her as she circled the room, and then gradually made her way to the bar. There was no shame in the way she jabbed elbows into ribs or slithered between couples. Katherine lost sight of her in the mob that surrounded the bar. She knew Monique did whatever it took to make her way through the crowd of hot young males. A few body to body contacts and any pats or pinches would only delight her.

Best friend she might be, but the woman reminded her of a big cat as she prowled around...a cat in search of her prey. Every bone in Katherine's body told her one of the young men in here would end up on tonight's menu.

Chiding herself over the uncharitable thought, a flush of anger at Rex replaced the focus on Monique. He was the one who put such thoughts in her head. Over the years, he'd picked away at the one true lasting friendship she had, almost in a jealous manner. Unsure of when all the negative remarks began, she dug deep into her memory back to when she first noticed his change in attitude toward her friend. The really nasty digs had begun right after a party they'd thrown to celebrate the wrap of one of Rex's movies around fifteen years ago. Hell, she couldn't remember now which one it had been. One where lots of things blew up and tons of people died was the only thing she could be sure of now.

Prior to that, Rex watched and didn't comment one way or the other about Monique and their close friendship. During the party, Katherine had seen the two deep in conversation and her husband didn't look happy. She wasn't certain, but it appeared Monique said something that angered him.

When she questioned him later about what happened, he'd replied, "Nothing."

A few days later, he suggested she needed to make new friends. "It isn't good for our reputation for you to be so close with a predatory woman like Monique." His mouth twisted into a smirk. "It might give people ideas about you that aren't true. And your reputation affects mine."

Surprised by his remarks, she did work to make other friends, but Monique was still the one woman she confided all her doubts, fears and joys to. To give up a childhood to please a man, even if he was her husband, was not on Katherine's list of things she was willing to do. Monique's friendship had been the only constant positive thing in her life over the years. They stood up for each other with family, friends and foes, always offering the necessary support at the moment it was needed most.

Still, she wasn't unaware of her friend's shortcomings. Well aware of her beauty, Monique used it to her advantage and Katherine couldn't fault her. The haughty attitude instilled in the little girl by a mother who was French and never let anyone forget it still surfaced at times. That turned a lot of people off and was probably one of the reasons Rex didn't care for her. The fear of that attitude rubbing off on Katherine was probably the reason for his discouraging their friendship. A smart man when it came to the movie business, Rex could be such an idiot regarding other things. You'd think he would have realized if she hadn't morphed into another Monique by the time he met her, it wasn't going to happen.

There were a lot of times she wished she could be more like her friend, though. The ability to toss a head of curls, stick her nose in the air and tell anyone who said mean, hateful things to "go fuck themselves" wasn't something Katherine had ever been able to do. She'd cared too much about what others thought of her, at least until recently.

All the nasty things said in the tabloids about her separation from Rex cut to the core of her being. The nasty accusations about her being frigid enough to cause her man to roam were mean. She wasn't frigid, in fact, she loved good sex, but it had been so long since she'd had any, she'd reached the 'why bother' point.

The thing that angered her most was the rumor that a lesbian relationship with Monique had caused him to leave when he discovered it. Now when it popped up in a

tabloid or on a talk show, she laughed. Let the idiots think what they might; she knew the truth and how sad it was for them if they'd never had a friendship as deep and caring as the one she and Monique shared.

Over the past two years and with the help of a therapist, she'd learned to ignore other people's spite and stupidity in her current life. She'd also concluded that her concern over what others thought had been ingrained in her childhood. A social climbing mother concerned over what others thought had the same effect on her as Monique's French attitude instilled by her Mama. Maybe the bond they formed to survive their mothers was what cemented their friendship.

A gorgeous bare-chested, young man appeared across the table. "Can I get you something to drink?"

Who knew when Monique would make it back with their drinks and given the slow service, maybe it would be a good idea to order from this guy too. "Sure. How about a couple of pomegranate martinis?"

Knowing Monique didn't care for flavored drinks, Katherine ordered them for sheer devilment. Screw it. Monique should have made it back sooner and if her friend didn't want one, she'd drink both.

"No problem." He jotted down the order on a pad balanced on his tray and turned away.

The Eye Candy turned out to be just as good from the back as the tight denim of his jeans emphasized his firm behind. She might be past her prime according to Rex, but she wasn't dead and could appreciate a hot guy.

With each tick of the clock, the mob inside the club grew and by the time Katherine caught sight of Monique again, she was on the second martini. She polished it off as she watched her friend coming her way and thought, *"Teach her to take so damned long.* Not a heavy drinker, the vodka had started to produce a warm, light-headed glow in Katherine. *Oh yeah, definitely getting a buzz here.*

"Sorry it took me so long." Monique needed to wipe the feathers off her mouth because the cat had obviously eaten the canary. "Meet Blaine." She tugged on the hand

attached to hers and a young blond man stepped forward as he juggled two bottles of beer in the hand not entwined in Monique's.

He was cute in a younger Rod Stewart sort of way, only with a better body, Blaine grinned. The gap in his teeth wasn't exactly Monique's style, but when her eyes dropped to the exposed chest, Katherine understood. Her friend had a thing for muscles and good old Blaine fit the criteria big time. She wouldn't be surprised if there was a well defined six-pack under where the buttons still held his shirt together.

"And," Monique reached her other hand behind her and encouraged the man who brought up the rear to step forward, "this is Corin. I invited them to join us since they don't have seats. It's Corin's birthday."

*Great.* Katherine almost groaned out loud. The thought of having to make small talk with a couple of Monique's toys didn't thrill her, even with an alcohol glow.

Corin wasn't as muscular as Blaine, but still not bad, and his dark hair and eyes contrasted nicely with the blond Mr. America. Both were definitely in the running for Monique's attention, Katherine decided. It might be fun to sit back and watch her play with the mice before she decided which one she wanted.

The dark-haired hottie held a martini in each hand and set them on the table, placing one in front of her and one close to Monique. Blaine slid one of the beers across to Corin, who somehow ended up beside her. Katherine studied the young man as he situated his long body in the booth and looked at her. What a baby! Monique really outdid herself with this guy. She seemed to going more toward the barely legal ones with each new conquest.

From the scowl on his face, Corin didn't seem too happy about his party. "Happy birthday."

She raised her glass and clicked it against his beer bottle. At least he was twenty-one if he made it into this place, or he had a very good fake ID since the bouncers carded heavily at the door.

Oh well, not her problem. The only question for her was whether to attempt inane conversation about some stupid action movie, which of course would turn out to be one

Rex produced, or spend the rest of the evening people watching. Of course, the way he clung to the edge of the booth, he acted like she had cooties and didn't want to talk any way.

There was enough action going on around them to keep her occupied for most of the evening. Some of the couples needed a room even more than Monique and Blaine. The dancing was getting down and dirty, and some of the women she saw rubbing and grinding against hard male bodies should be more concerned with putting in gym time before squeezing into outfits way too tight for them.

Corin cleared his throat; bringing her attention back to him. "So Katherine, what do you do?"

Well, that showed promise. At least he didn't ask who she did. She liked his deep voice and when he smiled, as he did now, his face lit up, eliminating the sullen James Dean brood. "Monique and I are getting ready to open an interior design business." That much was true. Who knew when Monique suggested they take a design class for fun that both would love it and continue the program? He didn't need to know that most of their experience had been in redesigning several of the rooms in her home and one of Monique's houses. Besides, he probably didn't know much about a subject that put most men to sleep unless they were gay or metro sexual.

"Good for you. I have to admit décor and design elements aren't my strong suits. Maybe I can get you to take a look at the house I'm considering buying and give me some tips."

"That's a possibility. I'm going to be around for a few weeks." Amazing, he's going to buy a house. Most twenty-one year olds wouldn't consider taking on the responsibility of a mortgage and up keep on a house.

"Yeah, I have several, but the one I'm looking at now is going to be my home for a while."

Several? Who the hell was this guy? Twisting around to face him more directly, Katherine reconsidered her prior judgment of tonight's situation. Maybe spending a little while talking with an attractive young man wouldn't be so painful.

At least they'd discovered something to talk about and there was the possibility he was in real estate and she just made her first business connection. Tonight wouldn't be a total loss.

## Chapter Four

Various death scenarios for Blaine played out in Corin's head as they pushed their way through the mob. He'd smelled trouble the minute his friend showed up with their beers and a hot older woman at his side.

Monique was probably in her late thirties, but without an ounce of fat that he could detect on her lean body, and there was a lot of skin showing that allowed one to detect any number of things. A little too flat-chested for his taste, but to each his own was his life's motto.

After the introductions, Blaine informed him they were joining Monique and her friend. Great. An evening avoiding the wandering hands of a randy older woman whose main conversation was what she wanted to do to him later wasn't his idea of the perfect way to spend his birthday.

A quiet evening of reading would have suited him more. He didn't get the chance to indulge in his favorite pastimes much these days. Between his work at the bar and remodeling the houses he bought, his time was limited. These days, diving into a good book or spending hours puttering in the kitchen creating new recipes were a luxury. Yeah, he liked to cook.

When he set the drinks that had been palmed off on him to juggle through the mobbed room onto the table, he didn't miss the fact that Katherine wasn't too thrilled to have company. Maybe tonight wouldn't be as bad as he originally thought. He'd finish

his beer and make up some excuse to escape. Hell, he could even tell the truth, he was tired.

The casual air of sophistication couldn't be missed. From the way the chin-length bob haircut enhanced the rich honey blonde hair streaked with lighter shades, to the simple dress that pulled across her full bust line, the woman screamed class. She was more his type, at least in appearance. Her real woman's body was much more interesting than Monique's stick frame. He liked his women with a little meat on their bones and a nice chest didn't hurt either.

When he asked what she did, her response surprised him. He fully expected the glib, "shopping and charity work" answer that women in their obvious social group threw out. Instead, she actually talked about goals and her response to possibly helping him with suggestions on a brought a smile—a smile that wasn't just on her full lips, but carried into her beautiful light blue eyes. There was potential for a pleasant evening here and if they ignored the consumption of each other by Blaine and Monique taking place on the other side of their booth, things could go quite well.

"Are you a real estate broker?"

Her question caught him off guard. The grind of selling didn't appeal to Corin, but it was refreshing to have someone ask a question that tied into his abilities versus his looks, which is how females had opened conversations with him since he was in his early teens. "My sideline is buying and fixing up properties to turn over. My other job is here." He pointed toward the bar, "I'm one of the guys who mixes the drinks and shakes his hinny up on the counter four nights a week."

"Really? I can see the property angle with you, but the work here...I don't know...it just doesn't seem too...well..."

The blush of color that spread up her neck to her cheeks and the look of surprise at his confession were priceless. "It's okay. Not to worry. For now, it works for me. The money's good and for the most part, the job's fun."

The not so fun part, being manhandled by grabby female customers, he'd accepted it as part of the job after the first few times it happened. Hell, having some chick lean



across the bar and tweak one of his nipples was no worse than what females at other clubs put up with from guys who played grab-ass when they walked by in their short little outfits. In this business, if the skin was exposed the customer took it to be an open invitation to touch.

There had been times when he considered wearing a “look but don’t touch” sign across his chest, but management might take a dim view of that. Anyway, his finances were to the point that he would call it quits when the job here lost its allure. The thought of retiring from the party arena came more frequently these days. He could see moving on in the not too distant future.

“Let’s get out of here,” Blaine yelled across the table as he stood to allow Monique to slide out of the booth.

Following their lead, Corin and Katherine found the pair waiting outside locked against each other. “We’re going to our place to talk,” Monique managed to pull her mouth from Blaine’s long enough to make the comment.

Corin didn’t see much talk beyond muttered, umms and oh god, in the near future of the sexed-up duo. They were so hot for each other you could smell their glands pumping.

“Looks like we better go so these two can talk,” Corin winked at Katherine and delighted at the blush that tinted her cheeks. She knew the score as well as he did, but her friend’s behavior had embarrassed her a little.

The ride to Monique’s place in the limo that was waiting when they stepped outside the club was one of continued drinking. The law in Vegas might stipulate no open bottles in vehicles, but Monique didn’t seem to know about it. Corin and Katherine sat across from the other couple and he resisted the urge to tell her he didn’t bite when she jerked back any time they brushed against each other.

The little condo Monique had mentioned when he and Blaine first met her was designed to impress. Little wasn’t the word he’d use to describe the sprawling grandeur. Neither of the two bedrooms they peeked into on the quick tour Monique gave them when they arrived were small, nor were any of the living spaces.

Monique picked up the phone and punched a few numbers. Corin watched her place a food order and when she caught him staring at her, she grinned. "It pays to have room service."

Who needed room service with this kitchen? The room that impressed Corin most was the state of the art high tech kitchen. Could he ever whip up some meals in this chef's paradise! Cooking was one of his stress relievers and when something bothered him, chopping, dicing and mixing up combinations of ingredients took his mind off his problems. The aromas and tastes created peace inside him. Plus, he loved to eat good food. Ideas he wanted for the kitchen of the house he was currently negotiating on danced through his head as he admired the quality materials and appliances.

Blaine popped the cork on the bottle of champagne Monique handed him and they all drank a toast to Vegas. The lovers contributed a few words to what was supposed to be conversation before they became molded together again. The tonsil exam they performed on each other was on the verge of becoming a porn movie scene when Monique stood and without a word led her partner down the hallway toward one of the bedrooms.

The red glow on Katherine's cheeks was a strong indication about her thoughts on their friends' display. Corin surprised himself with the sympathy he had for her discomfort. He decided a long time ago that people put themselves in situations and if they didn't find the circumstances comfortable, it was up to them to do something to make changes. That still might be true with this one to some extent. But this was where she lived. Her friend's reckless disregard for Katherine's discomfort, in addition to his being here, placed her in this awkward position.

Should he go? Should he stay? *Hell, get off the fence man, make a decision.* The truth hit him hard. He didn't want to leave because he found this woman interesting and a nice change from the women he attracted. Boring, horny females with one track minds didn't do it for him any longer.

It had been a long time since he wanted to spend extended time with a female and he didn't want tonight to end so quickly. "Would you like to go out for coffee and desert?"

Maybe if they got away from the happenings behind the closed door, they both could relax.

Katherine shook her head. "I think I'm up for another glass of champagne." She rose from the sofa and walked over where the bucket sat on the bar and poured a full glass of the bubbly. "Want some?" She waved the bottle in Corin's direction.

"Why not?" He joined her at the bar and watched as she took long steady gulps until her glass emptied. "Champagne is for sipping."

"On most occasions. As with anything, there are exceptions to the rule."

She picked up a chocolate covered strawberry from the platter of goodies Monique had ordered when they arrived, and nibbled on the tip. Watching her mouth caress the fruit, Corin's cock hardened at the way her lips surrounded the large strawberry. *Damn, I wish these jeans weren't so tight.*

Katherine's tongue licked at the juices dripping from the berry and Corin imagined her head between his legs doing the same thing to his erection. *Damn.* It was definitely time to get out of here before he put the moves on this sexy woman. Just because she appeared to like him, didn't mean she was ready to fuck him.

"I better get going." He resisted an "aw shucks" Gary Cooper shuffle as he glanced toward the bedroom door behind which their friends were sequestered. One look at Katherine's face told him she was hearing the same sounds as he was. "Looks like Blaine is going to be a while."

A flash of fear briefly appeared in Katherine's eyes and then her chest expanded as she took a deep breath. "Don't go. I'd like you to stay...if you want to, that is."

"Yes." The raspy manner in which the simple word came out spoke volumes in his mind. The realization of how much he wanted to stay caught him off guard. He liked her, but until her tentative invitation, he hadn't realized how much.

He placed his glass on the top of the bar and stepped forward. Standing inches from Katherine, he reached out and wiped a dab of chocolate from the corner of her mouth and placed it against his lips for a second before he licked the rich sweetness from his fingertip. The fear he'd noticed earlier again darted briefly across her face, replaced with what could be longing.

His gaze focused on her full mouth. Did her lips feel as soft as they looked? There was only one way to find out. Corin reached out and slipped a hand behind her neck and pulled her head toward him. Soft, rose petal lips caressed his and the tip of her tongue darted across his. He deepened the kiss and delighted in the taste of strawberries, chocolate and champagne in her mouth as he explored every inch with a zest he hadn't experienced in a long time.

The silky skin of her shoulders encouraged his hands to slide further down to the point where her dress stopped them. Working quickly, he manipulated the zipper and released it with ease. The strapless fabric dropped to the floor and pooled at her feet. His left hand moved between their bodies and he cupped one of her soft breasts, pinching the nipple to more of a hard bud than what he'd discovered.

Stepping back to allow room to lower his head, Corin took the other nipple in his mouth and rolled it around with his tongue. The soft moan from Katherine encouraged him to continue. Even though she was braced against the bar, he felt the quiver in her legs when his hands grasped her thighs and his mouth traveled down her stomach to the narrow patch of hair protecting his goal. Her groan became louder when he blew warm breath against the curls.

As much as he enjoyed this game, he wanted to appreciate her full beauty. Corin stood and scooped the trembling woman in his arms and carried her into the bedroom that she declared was hers on the earlier apartment tour. With one hand he tossed back the satin cover and laid her on top of the creamy silk sheets. Standing beside the bed, he gave himself the opportunity to enjoy her beauty as he removed his clothes.

He appreciated that her full breasts weren't the creation of a plastic surgeon. They hugged her body naturally, instead of retaining mountain peak heights, as she lay on

her back and watched him. The slender waist gave way to deliciously full hips and the strip of dark blonde curls gave a perfect landing to where his pulsing cock wanted to plant itself.

Stretching out beside her, he looked into her deep sapphire eyes, searching for the fear he'd detected glimpses of earlier. Now only passion stared back at him and he leaned down and took her soft lips with his. Unsure if the sigh of bliss he heard was his or Katherine's, he only knew it spurred him to want her more.

All the home improvement projects on his real estate investments took a toll on his hands and he hoped they weren't too rough against her silky skin. The need to taste every inch of her consumed him and his mouth traced where his hands caressed, paying special attention to her lush breasts and the hard buds of her nipples.

"Oh." Her gasp as he sucked on one point and tweaked the other nipple tip with his finger caused a rush of joy he never experienced in sex before. Maybe because he didn't consider this sex, but making love. This woman deserved more than a one-night-stand and he wanted to make sure there was more than sex between them.

Taking her in his arms, Corin rolled her on top of him and indulged in the sensation of her flesh pressing down the length of his. His demanding cock slipped between her thighs and appreciated the wetness it found there. For a few minutes they rubbed skin to skin, her hard nipples pressing against his chest as his throbbing manhood delighted at being clutched between strong hot thighs.

Knowing the end was near if this game continued much longer, Corin rolled them onto their sides and once again started his exploration down Katherine's body. Her moans turned him on more as he worked his way to her core. He pushed her to her back, spread her creamy thighs apart and buried his face between them; first licking, then nibbling on her hardened clit. Her womanly scent enveloped him and he drank deeply from the juices that flowed over his tongue.

"Please, please." Katherine's plea ended as her body bucked upward off the bed and her shout of, "Oh my god!" filled the room.

Corin buried his head deeper, sucking her hard nub in an attempt to give her additional pleasure.

"No more. I can't take any more." She pushed at his head, trying to force him to stop.

Forcing his eager mouth to stop, he pulled back and grinned up at her. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," the word was barely a whisper and her body still quivered with the spasms of her orgasm. "Get in. I want to feel you inside me."

The throbbing between Corin's legs didn't need to be encouraged any more and he positioned his hard member against her wet opening. He started to slip in gently, not wanting to create discomfort for her, but she took matters into her own hands. She raised her hips up to meet him, at the same time placing a hand on either side of his upper thighs and pulled him down into her. Each lift of her hips to meet his thrusts drove him closer to the brink and he fucked her more intensely as her nails dug into his buttocks and she screamed her release.

The hot tightness was more than Corin could handle and he spewed into her with the velocity of a geyser eruption. The intensity surprised him and his drained body collapsed down beside Katherine, who was lost in her own afterglow. He gathered her into his arms and planted a kiss on top of her head. Drifting off to sleep, thoughts of all the things they could do together, in and out of the bedroom, drifted through his head. *More...I want more of this woman.* His exhausted cock twitched in agreement.

## Chapter Five

Numbness seeped from his arm to Corin's brain, creating sleepy confusion. The haze lifted and he realized the reason for the sensation in his arm. The silk of Katherine's hair spread over his bicep with her head cradled in the crook of his numb appendage.

Working slowly to remove her head, he moved down the pillow she'd ignored last night and slipped it under her cheek. His body responded as he studied the slumbering woman beside him, but the need to work out the pins and needles in his arm couldn't be ignored. After he answered nature's call, he would wake her up with some of the same action that put her into such a blissful sleep.

Swinging his legs over the side of the bed, Corin bent his arm up and down to relieve the tingles and allow the blood to return. He caught a glimpse of the clock on the nightstand beside the bed. Holy crap, it was after ten and he had to be at the realtor's office by eleven. No time for the morning wake-me-up he'd planned to greet her with on his return to bed.

Locating the clothes he'd tossed aside in last night's haste, Corin dressed and tiptoed out of the bedroom and made his way to the foyer. Finding a pen and a sheet of paper on the table by the door, he wrote a quick message. *Have a business appointment, but will call you later.* There. That should let her know that he didn't consider last night a one-night-stand.

A glance at his watch encouraged him to get a move on if he wanted to get a quick shower and clean clothes before his meeting. He quickly closed the door, careful not to slam it. The slight breeze sent the note fluttering to the floor and under the table.

\* \* \* \*

The murmur of voices from the living room pulled Katherine from her cocoon of sleep. More rested than she'd felt in months, she stretched and rolled over to caress the pillow that still bore the indentation of Corin's head.

"Shameless hussy. Not only did you get it on with a guy that's barely legal, you enjoyed it more than any sex you've ever had." This new feeling of euphoria gave her a better understanding of why Monique loved her horny young prey so much. Her friend knew of what she'd preached for years. Young hunks definitely knew the magic, or at least had the stamina, needed to please a woman.

Padding barefoot to the bathroom, she hopped in the shower. Her soapy hands roamed over her body, bringing back the memories of Corin's talented touch last night. She dipped a finger into the curls between her legs and massaged her throbbing clit. It wasn't as good as the sensation from Corin's hands, but since thinking about him turned her on, self-satisfaction worked for the moment. If she'd been smart, she would have gone out into the living room and dragged him into the shower with her.

He must have grown tired of waiting for her to wake up and joined Monique and Blaine for coffee. Next time. How sweet that he was considerate enough to let her sleep. This was a new game to her and she had to learn the rules, or at least learn to make some rules she wanted included.

When she opened her bedroom door, Katherine prayed the surprise she felt didn't register on her face. Only Monique and Blaine greeted her, Monique with a smile and Blaine with a wave of the toast in his hand that he'd spread liberally with jam.



"So where's my roomy?" Blaine washed down his bite of toast with coffee and grinned at Katherine, a blob of strawberry jam stuck in the gap between his front teeth. "You wear him out to the point he can't get out of bed?"

Embarrassment surged through Katherine and she walked over to help herself to a cup of coffee before responding. "Nope. He was gone when I woke up."

No need to share with them that she thought she'd find him out here.

A frown creased his forehead. "He didn't wake you up when he left? Man, that's out of character for Mr. Charming."

Didn't Blaine know when to shut up? If Corin had at least awakened her with a kiss goodbye or a "see you later", she wouldn't feel like such an idiot right now. Instead, he stole away in the middle of the night without so much as a "thanks for the fuck."

And that was exactly what it had been.

A long time without sexual satisfaction had left her vulnerable to the display that Monique and Blaine put on before they managed to take it behind closed doors. She had only herself to blame for an out of control libido that had her coming on to a guy young enough to be off-limits.

Unable to continue with the up-beat attitude after a one-night-stand, Katherine needed to escape. "Hey, sorry to slurp and run," she set her coffee cup in the sink, "but I just remembered I have a massage appointment." That wasn't exactly a lie. If she could get a walk-in opening, she'd jump on it. Having someone work the knots out of her neck might help relieve the one in her stomach.

After grabbing her purse, Katherine made a quick exit. No, she didn't miss the strange look Monique shot her on the way out and knew there'd be a lot of questions later. Maybe by then she'd be up to dealing with the rejection? Right now, escape and time to think was what she needed.

*Would it be too embarrassing to sob through a massage? Just hold it together a little longer.*

\* \* \* \*

Corin glanced up from his book as a shirtless Blaine wandered past on the way to the refrigerator. "Good grief, man. What happened to your back?"

"Guess I tangled with a wild cat last night." Blaine's grin of satisfaction left no doubt how pleased he was with last night's hook-up with Monique. "Bet yours doesn't look much better."

"Sorry to disappoint." Corin knew there were few, if any marks on his back. He would have felt the sting in the shower if he bore similar tracks down his skin like the ones his roommate so proudly sported.

Making love with Katherine had been sensational. The womanly curves would make a teenage girl envious with their firmness and they definitely fell into the male appreciation category. When he touched and caressed her, she responded with passion, but she didn't turn into a wildcat in bed. There hadn't been any blood letting in their horizontal tango, instead a needed hunger for each other as their desire built.

"What happened to you?" Blaine paused in his perusal of the refrigerator contents and glanced back over his shoulder. "Expected to see you stumbling out of Katherine's room looking well sated from a roll in the sheets. Instead she came out and looked a little disappointed you were missing in action." Not waiting for Corin's response, Blaine pulled out the milk, opting to forego a glass, took a long drink from the carton.

Habits like that one topped the list of reasons Corin decided it was time to live alone. Given the current slump in the real estate market, he'd decided to let Blaine stay in the condo and pay the same rent he contributed as his share now.

*Thank goodness, I was smart enough to turn over most of my properties before this real estate slump kicked in.*

He'd almost laughed out loud during this morning's meeting at the look on the realtor's face when the man asked how much Corin wanted to put down on the house as they prepared to make an offer. His response of "All," put the poor man in shock. Fortunately, he'd also put most of the money in CDs and savings accounts, instead of the stock market and had easy access to plenty of cash.

"I had a business appointment and didn't want to wake her. I tried calling after I got back, but the hotel operator wouldn't put me through. He said the tower residents have their own private number and if they want someone to have it, they'll give it to them. His tone made it obvious I wasn't one of the chosen ones."

"Yeah, I can see where working in that environment could turn some people into snots." Blaine put the carton of milk back in the refrigerator and used his arm to wipe off the white mustache.

"Did Monique give you the number?" Corin hoped his face didn't reflect his desperation, but for once, he wished Blaine came away from a night with more than a scratched up back.

"Nope. Didn't think to ask. No problem though. They're coming over to Stallions tonight around the time we get off."

"Great." It was great, but Corin wanted to talk to Katherine before then, maybe even have a nice lunch and talk.

Funny Blaine didn't mention her seeing his note. Something didn't feel right here. If she didn't see the note for some reason, then she probably thought he was in it just for a night of sex. The sex was great, but he liked this woman and wanted to get to know her better. He had the perfect excuse with the house. He'd already mentioned getting her input on decorating. If he hired her, they would need to spend a lot of time together going over plans and he would have the opportunity to grow their friendship at the very least, though he liked the idea of them becoming more than friends.

If she agreed to meet him tonight, then she probably wasn't too upset about his leaving without waking her, even if she didn't see the note. Corin looked down at the book in his hands. Suddenly, the story that held his interest a few moments ago wasn't nearly as intriguing as the thought of seeing Katherine tonight. But if Blaine thought he'd bailed without a word, then what happened to his note? If Katherine hadn't seen the note and wasn't upset about his departure, maybe she wasn't as into him as he wanted her to be.

\* \* \* \*

"Sorry, no can do." How dare Monique assume she could set up a date for her without asking first? Being well past twenty-one, she didn't need someone to make decisions for her. The soon to be ex-husband had done that way too many years. Let Monique think she was a stick-in-the-mud.

Besides, no way in hell did she want to face Corin and appear to be a desperate older woman unable to stay away from his luscious young body. Last night was a mistake she wasn't about to repeat. She didn't need sex that badly. A flush of heat ran through Katherine at the thought of last night's climax. Maybe she did, but there were toys made for that.

"Of course, you can. What else do you have to do?"

"Wash my hair."

"Oh Kitty, give me a break. You washed your hair in the shower this morning. It's time you fess up and tell me what the hell is going with you today."

*I'd wash it a dozen times to avoid your little get together tonight.*

"I thought you'd jump at the chance to meet the guys tonight for a late dinner and whatever else might come up." A sly grin left no doubt about Monique's plans for the last part of the night.

Monique had used her nickname from their childhood days, making Katherine smile. "Nothing is going on, Mo." It was easy to slip back into the pet names and if she didn't watch herself, she'd spill her guts to her friend just like when they were kids.

"Bullshit." The look Monique pinned her with spoke as loudly as the word.

Defeated, Katherine slumped further down into the sofa, fighting the urge to cry. She was a big girl now, not a rejected teenager. "Look, last night was a one night deal. I'm sure Corin feels the same way since he slipped out sometime during the night without even a 'thanks for the fuck.'" It still smarted that she'd let her libido do the thinking.

“So that’s it. Your feelings are hurt that the horny hunk didn’t wake you up to whisper words of endearment in your ear before he slipped out.” Monique shook her head and grimaced. “I obviously have so much to teach you. Girl, you have to learn to think like a man. Take your sex where you can get it and move on. You’ll find out tonight if he’s not into you and if that’s the case, so what? You find fresh meat and move on.”

Disgusted at the crude way Monique looked at relationships, Katherine jumped off the couch and stomped from the room without commenting. For Monique, thinking like a man might be the answer, but not for her. She needed to feel some sort of connection with a guy before they hopped into bed. Last night, she’d picked up the vibe that Corin thought the same way, but look what listening to her intuition got her. Satisfied sexually, but disappointed on a deeper level which hurt.

Alone in her room, Katherine paced back and forth between the window that displayed a breathtaking view of the Las Vegas strip, to the walk-in closet that contained the limited wardrobe she brought with her. With each trip across the room, she made a mental list of the pros and cons of going with Monique tonight.

Pro—the sex was great. Con—he’s too young. Pro number two—he seems really smart, not just a pretty boy.

Con number two—if she went, there was the potential for more humiliation and hurt if Corin blew her off.

On the other hand, if he didn’t, where did that put her? She really liked the guy, but even though she hadn’t asked last night, from the boyish looks it was obvious the birthday he’d been celebrating was probably an early twenties one. He had to be over twenty-one since he worked as a bartender, but not much over the legal age. She was fifty and certainly no Joan Collins who based her choices on what man would be up to pushing her wheelchair in a few years.

Ouch, that was a mean thought. She knew and liked Joan who made seventy sexy.

Granted, there wasn’t a thirty plus year spread between she and Corin, like there was between Joan and her latest husband. Still if Corin was in his early twenties as she

suspected, there were too many years between them for Katherine's comfort level, even for a fling.

Striding over to the door, she flung it open and marched over to Monique's bedroom. Not bothering to knock, she stuck her head in. "Okay, I'll go. What time?" The smirk of satisfaction on Monique's face almost made her retract what she said.

"The limo driver will pick us up in thirty minutes. Better hustle your tushy." Monique grinned at her, "I'm glad you changed your mind. We'll have fun.

The blast of music greeted them as they walked in the door and made their way through the mob toward the bar. Catching Blaine's eye, Monique received a thumbs up and pointed toward the end of the bar where servers picked up orders.

Dread flooded through Katherine as she watched Blaine and Corin make the shift exchange with the bartenders coming on duty and head toward them. The smile on Corin's face almost made her think he was happy to see her...almost. When he'd left without a word in the middle of the night, he told the real truth about how he felt.

"Katherine."

The delight in his voice when he said her name put her pulse in speed mode. Damn, she was attracted to this guy even though every instinct screamed at her to run like hell. She had enough trouble on her plate with the potential of a pissed-off older man when he gets the notice that she filed for divorce and wants half their assets. Why add someone young enough to be her son to her plate to complicate things more?

"You look wonderful tonight." Corin leaned over and brushed her lips with his.

Her heart did a flip-flop and heat spread throughout her body. The hormone thing was kicking in again and she was woman enough to overcome a physical reaction, no matter how intense — wasn't she?

*Why does my life have to be so complicated and my body so treacherous?*

## Chapter Six

Why, why, why did she let herself become such a fool? Granted the past three weeks had been the best time of her life in what seemed like forever...maybe even ever. Corin was delightful and the more she got to know him, the better she liked him. Add the mind-blowing sex they shared, it was enough to have her thinking of the possibility of something long term. Still, agreeing to take him on as a client wasn't smart for a lot of the same reasons. They spent too much time together and the more they shared, the more his good qualities outside the bedroom stood out.

Maybe signing the papers for her divorce had her mind wandering down this tricky road. She still couldn't believe six weeks had passed so quickly. Guess that went to show how much fun she'd been having.

The fun would come to an end when Rex was served with the dissolution papers this week. A perverse part of her wished she could be there to see his response, while another part held its breath knowing all hell was going to break loose.

"What do you think of this?" Corin shoved a swatch of fabric across the card table toward her. "Do you think it will go with the wall color in the den?"

Fingering the texture of the lush fabric, Katherine smiled. When he said the finer points of decorating weren't his strong suit, Corin had been right. In the weeks they'd worked together to pull together a color palette and décor for his new house, he'd stumbled and turned to her for help numerous times. "I love the texture and yes, the color will work." She actually loved the rich burgundy he'd selected at their last

meeting better. "You have to remember the walls are in a neutral shade that will go with most colors." The way he changed his selection on the dominate color palette every ten minutes was getting them nowhere fast. "Do want this to be our central color?" She managed not to wrinkle her nose at the lime green.

Corin ran his fingers through his dark hair, causing it to spike in spots, and let out a long breath. "I have no idea. Yesterday it was the red and now today this green is talking to me."

"Burgundy."

"What? Oh yeah, burgundy." He grinned and hung his head. "I'd probably be better off being color blind. That way, I wouldn't keep changing my mind because most colors would look the same, right?"

Leaning back in her chair, Katherine looked up at the dinning room ceiling where the atrocious chandelier taunted her. Who the hell came up with a beer can light fixture that gave off about as much light as a firefly? That definitely had to go, but she didn't want to make a decision on its replacement until they'd stabilized the rest of the design plan. "Well, you know with the red and green theme, we could turn this into the House of Christmas...you know have a sign made to hang on the gate..." She didn't get a chance to finish before a ball of paper whizzed by her ear.

"Okay, smartass." Corin scowled across the table at her. "How about I just turn the whole design plan over to you and you run with it. The only thing I ask is, don't make it too foo-foo. Remember, I am a guy who has an image to maintain."

Oh yeah. Like she'd forget he was a guy. Her body still hummed from last night's confirmation of his manliness. "So you're telling me, I can decorate the house any way I want as long as I make sure it's in bachelor-pad modern."

"I'll show you bachelor-pad modern." Corin rose from his seat, knocking over the folding chair when his long legs bumped against it. "As I recall, this is one of the rooms we haven't christened." He moved around the edge of the table and reached for her.

"Right you are." Katherine put out her hand and pushed against his chest. "Nor will we with all the construction workers wandering around here."



Ignoring her attempt to keep distance between them, Corin pulled her toward him. The accelerated heart rate under her palm made her aware of the thud in her own chest as well as the heat that spiked through her body.

"Corin." They both turned to find the crew foreman standing in the door. "Sorry to interrupt your design session, but I need your input before we proceed in the kitchen." From the smirk on the man's face, Katherine knew he was all too aware of what he interrupted.

"Sure." Corin nodded to the foreman. "Saved this time," he whispered to Katherine as he turned to follow the foreman.

"Fool," she muttered under her breath.

Didn't the idiot see they'd been caught in what would have been a really embarrassing situation if their visitor had arrived a few minutes later? There was no way they'd christen this room or any other room when the house was full of people. She looked down at the dirty carpet. Besides, if there was to be any floor christening done, it would be after the installation of the new carpet.

Turning back to look at the swatches of fabric spread out on the table, the musical chime of cell phone distracted her. "Yes."

Monique came through loud and clear. "Hey, just wanted to let you know I probably won't make it home tonight."

"Really?" Katherine felt her eyebrows shoot into her hairline. "And what little toy will you be playing with?"

"I wish." A wistful sound came from Monique's end. "I'm tied up with a business situation."

"I don't get it. You don't have business dealings here in Vegas."

"No, but I do in California. I'm in Los Angeles, darling. Had to do a quick fly out this morning."

Katherine heard someone in the background call Monique's name. "Got to run, Kitty. I just wanted to let you know so you wouldn't worry when my smiling face doesn't put in an appearance tonight. Give my best to Corin and Blaine."

The line went dead. Whatever business created the need for her to leave on such quick notice must be important. Katherine closed her phone and wondered briefly what her friend was up to now. With Monique, one never knew.

Oh well, Monique was a big girl and Katherine had enough trouble of her own without adding worries about her friend to the plate. Things with Corin were getting a little too serious and she needed to put some distance between them. The sooner she finished up this decorating project, and the sooner Rex got notice of the divorce action and things were settled, the sooner she could get out of town.

\* \* \* \*

Monique smiled in satisfaction as she snapped her cell phone closed and looked over at Sam, the process server, that James Martin insisted accompany her on a mission she looked forward to with menacing delight. "Found him. He's having lunch at a restaurant a few blocks from here."

"Are you sure you don't want me to take care of this without your being involved?" The balding, overweight man wiped the sweat from his forehead.

*If you lost fifty pounds you might not sweat so much.* It was hot, she'd give him that, but carrying around all that extra weight probably contributed to the endless flow of perspiration that dampened what was once a white handkerchief.

The man didn't exude Hollywood by any stretch of the imagination, but James said that was one of the reasons he often used him. Sam's unassuming appearance let him disappear into the background as most thin people didn't want to acknowledge there were such things as weight problems in Tinsel Town. "Nope. You just be there to back me up in case he gets ugly when I hand him the surprise package." Monique patted the bag slung over her shoulder that held the divorce papers she intended to hand to Rex Holland. Just a little payback for some of the pain the bastard had inflicted upon her friend.

Three blocks in the heat put a glow on her, but the effect was nothing compared to what it did to her overweight companion. Sam's jacket hung limply and she caught a glance of the shirt plastered to his body under it. "Here we are." She stopped in front of La Delight, the new hot spot for those who wanted to see and be seen. Smoothing down her skirt, Monique stepped through the doors into the welcome coolness of air conditioning.

"Miss Monique, how delightful to see you." Henri, the Maitre d', stepped forward to greet her. "I thought you were out of town and unfortunately just gave your table to someone else only minutes ago." He looked over her shoulder and raised a questioning eye at her as Sam hovered close in a manner indicating they were together when he took her arm in his large paw.

"Not a problem, Henri. We're actually here to meet up with someone...Rex Holland."

"Ah yes, Mr. Holland." Henri's brow wrinkled in concern. "I'm afraid he's seated at a table at where we may not be able to accommodate everyone." His glance in Sam's direction indicated who everyone was.

"Not a problem, Henri." Monique smiled and placed her hand on the Maitre d's arm. "I can just drop off the papers he needs. He wasn't expecting me to bring a friend." *Just like he isn't expecting me.* "We'll arrange another lunch date."

"Let me show you to his table." Henri winked and a wave of his hand indicated she should follow him. When they reached Rex's tucked away table, Henri continued his check of the dining room before making a return to the front desk.

The look on Rex's face when she stopped at his table was priceless; not as good as the one she anticipated in a few short minutes, but still it gave her a lift. Of course, his lunch companion had a larger bustline than her IQ from the vacant look in her round blue eyes when she started up at Monique.

"Monique. What a pleasant surprise." Rex started to rise.

*Always the gentleman bastard, aren't you Rex? I can't tell you the joy seeing your last two pictures as box office flops has given me.* "No, stay seated. I just wanted to stop by and

give you a little something.” She reached in her bag and pulled out the envelope that contained the papers that would give Katherine her freedom. “Actually, this is a little something from Katherine.”

A frown replaced the fake smile on Rex’s face and suspicion flared in his dark eyes as he took the envelope. “Can’t Katherine deliver her own requests for more money now? Always the loyal, little pit bull friend, aren’t you Monique?” An ugly snarl twisted his lips into a deformed droop.

“Loyal. Yes, that is what I am Rex, unlike you. You wouldn’t know loyalty or friendship if either one bit you in the ass.” Glee surged through her as he tore open the manila envelope and stared down at the contents.

“We should leave, Monique.” Sam pulled on her arm, encouraging her to make a hasty exit. “You’ve completed your mission.”

“Not quite yet, Sam.” She jerked her arm from his hold and continued to watch Rex. A puzzled expression ran across his face as he started to read the documents.

“What the hell is this?”

“What does it look like? My guess is it’s Katherine’s freedom.”

“She’ll be hearing from my lawyers about this bullshit.”

The flushed face and hate-filled bitterness in his eyes delighted Monique. With any luck, he’d have a heart attack and drop dead before her eyes. “No darling, your attorneys will be contacting her attorney. I’m sure with what you pay them, they are smart enough to figure out they can’t talk to someone with legal representation.”

All attempts to keep his voice low evaporated. “You fucking cunt! You put her up to this. You want her all to yourself. I always knew you two had a thing for each other.”

The dining room went silent as all eyes turned to focus on her and Rex. Determined not to get into a shouting match and earn him even more publicity than his actions were generating, Monique smiled. “No darling, it isn’t my doing and as for our relationship, it has never been along the lines of the vile rumors you spread. She’s discovered she has a brain and can think for herself and somehow, staying married to a

man who uses her as an excuse to not to commit to any of his playthings, became old. She's ready to have a life and not just exist for your pleasure."

The red color in Rex's face became more vivid and he screamed, "I'll see that she doesn't get a penny, do you hear me?"

Monique felt Sam position his large bulk closer, maneuvering to get between her and Rex, but she wouldn't let him. She'd waited too long for this moment.

"A deaf person could hear you, darling." Monique leaned over and patted Rex's cheek. "Instead of worrying about how to screw your wife out of what she earned in putting up with your sorry ass all these years, maybe you should focus on how to make movies that aren't bombs at the box office."

"You fucking cunt! You'll regret this, just wait and see."

The words echoed after her as she made her way out of the dining room with Sam close on her heels. Stopping briefly at the Maître d's desk, she placed a quick kiss on top of Henri's head as an apology for exposing him to the ugliness that took place in his restaurant.

God, she loved the excitement of a good confrontation. Now for the perfect end to a perfect day, she needed to get laid.

## Chapter Seven

Stunned, Katherine closed her cell phone. Now she knew why Monique made the rushed trip to Los Angeles. The venom in Rex's voice as he screamed obscenities across several hundred miles about how the "fucking cunt will pay for humiliating me in public" still rang in her ears.

"Mo, what have you done?" Katherine appreciated her friend's loyalty, but the strong-willed woman didn't realize how vindictive Rex Holland could be. She'd watched him scheme and plot to destroy the careers and lives of people who crossed him on numerous occasions and to her shame, did nothing to try and stop him. For Rex to have all the energy he used to crush his enemies directed toward Monique made her shudder.

Staring down at the Friday night traffic that crept along the strip, she compared her life to the endless line of headlights. Like them, she was going nowhere fast. She was involved in a fling with a man young enough to be the child she never had and was facing a court battle that would probably drag on until she could only shuffle between her bed and the bathroom with the aid of a walker. If that wasn't enough, throw in the fact that her not yet ex-husband was out to destroy her best friend.

Rex's vendetta could take about any form, from harassing Monique through a legal filing for defamation of character to vicious whisper campaigns. No, the rumor mill wouldn't bother Monique. She thrived on attention as much as Rex. Both of them lived with the philosophy "there is no such thing as bad publicity."

Another thought popped into her head and caused her stomach to roll over. Given Rex's fury, he might consider the possibility of an action that he'd threatened at times on others, but to her knowledge, never carried out. She still had doubts about the accidental drowning of Frank Roth after he withdrew financing from one of Rex's pictures. The man had been a former Olympic swimmer. What if Rex hired a hit man to eliminate Monique? The wrath of Rex Holland wasn't something to shrug off.

"Don't be silly, Katherine. Rex is smarter than that and you need to stop talking to yourself." The dancing shadows created by the bedside lamp as the ceiling fan twirled did nothing to convince her Rex wasn't capable of inflicting bodily harm. Come to think of it, she'd better watch her back too. Her accidental death would be an option to a long drawn out court battle.

Relief flowed through her that she'd been smart enough to move the money in her bank accounts to a new bank here in Las Vegas. Rex was in too tight with the president of the bank where her accounts had been during their marriage, and who knew what games the two men would have cooked up to leave her destitute, at least to the point of living off Monique's charity.

The digital clock on the nightstand flashed the time and hammered home the realization that Monique was probably on her way back from California. Katherine wasn't sure if she wanted to hear the details about Rex's response when her friend had handed him the papers tonight. She definitely had to warn Monique to take extra precautions for while. In fact, it wouldn't hurt for both of them to keep an eye over their shoulders.

The need to be held surged through Katherine. As stupid as it might be, she picked up the phone and dialed Corin's number.

\* \* \* \*

"Katherine, what's wrong?" The concern in Corin's voice when she walked in told her she looked as bad as she felt.

"Thank you for letting me come over." When she called Corin, she prayed he was home. "The divorce petition was served to Rex today and to say he's not happy would be an understatement."

Corin held out his arms and she collapsed against his chest and let the tears she'd resisted all evening flow. "That bad, huh?" He pulled her tighter against him.

"That bad and more. Monique handed him the papers in a public place from what it sounded like through all his swearing."

"Monique's a big girl. I'm sure she handled it with her usual expertise."

Katherine felt Corin's smile against the top of her head. "I think she underestimates Rex. As much as she knows about him, she didn't live with him twenty plus years and see what he did to people who crossed him."

"Not to worry. Rex is a loser in the box office right now. His last two releases have been major flops from what the gossip rags report and his influence isn't what it used to be." He pushed her back and stared down at her. "Besides, what can he do to Monique? She's not in the business and doesn't have a movie career to be concerned about."

Not wanting to share the wild ideas that popped into her head earlier, Katherine made the effort to smile and nod her head in agreement. "No, a career of that sort would take too much work. Who needs to put in that kind of effort when she only needs to bat her eyes in the direction of a rich old fart and he comes panting and gets down on bended knee with a diamond to slip on one of her dainty fingers?" Katherine giggled at the memory of some of Monique's conquests. If only she had her friend's ability to make men fall at her feet.

Corin slid his hands up and down her arms for a few seconds as he looked into her eyes. God, when he looked at her like that, she melted inside.

"You're really tense, babe." He pulled her toward him and lowered his mouth downward to hers, hovering there for a brief moment, before touching.

The long slow kiss sent pulses of heat radiating through her body before it centered between her thighs. Sweet and caressing, the kiss lasted for several minutes, weaving



back and forth across her burning lips. When his tongue darted out, she offered no resistance and gave in to the sensations of his taste.

Their tongue war continued as they stayed locked in each others' arms and Katherine knew if she had the power to make time stand still, she'd use it at this moment.

When Corin moved to break their molded embrace, she wanted to resist. Instead, she allowed him to push her away and the back of his hand came up, rough against her cheek as he stroked her jaw. These were not the soft, well manicured hands of a Hollywood mogul, but the work-worn hands of a man who jumped in beside the construction crew to help create his new home. The scratchy texture created more sensation in her than Rex's smooth hands ever had.

"The bed was delivered today. I think we should test it out." The corners of Corin's mouth turned up and mischief danced in his eyes.

"Yes." The word came out in a whoosh and Katherine's throat felt dry and parched and she resisted the urge to drop her eyes. Why was she suddenly so shy? It wasn't like he hadn't seen her nude body on numerous occasions over the past few weeks.

Taking her hand, Corin led her down the hallway to the master suite at the end. Glancing around the room, she saw a lot of finishing touches that needed to be completed, but they could wait. Right now, she needed to feel Corin's arms around her and have him buried inside her. *Take me to the moon, baby, and help me forget my current life.*

As if reading her mind, he started to undress her. His fingers didn't fumble with the tiny buttons down the front of her blouse. With practiced ease, he opened them and slipped the silk off her shoulders. Standing with only her bra covering the top part of her, Katherine closed her eyes and gave in to the stimulation of his touch against her bare skin as he lightly ran his fingers along either side of her ribs.

She blinked and gave a sharp intake of breath that brought another grin from Corin. "Like that, do we?" His fingers moved down to her skirt and his thumbs slipped under

the band and glided to the back zipper. Seconds later, the lower part of her body was covered only by a tiny bit of lace.

"Nice." Corin dropped to his knees and rained kisses across her flat belly, before lowering his head and blowing hot breaths against the lacy barrier that stood between him and the path to her throbbing clit.

What the hell was he trying to do, drive her insane? He huffed again, the warmth of his breath sending greater spasms of desire over her body. "Corin, please."

"Please what, my lovely?" His hand inched the flimsy fabric off her ass, slowly over her trembling thighs and pulled it down her legs, letting the panties pool at her feet along with the discarded skirt.

The feel of his hot tongue against her vulva sent off another round of shock waves and Katherine knew if she didn't sit or lie down, she'd fall. Before she could form coherent thoughts to express the need, Corin stood and lifted her in his arms. *A girl could get use to being carried like this.*

Sprawled on the bed, she stared up at him and it dawned on her, only one of them was almost nude. Unlike their prior, trysts, she'd been so wrapped up in what he was doing to her, the thought of removing his clothes hadn't occurred to her. Oh well, there were times when a girl just needed to enjoy.

Clad only in the lacy bra that matched the discarded panties, Katherine shivered in anticipation as Corin stripped the black tee shirt over his head, revealing a nicely defined chest. Tossing the shirt aside, he pushed a sneaker off with one foot and then switched to the other, before he unbuckled his jeans and let them drop to the floor. Stepping out of a heap of clothing, he moved toward the bed. His boxers tented out and her fingers itched to get the obstructing fabric out of the way and give her free access to the object of her desire.

Dropping beside her on the bed, Corin placed his elbow down and rested his head in his hand and looked at her. His eyes devoured her inch by inch and the tension inside Katherine could take no more. She made her move, rolling against him and molding their bodies to each other. His cock throbbed against her sensitive sex and she

fought the urge to beg him to take her. Pleasure could be in the anticipation, but how much anticipation could she take?

Lost in the thrill of emotions coursing through her body, Katherine gasped when Corin slipped downward, his tongue leaving a burning path in its wake. Stopping at her breasts, he suckled one as his nimble fingers teased and tweaked the other. His skillful manipulation of one or more erogenous zones set off fireworks in her head. Gasping for breath, she knew an orgasm was just around the corner; when his other hand slipped between her thighs and his thumb stroked her hardened clit. The combination of pleasures brought her blissful agony to a body shattering end as spasm after spasm racked her.

Weak and disoriented, she came to the realization that Corin's hard cock was working its magic inside her. The in and out pounding against her throbbing clit once again carried her to new heights. She wasn't a multiple orgasm kind of girl, but damned if she wasn't about have her second one within a matter of minutes of the mind-blowing first one.

Not wanting to miss out, Katherine raised her hips, angling for the best position to give her more satisfaction. Within a matter of minutes, she found herself gasping along with Corin as their bodies shuddered and their spasms climaxed together.

Collapsing under him, Katherine fought to catch her breath. *Wow, unbelievable. Unfrigging believable. I actually had multiple orgasms. The old girl's not dead yet.*

"I..." Looking down at her, Corin had stopped what he started to say.

"You what?" Katherine leaned up and planted a kiss on his chin.

"I don't know about you, but I'm exhausted." He flopped down on the bed beside her and pulled her head onto his shoulder. "I think this bed is well broken in for one thing. How about we see how it sleeps." Slipping his arm from under her head, he pulled the comforter from the floor where it fell during the action and placed it over them before turning off the lamp beside the bed.

Snuggling against his warmth, Katherine realized she hadn't thought of the mess that existed in her life since his lips touched hers. He had given her the safe haven she'd longed for, if only for a few hours.

A grin spread across her face as she listened to the soft snores from her slumbering bedmate. *Enjoy tonight, Katherine. You go back to hell tomorrow.*

\* \* \* \*

Corin watched the taxi carrying Katherine back down the driveway. He wanted to take her back to the hotel, but she insisted taking a cab was smarter. The construction crew would be showing up soon and he had to make sure they were finished with the last and most important room by Friday. "After all, Corin, you can't cook for your party if the kitchen isn't complete, can you?"

Should he have said the words he wanted to say last night? The words that followed "I" that he bit back and changed when she asked him what?

"I love you, Katherine," he whispered as the taxi turned the corner.

What stopped him from spitting out the words that could change life as he viewed it for so long? There was only one answer—fear. The fear she'd bolt and run or, worse yet, laugh in his face. Timing was everything and his gut told him this wasn't the time to confess his feelings. She had enough on her mind right now with the divorce coming to a head. Once that was settled, maybe then she'd be open to hearing how he felt.

"I love you, Katherine Holland and if the fates are with me, you'll love me back one day."

The arrival of the construction crew pulled Corin out of his dream world and back into the reality of the day. He had a house remodeling to get finished since he let Blaine talk him into a party this weekend. Working on a plan to get Katherine to agree to becoming a permanent part of his life would have to wait for right now.

## Chapter Eight

"Rex?" Katherine gasped. Fear strangled her as she watched her husband walk toward them. She wanted to break free of Corin's arm around her shoulder and run in the opposite direction of the man coming her way. Instead, Corin tightened his grip and pulled her closer.

"Bastard." The venom in the spat out word left no doubt about how Monique felt over Rex's appearance in Vegas.

"Mo, please. No more scenes." Katherine had heard the details of Rex's reaction when Monique handed the divorce papers to him. Her suggestion that her friend be more careful for a while had fallen on deaf ears.

Instead she'd laughed and said, "What will he do, put a hit out on me? Even Rex can't be that stupid. He'd better focus on getting his career back on track. Rumor has it the film that's about to release is worse than the two prior ones." The grin she'd flashed at Katherine had reminded her of a cat at a cream dish. "See darling, good things do happen to bad people."

"My, my, my...what do we have here?" Rex stopped in front of them, his eyes first on Katherine and then darting back and forth to the others. "Katherine and her posse?" An evil smirk twisted his thin lips, "Or is it the lesbians and their shields?"

Katherine felt Corin's body stiffen and his arm start to drop from her shoulder. Grabbing his hand, she held tight, not letting him move away. The last thing she

wanted was to have a picture of Corin punching out Rex splattered across the tabloids tomorrow.

"Rex. I didn't know you were in Vegas." Katherine shifted to place her body between Rex and Corin.

"My attorney has a meeting set with yours tomorrow and I wanted to be present. Didn't your mouthpiece inform you?"

Rex's eyes darted back and forth between her and Corin. She knew the look. He was trying to assess why a young guy with movie-star looks would be draped around his aging wife and willing to start a fight over her. The subtle shift in his expression told her he'd connected the dots.

"Oh, Kitty. I forgot to tell you. James called just before you got in and wanted you to call him." Monique batted her mascara-coated lashes in Rex's direction and pouted. "Sometimes her best friend can be such a ditz, I don't know how she puts up with me."

Katherine didn't miss the flicker of hatred in Rex's eyes before he plastered a smile on his lips. "I've often wondered about that myself."

Not wanting another battle of words between the two, Katherine took matters in hand. "We have dinner reservations, Rex. You'll have to excuse us." She pulled on Corin's hand and stepped forward, not missing the poisonous darts Monique and Rex shot at each other when the dark-haired woman walked past him.

"Katherine, we really need to talk." Rex rushed to catch up and stopped in front of her. "After all, we're adults and I'm sure if we sat down without the lawyers or outside influences," his eyes briefly cut over to Monique, "we could come up with a solution that would work for both of us."

They were adults. When had that realization come to him? She'd been an adult all along and wanted to sit down and discuss things when they first split. Marital counseling was one of her suggestions and he'd laughed in her face. The last thing he'd wanted was someone telling him he had to stop screwing around to save his marriage. Was it possible that having a few flops at the box office had humbled him to the point

where he didn't think he was a god? Maybe they should talk. "Okay, Rex. I'm open for that. When?"

"The meeting with the attorneys is at ten. We could have breakfast and talk first." He gifted her with his most winning smile.

"Okay. Breakfast it is. I'll meet you here in the casino coffee shop at eight." Katherine stepped around him and worked to lighten the mood within her little group. "I don't know about anyone else, but I'm starved. Breakfast is a long way off."

\* \* \* \*

"I'm really glad you came." Rex stood up and leaned in to kiss her. She turned her head slightly; he missed Katherine's mouth and ended up with a peck to her cheek.

The slight grimace on his face didn't go unnoticed by Katherine, but he didn't say anything about her avoiding his kiss. Instead, he pulled out the chair for her. "Do you want to order from the menu or would you prefer the buffet?"

"Just coffee for me. I'm not hungry."

"Come now darling, you must eat. You're wasting away to nothing."

What was he up to? He hadn't greeted her with a kiss the last few years they were together, so why now in the middle of a contested divorce? And suddenly she was too skinny after over twenty years of being told she needed to go on a diet. "I told you I would be here, Rex." She met his gaze, "I keep my promises."

"Really, Katherine?" He grinned, reached across the table and took her hand in his. "I'm glad to hear that, because keeping promises is what I want to discuss. Let's get our order in since our waitress is hovering."

Rex signaled they were ready and he settled for coffee, too. Releasing her hands when their coffee arrived, he reached over and captured them again when the waitress left.

Puzzled, Katherine raised her eyebrows and looked down at their hands locked together. How different his hands were, compared to Corin's. Rex's were soft and

manicured with the nails buffed to high sheen, whereas Corin's were strong and tanned, a little rough against her skin. She knew which ones she preferred on her body.

When she looked into Rex's eyes, a chill across the back of her neck put her on alert. "Are you going to tell me what's so important that we need to discuss it without legal representation?"

"Us."

"Us? There is no us, Rex. In case you've forgotten, 'us' went out the window with your confession that you were screwing your assistant and I made you feel old."

"Darling, you'll have to forgive a man's middle age crisis." He squeezed her hand tighter and leaned toward her. "I said and did some stupid things, but the last few months have given me new insight into my life."

*Yeah, I'll bet you had lot of insight a few days ago when Monique handed you the divorce summons.* She attempted to free her hand but he didn't release it. Fine, if he thought teenaged displays would soften her up, let him. "Rex, you hurt me. I've spent the past two years after you walked out working to build a life and find myself. I don't have time for the 'us' you mentioned."

"Darling, I know this a difficult adjustment for you, but you did say you keep your promises and weren't our marriage vows a promise? As I said, I was going through a middle age crisis."

Touché on the promise comment. Chalk that one to Rex. Taking a deep breath to calm the fury that boiled inside her, Katherine managed to jerk her hands free and placed them in her lap. "Rex, that was two years ago and you were well past middle age then. You were fucking sixty-six years old and that makes you what now...oh yeah, sixty-eight."

"You don't have to get nasty with the age thing, darling. Okay, so I was having an old age crisis."

"Was? What the hell have you been doing since we split? From the tabloid headlines, you're still having one."



Anger sparkled in his eyes and quickly disappeared. "The important thing is I've come to my senses and I want you back."

Unbelievable. After all the hateful things he'd said to her, he thought a simple statement about wanting her back was all it would take to have her groveling at his feet again. "I'm sorry, but I don't see it happening. For you to sit there and tell me you've changed is great, but I need to see more than words from you. Plus, I'm not sure I want to be back."

He reached across the table and ran a finger down her cheek. "Your skin is as smooth now as it was the day I met you." A sad smile twisted up one corner of his mouth. "I have no one to blame for this but myself. I'll prove to you how much I love you, Katherine. You'll see that our marriage is worth saving. I'm going to tell my attorney to cancel this morning's meeting and wait to hear from me."

Closing her eyes, Katherine fought back tears. Her marriage vows were a promise before God and the world, one that was important to the core of her being, but could she trust this man again? Did she still love him? "I'm sorry, Rex. I can't say yes right now. I need time to think."

"It's okay, darling. I understand." He signaled for the check. "I have to go back to LA this afternoon and take care of some pressing business issues, but I can be back on Sunday. Will you have dinner with me?"

The invitation made her sad. It almost sounded like he was wooing her like he had in the beginning. If they both had continued to put that effort into their marriage, then maybe they wouldn't be here now. "Okay. Dinner, Sunday."

Rex flashed his biggest grin. Standing, he tossed a twenty on the table and reached for her hand. "I'll walk you back to your apartment."

"The elevator is fine. We both need to call our lawyers." Monique probably hadn't left yet and the last thing Katherine could handle right now was for Rex to get into a confrontation with her.

*Damn.* As they reached the elevators, Katherine saw Corin striding toward them and from the way Rex's body tensed, he saw the younger man too.

“Darling, I’ll call you after I get back to LA.” Rex took her in his arms and kissed her with a lingering embrace. “Don’t forget, dinner on Sunday. We’ll work out the time when we talk.” He planted another kiss on her mouth and glanced over her shoulder. Oh yeah, he definitely sent the message to Corin—he had marked his territory.

\* \* \* \*

Monique listened passively to Katherine’s news, glad Katherine had waited for Corin to leave to share the bombshell. It was impossible to think her friend actually considered taking back the low-life slime. If he’d given up his philandering ways, well she had an alligator farm for sale in Vail, Colorado.

Knowing Katherine as well as she did, Monique bit down on her response. Instead of the, “are you fucking insane?” question that screamed in her head, she gave the illusion she was mulling over the news. If she spewed the venom she kept bottled up, Katherine would go stubborn on her. Finally, she asked, “Are you sure, Kitty?”

“No, I’m not sure.” She pressed her fingers to her temples and chewed on her lower lip. “I’m not sure of anything other than I’ve invested over twenty years of my life into a marriage I thought was dead. You know my mother is twirling in her grave at the idea of her daughter getting a divorce, let alone one that has scandal written all over it.”

“You’re probably right. Your mother didn’t like scandal.” The old bat didn’t approve of anything that went against her beliefs. When Katherine declared she wanted to be an actress and was moving to Hollywood, Monique thought the older woman would have a stroke, whereas her own mother shrugged her shoulders and said, “*c’est la vie*,” at the news. “Well, I think you made the right decision to wait and see how things go.”

“I have to tell Corin.”

"You think? Why rock the boat there? You have a good time with him and may have the need of some laughs in the future."

"Mo, I can't work on putting my marriage back together when I'm seeing another man. No, I have to tell Corin I won't see him anymore."

"His party is tonight. Are you going to tell him there?"

Katherine blinked her watery eyes and nodded her head. "I'm going to stop by before the party gets started and leave his housewarming gift. I'll tell him then."

"Okay." Monique stopped and gave Katherine a hug of support on her way to her room. "You have to do what works for you."

Behind the closed door, Monique picked up the phone and punched in the number she knew by heart. When her attorney came on the line, she didn't waste time. "James, I need the information on the private investigator you suggested."

She'd heard the rumors about Rex Holland and didn't put anything past the man, including eliminating anyone who stood in his way. Katherine needed protection as much as she did and Monique plan to protect her friend.

Katherine suggested Monique be careful when she discovered she'd been the one who handed the divorce summons to Rex, and careful she was going to be...for herself and her friend. Katherine was going to have a bodyguard without her knowledge, just as Monique would have one that she knew was covering her back. The last thing she wanted was someone to find either of their bodies in an alley from a trumped up attempted robbery, which was exactly what could happen when she convinced Katherine that reconciliation with the sleaze was a bad idea.

Rex didn't want his wife back. He wanted the woman a younger man found attractive. Since Katherine had agreed to drop the divorce proceedings, he'd be back to his old ways, screwing any young thing that would spread her legs.

If Monique managed to convince Katherine that would happen, Rex would be a furious. His vengeance would extend not just to his wife, but to her friend, and they would both become targets for his revenge. Neither of them could be too careful.

## Chapter Nine

Frustrated, Katherine resisted the urge to kick the tire of the taxi she'd just exited before the driver pulled away. It wasn't the driver's fault they had a flat tire on the way to Corin's. Besides, why break a toe because she was angry with her own inability to hang up on Rex's endless blabbing? He'd sounded so needy when he called and she didn't have the heart to brush him off.

Katherine saw the party was in full swing and she'd missed the opportunity to have alone time with Corin. Now she would have to wait until the guests were gone to tell him she couldn't see him again. Regret surged through her at the thought of not having this hunky man in her life.

Opening the door, a blast of hip-hop greeted her. This was a music style she didn't think she'd ever come to appreciate. Killing cops and fucking whoever screamed to a beat just didn't do it for her.

*Guess my age is showing.*

A quick glance around made her wince. Almost every female here was on the downside of forty and the men...well some of them probably weren't legal. It was just as well things were ending with Corin tonight. This was an eye-opener as to how pathetic she must appear. Women draped over young men, caressing body parts that created discomfort for...who? From the way it looked, only her.

God, even the thought of going back to Rex put her back into snooty mode. She really had to watch it and not fall into the habit of looking down on others like he did.

She grabbed the arm of one of the bartenders she knew from Stallions. "Have you seen Corin?"

"Last time I saw him, he was in the kitchen."

That figured. The new kitchen was his pride and joy. He spent hours talking about all the things he planned to cook in the dream center. "Thanks," she yelled above the noise and made her way toward the back of the house.

Standing in the doorway, she observed Corin in his element—pots simmering, pans heating and him chopping away on the maple cutting board. A shiver of delight ran through her as she watched. Why didn't seeing Rex create this sensation in her? Would time change the emptiness she felt at hearing her husband's voice or looking into his eyes if she went back to him?

"You're here." The delight on Corin's face when he looked up and saw her made her sad.

Determined not to spoil Corin's housewarming party, she pasted a smile on her face and shrugged. "Sorry. Taxi had a flat."

His brow wrinkled in puzzlement. "Taxi? What happened to the car and driver that Monique insists on?"

"She left early with said it." She grinned and shook her head. "One never knows what that woman is up to, but enough about her. What can I do to help?"

"You can put out some of these platters if you don't mind." He waved a knife in the direction of several large plates of food waiting to go into the dining room where the buffet was set up.

"Will do." Katherine scooped up a couple of the heaping platters and headed in the direction they needed to go.

"Hey," Corin called out. Turning she looked at him. "Doesn't the slaving cook get a kiss?"

"Sure." She backtracked and leaned to plant a brief kiss on his mouth as she juggled the plates of food.

"Not good enough lady." He took the food from her hands and set the platters on the counter. "I want a real kiss."

Warm lips covered hers, exploring and demanding, causing her knees to go weak as his kisses always did. Maybe she needed to rethink going back to Rex. He never made her feel this way, even in the early years of their marriage.

Corin released her and laughed. "Now, that was an appetizer for what is to come later. Just wanted to remind you."

He reminded her all right. He reminded her how treacherous her body was when he touched her and how much she loved to laugh with him. He reminded her of everything they'd shared the past few weeks, even the arguments over decorating his house. Dazed, she picked up the plates of finger sandwiches and walked toward the dining room.

"Thought you'd never get here." Monique appeared beside her holding two drinks. "Figured you'd need this." She waved a martini under Katherine's nose.

*If only she knew how much.* "Bless you, my child."

They looked at each other and burst into giggles over the shared memory of the blessing intoned by Monique's childhood priest after he'd attempted to grope her without success. "Let me put this food down."

"Did you break the news yet?" Monique eyed her over the top of the glass she sipped her drink.

"I'll wait for the guests to leave." Katherine cast a glance around. If anything, there were more people here than when she arrived. "And that may take a while."

"I think you're right. Looks like you're in for a long night." Monique scowled as a woman in an exceptionally low cut top went by.

The redhead returned the look of distaste and Katherine almost choked on her drink at Monique's muttered comment. Surely, her friend didn't call the well-endowed woman "forty year old slut." Yes, she loved Monique like a sister, but the girl needed to be careful about calling someone a slut given her lifestyle.

Turning her back on the woman, Monique faced Katherine and continued where she left off. "I thought you were coming early to talk. What happened?"

"If you must know, I got detained by a phone call with Rex." Monique's scowl grew deeper and Katherine fought back annoyance. "Look, Mo, I know you two have your differences, but if we do get back together I'd appreciate it if you made an effort to at least be civil to Rex."

"We'll talk about it later." Monique tipped back the glass she put to her mouth and emptied it. "I need a drink."

It was going to be a long battle to get Monique to accept a reconciliation with Rex, *if* she ever did. Katherine watched as her friend weaved her way through the crowded room. *Please don't make me chose between you and my husband if it becomes necessary.* She cursed the guilt that followed her from childhood over breaking up her marriage.

If she did go back to Rex, then she faced the question, was her marriage worth destroying the friendship she'd counted on since childhood? At this moment, Katherine didn't know. Hell, she couldn't decide if she could make a clean break with a man she'd only known a few weeks, let alone a lifetime friend.

Tired of her own pity party, Katherine returned to the duty of keeping the table loaded with food. She worked to be useful while she mulled over what she would say to Corin when they were alone.

He'd finished his kitchen duties and now wandered, playing the considerate host. Resisting his attempts to make her the unofficial hostess, she slipped away to find Monique. People were beginning to thin out and she located her friend locked in a hot embrace with Blaine.

Not wanting to interrupt the pair, she decided it was time to start the cleanup process. If the remaining guests noticed her clearing the table and picking up, maybe they'd get the drift and leave. Then it would be decision time. Should she tell Corin it was over and attempt to work out her marriage? Or should she invest her energy into a relationship that would come to an end at some point? What she had with Corin might

not last, but comparing a spurt of happiness to a lifetime of boredom...well, the choice seemed a no-brainer. She could use a taste of happiness.

Decision made, she picked up a handful of dirty plates and headed to the kitchen and stopped in her tracks by the sight that greeted her. From the looks of things, Corin was taking the perfect host role to a new level.

The redhead that Monique had referred to as a slut earlier was now wrapped around the younger man. At that moment, she could understand Monique's claws coming out in their silent exchange. Right now, she was ready for a cat fight herself. The kiss Corin and the woman exchanged wasn't a European, so glad you could come endearment. There was serious spit swapping going on.

Dropping the items in her hands on the counter, Katherine decided she'd seen enough.

*What a fool you were to think of something long term with a guy young enough to be your son!*

Without knowing it, Corin had made the choice for her. She'd work to put her marriage back together. Her golden years in peaceful boredom beat the hell out of spending them waiting for the other shoe to drop when her young lover grew tired of her.

Whirling around, she made her way to the closet where she'd put her purse. She grabbed it and ran out the front door.

"Katherine. Katherine, wait!" Corin's voice called after her as she made her way as quickly as four inch heels would allow. Finally, stopping in frustration, she pulled the shoes off and started to run. Corin's grasp halted her before she made it two feet.

"I can explain." He tried to turn her to face him.

"There's nothing to explain. I'm fifty years old and you're barely in your twenties. Just brand me a foolish old woman that you spent a few weeks playing with." She broke his hold and ran toward the street. If the luck was with her, she'd find a taxi and if not, she'd damned well walk back to the Vegas Strip.



Corin's words drifted after her as she picked up speed. "Katherine, I'm not in my twenties, I'm thirty-two."

Big fucking deal. Either way, she was a fool.

\* \* \* \*

"Stop it, Angela." Corin pushed the woman away. She'd been stalking him all evening and even before tonight. He'd resisted her passes for months, but tonight he'd had enough to drink to slow his reflexes when she pressed her body against his and wrapped her arms around his neck.

Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a movement and glanced over to see Katherine leaving the room. *Shit*. She'd walked in at the wrong moment and now she thought he was making it with another woman. He had to catch her and explain.

Several people stopped him to comment on the great party delaying his attempt to find Katherine and he saw her rush out the front door. When he caught up with her, she'd stunned him with the news she was fifty years old. Her declaration shocked him. He'd never guessed there was that much of an age difference. His brain processed the information in a matter of seconds and didn't care. Unfortunately, those wasted seconds gave her the opportunity to break free and start to run.

"No." Monique grabbed his shoulder as Corin started to go after her. He watched Katherine race down the driveway.

"Trust me on this. I've know her longer than you and she needs time to calm down. Whatever you say right now, she won't hear."

He turned and looked at the dark-eyed woman. "But..."

"I'm right about this," she whispered. "Let her go. I'll get my car and driver. We'll take her home and when she's ready to hear about whatever happened, I'll call you." Monique looked up at him. "What did happen?"

"She walked in on Angela and me kissing. Actually, Angela was kissing me, but I'm sure it looked to Katherine like it was a mutual exchange."

"That bitch," Monique hissed several profanities that Corin could only guess at, but it was obvious there was no love lost between the redhead and Monique.

Monique herded him toward the house, and too depressed to resist, Corin allowed her. She signaled for her car and kissed his cheek. "We'll talk tomorrow," she said as the driver held the door for her.

Back in the house, he turned to the thing that usually calmed him down. He needed to cook, even if there only a few guests wandering around. Given the amount of food consumed earlier he probably wouldn't have a lot of takers for the omelets he started to whip up.

"What the hell happened?" Blaine came and took a bar stool, reaching across the counter to help himself to a piece of cheese. "You look like death warmed over."

Corin wiped water from his eyes and let Blaine think it was from the onions he chopped. "Thanks. You sure know how to make a guy feel good."

"Yeah," Blaine poured a glass of wine, "but wasn't this a kick ass party? Man, we could have charged for all the younger guys to have access to the Cougars here tonight." He tossed a couple of nuts he'd fished out a bowl beside him into his mouth and talked around them. "You know, I saw this movie a while back where some guys did that. Started a club where they hooked up older women and younger men and charged the guys a membership fee to attend the parties. We should consider it. This has potential to be a real gold mine."

The glare shot in Blaine's direction brought his business plan to a halt. "Guess not, huh?" He hopped off the bar stool and stretched. "Guess I'll call it a night."

Corin nodded, knowing if he said anything, he would tell Blaine how stupid his ideas could be sometimes. He felt relieved when Blaine wandered away. Once again, Corin wondered how he maintained a friendship with a man whose maturity level was around fifteen.

There was no way he'd share with Blaine how he felt about Katherine. He was in love with her—no doubt about it. He hoped taking Monique's advice was the right thing to do.

Too late now to change his decision or to ease the fear in his heart that their relationship was totally fucked by his own stupidity, Corin continued to chop.

## Chapter Ten

"He's changed, Monique. I'm sorry you're letting your feud with him blind you to the fact that Rex is not the same person he was when we separated." Katherine placed another stack of clothing in the piece of open luggage that sat on the bed.

"I'm sorry you're the one blind to his manipulation of the situation. He only wants you back to show Corin who the real man is, or at least who the creep thinks is macho."

Ignoring the remark, Katherine let Monique stand in the doorway with her arms crossed and lips crimped in disapproval as she emptied her underwear drawer and carried the items over and placed them on top of the rapidly filling suitcase.

Unable to stand the angry glare and silence any longer, Katherine stopped and faced her friend. "Mo, I have to do this. If he has changed, then we can work to put our marriage back together and if not," she shrugged her shoulders, "then we take up where we are now. I'll have James re-file the divorce."

"Okay." Monique's arms dropped to her sides. "Do what you feel you must. I'm here if you need me. I'm not leaving Vegas until you do, because I don't think a leopard changes his spots so easily, or in this case a dirty old man becomes clean."

The grin on her face with the last line made Katherine respond. "Right now, this old woman is pretty dirty too." She saw Monique start to say something and then change her mind. Maybe her friend was going to defend Katherine's fling with a

younger man, but decided against it. Reality was, neither of them was squeaky clean, any more than Rex.

"I'll let you finish packing. When you're ready we can call Paul and he'll see you get to your new home." Monique turned and left Katherine alone with her thoughts.

Why did Monique replace the sweet older driver with Paul? The burly guy looked more like he was one of "the boys" from back east than a chauffeur. She said Ralph got sick, but when Katherine saw him a few hours before he vanished, the grey-haired driver seemed fine. With Monique, one didn't ask why when it came to her hiring and firing. It was her money after all.

Katherine paused and considered the happenings since her husband arrived in town. Rex had pulled out all the stops in the last couple of weeks to woo her. Flowers, dinners, shows, helicopter rides to the Grand Canyon...she barely had any time alone to process all of it.

Last night he'd convinced her the only way they could really work on a reconciliation was if they lived together. He'd rented a condo here in Las Vegas and swore they'd treat the next month as a second honeymoon.

Closing the bag, she zipped it and looked around the room to see if she'd forgotten anything. If she could leave the heaviness in her chest here, it would be the one item she wouldn't return to retrieve. When her eyes fell on the bed, she knew not having to look at the place she first made love with Corin would be a relief. Each time she entered the room, memories of that first night they shared flooded her thoughts. Maybe she was leaving some of the pain behind.

"Enough with the memories." Wrestling the bag to the floor, Katherine snapped up the handle and wheeled it into the living room. Monique sat on the couch, one leg tucked under her, as she paged through a magazine which she tossed aside when Katherine came out pulling the large piece of Louis Vuitton.

"So, you're really going to do it."

Katherine hated to hear the strain in her friend's voice. This was the strongest disagreement she could recall them having. When she originally married Rex, Monique

hadn't danced with joy, but she accepted Katherine's, "I love him," when she asked why.

"Mo..."

"Kitty..."

They both spoke the other's name at the same time and laughed. Jumping up from the sofa, Monique came over and threw her arms around Katherine. "I'm going to miss you, but we'll get together often. After all, we only have to brave a few thousand cars to cross the strip to see each other."

"Right. I'll give it a few days for things to settle in and then we'll have lunch." The doorbell stopped Katherine from saying anything more.

"That will be Paul. I told him to bring the car around and take you to your new abode."

"Thanks." Tears stung behind Katherine's eyes. "Later then."

She gave Monique another quick hug and went to answer the door. It wasn't nice to keep her ride waiting, especially when the driver was Paul, who intimidated the crap out of her with his mafia appearance.

\* \* \* \*

Opening the box of beer he'd carried from the back to stock the cooler, Corin looked up and froze. What the hell was Rex Holland doing at Stallions? Bars of this type were not exactly the kind of place a power player like him would hang out, not to mention that most of the patrons were older females and young guys looking to score with them.

Seeing that Corin was busy stocking, one of the other bartenders started over to serve the new customer. "I'll get this one, Dave, thanks anyway." Corin was much too curious to let someone cover for him, no matter how busy he might have been.

"What do you have on tap?" Rex cast an eye toward the row of taps that bore the names of the beer they poured. "Other than crap?"

Yep, Mr. High and Mighty was out of his element. He probably wanted a fancy micro-brew to quench his thirst. "What you see, is what we got." Corin looked in the same direction Rex stared. Damned if he was going to rattle off the list of beers clearly stated in plain view.

"Figures." Rex sneered and directed his gaze at Corin. "Not a problem, really. I didn't really come in for a drink." The sneer had turned to a smirk.

*He probably doesn't think I'm smart enough to figure that out.*

Corin wiped down the bar in front of the older man and smiled. "What did you come in here for, then?"

"I've been asking around about you since I saw you with my wife."

"Should I be flattered...or scared?" His conversation with Monique the morning after Katherine had caught Angela kissing him played through Corin's head. If Monique's speculations were right, then this man was dangerous, but probably not to him. He had doubts about Katherine's safety though. Rex was famous for his temper and though Katherine never mentioned abuse, Corin wouldn't be a bit surprised to discover he'd slapped her around in the past.

"Your choice." Rex bobbed his head up and down. "I just came by to give you some advice. You take it then you have no reason to be scared."

The man's veiled threat irritated Corin, but he clamped his jaw and kept his mouth shut. He wanted to hear what the idiot had to say.

"I came by to let you know there's no need for you to spend any more time with Katherine. We're reconciling and don't need the likes of you to muddy the waters."

Reconciling. Monique's daily reports had no mention of a reconciliation taking place. He'd planned to give Katherine a few weeks for Rex's true colors to show and then be there for her. Was this ass playing some kind of game here? He was the type to make sure he had no competition to hamper his latest attempt to control the wife he'd dumped for a younger woman.

"That's nice. I've always believed in the sanctity of marriage and all those vows that go with it." Corin leaned against the bar and met Rex's stare, "Especially the one about keeping unto each other."

"Good. Then you won't have any problem staying away from my wife."

"Oh, I won't have a problem. She won't have a problem. But, I wonder if you're going to have a problem keeping it in your pants for just one woman." A smile played across Corin's lips and he delighted in the flush of red creeping up into Rex's face.

"What I do or don't do isn't your problem." Rex leaned across the bar and lowered his voice. "The only thing you need to be concerned about is staying away from me and my wife. Otherwise, you'll find yourself unemployed and out on the street. I have connections."

Unable to resist the mental picture of two stallions preparing to battle for herd leader, Corin laughed. "You do what you have to do."

Pushing back from the bar, Rex stood. "I always do. Just remember, you want a job in this town, stay away from my wife."

Watching the pompous shit head for the door, Corin resisted rolling on the floor with laughter. "If only you knew I gave my notice this morning, Mr. Prick. If you can manage to make my two weeks notice shorter, please do." Humming to himself, Corin returned to stocking the cooler. When he got his break, he'd call Monique and give her the latest piece of news and discuss a plan that would allow him to talk to Katherine face to face.

\* \* \* \*

Even though she had a key, Katherine rang the bell to Monique's condo. Since she didn't live here anymore, she needed to act the part of a guest when her friend was home.

When the dark haired beauty called this morning and invited herself over, Katherine knew it would be better if Monique didn't come to the apartment she now



shared with Rex. If he came home early from his meeting, she knew the two would clash. It was easier to lie about why she was gone than to listen to the two battle and deal with all the pouting Rex would do after.

For cripes' sake, she sounded like a teenager sneaking around behind her parents' backs. She was a grown woman who wanted to have coffee with her best friend. A surge of delight flooded her as she heard the door opening. It had been a few days since she'd seen Monique and she really missed her.

The warm feelings changed to shock, then anger when she saw who held the door. "Corin, I didn't know you were going to be here." He stepped back and motioned for her to enter. Panic caused her heart to pound as she surveyed the living room that held no sign of Monique.

"She's not here."

Katherine whirled around and missed colliding with Corin by inches. Taking a couple of steps back, she placed a hand to her chest to calm the pounding. "We're supposed to have coffee. She called and suggested it." God, she hated sounding so panicky at being alone with Corin.

"I know. I suggested she call with the invitation and invite me too." Corin took a step in Katherine's direction. "Then I suggested she probably needed to run an errand or go shopping." He moved forward again. "I thought we needed time alone to talk."

"There's nothing to talk about." Katherine escaped around him and moved over to the window hoping something outside would offer a distraction while she worked to control the rush of emotions that flowed through her. Where was a window washer when you needed one? They were usually like flies plastered against the glass in a continuous battle to keep the city grime from marring the view of Las Vegas for the high roller residents in this building.

"It's okay, darling."

Corin stood behind her, close enough his whispered words tickled her ear. No, it wasn't okay. Didn't he understand how being in the same room with him affected her determination to make her marriage work? To have his arms around her one more

time, have his mouth and fingers explore her body, taking it to levels she never knew it could achieve? No, she didn't need to be reminded of that, or to compare it to what she had with the husband she gave over twenty years of her life to.

Rex's idea of making love was a few sloppy kisses, a couple of tweaks of her nipples as foreplay, before he jumped on top of her. Once his cock entered her body, he usually managed a few thrusts before he grunted, collapsed against her to catch his breath then rolled off to his side of the bed. There he'd stare at the ceiling for a moment and on a good night pat her thigh asking, "Was it good for you, too?" before he started to snore.

No, she didn't need to remember any of that. She needed to remind herself that marriage was based on more than a few passionate encounters that made her body hum. If she needed to play the new tune she'd learned, then it was time to explore the toys Monique mentioned when they passed one of those shops.

"Katherine, I miss you." Corin's arms wrapped around her from behind, pulling her against his chest. "I need to say goodbye away from prying eyes."

Passion weakened her knees and Katherine willed herself to stand. She was a strong woman and could walk away from this temptation, but oh God, his body felt so right against hers. His hands turned her toward him and as much as her mind screamed at her to stop him, she didn't resist.

When his mouth moved down on hers, she was home. No sloppy forced tongue, but soft lips against lips, rocking back and forth, changing to quick nips and tender nibbles. She was the one who worked to slip her tongue between his lips, to taste and explore the mouth that brought her so much delight when it teased its way over her body.

Pressing tighter against him, Katherine felt the heat generated by their bodies through their clothing. Corin's rigid cock against her pelvis sent shivers of delight racing through her and the expensive lace of the panties she wore was soaked. The best way to solve that problem would be to rip them off and bury his erection inside her demanding heat.

The fingers of both Corin's strong hands massaged her swollen nipples. She'd been so caught up in the ache between her legs, the unbuttoning of her blouse had escaped her notice. The lacy bra that matched her panties offered little barrier to the sensation of flesh against flesh.

As the heat built in her body, Katherine's juices flowed like molten lava and she offered no resistance when one of Corin's hands dropped down and inched her skirt up. Slipping under the thin strip of fabric his skilful fingers manipulated her swollen clit and within what seemed like seconds Katherine gave in to the release her body craved.

Breathless she leaned against Corin and buried her head in his shoulder. As the shudder subsided and her breathing returned to normal, so did her thinking and the reality of what just happened. She pushed away and while tears flowed, Katherine worked to button her blouse and put her clothing in order. "This is wrong, Corin and I'm sorry I was weak enough to let it happen."

Lifting her head, she met his gaze. He didn't say a word while she worked to put on a presentable front for the rest of the world and she ignored the tears on his cheeks just like she ignored the ones still streaming from her eyes.

*Damn you and your meddling, Monique Longet. I may never forgive you for this.*

## Chapter Eleven

Still furious with Monique over tricking her into a meeting with Corin, Katherine hadn't spoken to her friend in a week. Regret washed over her because of the void created in her heart by the rift.

"Darling." Rex smiled across the breakfast table at her. "Are you feeling all right?"

"Fine. Just a slight headache." *And heartache.* The two people who were most important in her life were non-existent at the moment. Monique because she resented the way the woman who'd been her friend most of their lives tried to manipulate her, and Corin, someone she had no business feeling so strongly about. The void they created was enough to give anyone a heartache.

Her efforts to forget the younger man had proved mostly successful; that is until she spent the time with him in Monique's condo. Memories of his touch, his kisses and his smile were branded once again in her mind.

"You know darling, I really need to get back to LA." Rex reached over and squeezed her hand. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but we are getting along great and I don't see the need to stay here in Vegas for the full month we initially discussed. What say you, we pack up and go home? I'll move some of my things back into the old house."

Great, he was thinking for her again. Once again, it occurred to her how much her husband and her best friend had in common. Both wanted to tell her what she should think and do with her life.

What did he mean by some of his things? If their reunion was so solid, why didn't he mention selling the house he bought after their separation? Unable to muster the energy to talk, Katherine nodded an okay to his suggestion.

"Excellent." Rex rubbed his hands together in a jester of glee. "I think you'll be happier there, too. Since you haven't seen much of Monique the past week or so, I've noticed you're calmer and going back to California should help even more."

How did he know she didn't see much of Monique? She didn't mention her friend's name to him, because it only earned a look of scorn, but prior to last week they had lunch several times while Rex was tied up on business. Instead of arguing, she once again nodded her head and managed "Right" in response.

"It will definitely be for the better when she's out of your life for good."

The comment caught her attention. "What do you mean by that? Monique has a home in LA too and I'm sure we'll get together for lunch and drinks like usual when she's in town." At least they would when Katherine forgave her for last week's treachery.

"I'm sorry to hear you still feel that way. She's such a bad influence on you." Rex stood and tossed his napkin on the table. "But no matter, I'm sure she'll be too busy to spend much time in LA."

Coming around the table, he bent down and kissed her on the cheek. "I think we should leave for LA tomorrow. Why don't you call your attorney this morning and drop the divorce? That way, if there any papers that require your signature, he can get them drawn up today and we can stop by his office on the way to the airport tomorrow for you to sign."

"Sure."

“Good girl.” He leaned down and rewarded her with another kiss on the cheek. “I must run. Have another meeting for most of the day, but I’ll see you at dinner. We’ll do something special to celebrate.”

His lewd wink told her all she needed to know about the celebration he had in mind. She watched Rex as he made his way out and she fought back tears. The thought of his hands on her again tonight left her cold.

Sex with Rex had never set off fireworks and they’d had separate bedrooms the ten years prior to his leaving her for another woman, but she couldn’t help comparing his touch to Corin’s, no matter how hard she tried to forget, and forget she had to do, in order to make this marriage work. After all, if Rex was willing to give up his stable of playthings, she should be able to give up one.

But what if...what if she were in a position to pursue a relationship with Corin... would she? Probably not. Why not, when there was potential to feel the exhilaration being with him gave her? The answer was one she could avoid by lying to herself, but reality was something she would face from now on.

Fear.

Fear held her back from doing a lot of things. With Corin, the fear was that he’d grow tired of her as she aged and once again, she’d face being traded in for a younger model.

At least with Rex, she knew what she was getting into and if things didn’t work out this time, the only thing damaged would be her ego, not her heart. Time to close the book on thoughts of the younger man. She forced her mind to think about another subject.

Now with Mo it was a different story. She needed to figure out a way to salvage a friendship with the one person who’d been there for her more years than she wanted to think about. If she could accomplish that, she’d be okay. To hell with men, young or old.

Forcing herself from the chair, she moved through the condo thinking about a plan of action. First a shower and after she was dressed, a phone call to James to inform him

the divorce was off. Given the opinion he'd developed of Rex over the past weeks, she knew the attorney wasn't going to be pleased, but it was her life.

Once she accomplished that, then she'd work on a plan to rebuild her relationship with Monique.

As for Corin, with time the young man would become a distant memory—one that, down the road, an old woman could find delight in thinking about while she sat in her wheelchair and nodded off to sleep at the nursing home.

\* \* \* \*

Monique walked out of the Spa La Femme into the blazing afternoon sun and stood for a moment looking for her missing limo and driver. Paul startled her when stepped from the shadows and spoke from behind her.

"Don't worry, Miss. I'm here." The burly man took her arm and led her to a shady spot a few feet away where she saw the limo parked in plain view, down toward the bottom of the entrance driveway to the spa. Birds in the nearby trees darted back and forth.

*Great, bird shit all over the car. Well, he'd just have to get it washed.* "What the hell is going on, Paul? It's hot as hell out here and I'm not in the mood for bird watching."

"Oh, I don't know about that, Ms. Longet. You may find this bird interesting to watch." He whispered and nodded his head in the direction of the car. The man who only minutes before walked past it, approached again and stopped. "We may have a rare sighting of the Hairless Bomb Planting Hit Man."

Hit man. Shit. The statement coming from a guy who could pass for one of Al Capone's boys, sounded like something out of a movie. She watched as the harmless looking bald guy bent down and untied his shoe, only to tie it again. He took a quick look around and seemed satisfied he wasn't being watched. Reaching into his jacket pocket, he pulled out an object and hastily stuck it up under her car. This really was getting scary.

"Stay here," Paul commanded before he moved off in the direction the man was now walking at a rapid clip.

As if sensing the large man coming in his direction wasn't a good thing, the pudgy bald fellow changed directions and picked up speed. He could move pretty well for a guy who looked so out of shape.

But so could Paul who grabbed the fleeing man's arm and whirled him around. Never being one to take orders, especially from a man, Monique left the safety of the position where Paul had instructed her to remain and moved closer to the action.

The noise had attracted the attention of passersby and a small crowd formed around the two men having a heated discussion. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" Baldy worked to get his arm out of Paul's grasp. "You can't just accost someone walking down the street."

"What were you doing hanging around my car?" Paul demanded in an equally loud voice.

"I had to tie my fucking shoe. You got a problem with that?"

"Yeah, a big problem when it also involves slipping something under my car, so if all you were doing was tying your shoe, you won't mind if we have the bomb squad check it out, will you?"

"Why you overzealous punk, I'll have you ass in court so fast your head is gonna spin and..."

A loud explosion brought an end to the man's tirade. All heads turned to see what was left of the limo engulfed in flames. The rest was scattered over the street and sidewalk.

Monique's knees went weak with the realization that she could have been one of those scattered parts if Paul wasn't so observant. Monique sat down on the sidewalk where she stood. A scuffling noise pulled her attention back to Paul and his suspect. The man exerted all his effort in attempting to escape, but to no avail. He was no match for the larger, more muscular Paul, who now held him by the collar, shaking the smaller bald guy like a dog with a chew toy. The look on Paul's face left no doubt in Monique's



mind that the other guy was on the verge of becoming a victim if the police didn't arrive soon.

Pushing herself up off the sidewalk where a collected crowd of gawkers literally ignored her, Monique made it over to Paul's side. "Let the cops take care of this, Paul. We need to know who put him up to blowing me up."

"Oh we'll find out." Paul pulled the man up on his toes and held him at eye level. "I think our friend here would love to share with us the name of the person who paid him." He shook the man none too gently, "Wouldn't you?"

"I...I..." the man's bladder let go and water puddled at his feet.

"Who do you have here, Paul?"

Paul's eyes locked with the man who now stood behind his catch. "Detective Horner, nice to see you. Meet my new friend. Haven't got around to getting his name yet, but I think he'll share that along with the name of the person who hired him to kill my boss." He released his hold on the man, allowing him to stumble and fall into the puddle he'd created moments earlier. "Of course, he might need a shower and some dry clothes before you close yourself in an interrogation room with him."

When Paul placed his arm around her shoulders, Monique felt safe for the first time since she witnessed this nightmare and the shakes subsided. This definitely ruined the relaxed high from the spa treatment.

\* \* \* \*

Vegas in August wasn't Katherine's idea of a fun time. She hated heat, and cold wasn't on the top of her list either. Probably one of the reasons she'd never become much of a ski bunny. Bracing herself for another blast of heat, she dashed from the taxi to face the blazing heat radiating from the concrete at her feet.

James' office was located in one of the new multifunctional buildings with a shopping mall & restaurants housed on the bottom two floors, offices the next eight floors up and then luxury condominiums on the top three levels.

The aroma of food wafting from one of the restaurants reminded Katherine she hadn't made time for lunch in her rush to pack after James told her she needed to sign paperwork to stop the divorce. It was better not to wait until tomorrow to go sign them; it was out of the way to swing by there on the way to the airport. She looked longingly toward the direction of the delicious smells and stopped dead in her tracks.

Surely, her eyes deceived her. The man she just saw entering the restaurant with his arms wrapped around a young blonde couldn't be Rex. He was at a meeting with potential investors in his next movie project and from the looks of this girl, unless she was Paris Hilton, there was no way she was investing in movie.

Her curiosity peaked, Katherine ignored the open doors of the elevator and made her way toward the restaurant. Entering, she looked around at the elegant ambience with its dark paneling and soft lighting. Just the type of place for a romantic celebration or an illicit rendezvous, she decided.

"May I help you, Miss?" The maître d's tuxedo matched the rest of the environment, flawless.

She needed to buy time to see if she could get another glimpse of the man and woman. It wasn't the sort of thing a trusting wife should do, but she realized there were doubts lingering about Rex. It would take more than a few weeks for the trust to grow between them.

"I'd like a table for one, please."

"Certainly, Miss." The Maître d' checked a sheet on the desk and picked up a menu.

"But first I'd like to use your ladies room." Katherine flashed him what she hoped was a winning smile. "After I freshen up, I'll be able to relax and enjoy my meal."

“Of course. Allow me to show you.”

The appearance of a new group of customers saved her from his showing her where to find the ladies room. Katherine jumped on the opportunity to distract the Maître d’. You have other guests, why don’t you point me in the right direction and I’ll take it from there?”

Free from the prying eyes of the Penguin, Katherine took a circumventive route toward the ladies room. Bingo. Tucked away at an out-of-the-way table, Rex and the blonde huddled together in what was definitely not a business meeting, unless he considered monkey business as a money-making venture.

The old saying about a leopard not changing his spots was true, at least in Rex Holland’s case. How could she have been fool enough to believe for a moment that a man who’d chased younger skirts most of his life would have the ability to remain faithful to a wife whose age reminded him of the fact that he was growing older?

Katherine stood for a moment and observed the interplay between the couple. Although she wasn’t close enough to hear the words, she knew he was saying the same sweet nothings and using the same tactics on this gullible young woman that he’d used on her, oh so many years ago.

She could imagine him saying, “I wish my wife was as understanding as you. She doesn’t realize how a man of my stature needs someone who makes him look good. We only married for the sake of the baby and then she lost it.” Now she was again the wife who he complained about, the one who didn’t understand him.

Yeah, Katherine admitted, she’d been a fool and felt sorry for the poor powerful man trapped in a marriage to a woman who didn’t help him further his career and image in the world of glamour and egos.

When Rex took his eyes off his companion long enough to cast a glance around the restaurant, Katherine stepped back into the shadows. Memories of the headlines of a few weeks ago that resulted when Monique's confronted him in a trendy Los Angeles hang out flashed through her mind. She didn't need or want that kind of publicity, but she did have to let him know that the purpose of the appointment with her lawyer would be to move forward to finalize their divorce, not to stop it. Better to wait for him to come outside to have the encounter. That way, there would be less opportunity for eaves-dropping by nosey individuals in the crowded room.

Her decision made, Katherine stepped outside and positioned herself where she had a good view of anyone going into or coming out of what appeared to be a very popular eating establishment.

Furious with her own stupidity by letting him suck her in again with his sweet words, Katherine waited. Her husband would find out he didn't matter to her any more and she was ready for a new life. To make herself feel better, the words needed to be said to his face and she'd wait all day if she had to.

## Chapter Twelve

"Rex." Katherine moved toward her husband and the young woman who clung so possessively to his arm that she almost pitied her. But, if she pitied this silly young thing, then she'd have to pity the fool she'd been through most of her marriage. She been a fool long past the time youth couldn't be used as an excuse.

"Katherine."

The stunned expression on Rex's face made the wait well worth every minute. "I thought you'd like to know I'm on my way to the appointment with my attorney." She eyed the blonde and smiled. "Only now, it's safe to say, I won't be signing papers to stop the proceedings." *God, that felt good.* She'd been able to say those words without feeling any regret. "I'm dumping your ass like I should have a long time ago." Releasing the anger she'd forced down for so long empowered her. "I'm no longer your fool, Rex Holland."

"Wha...what do you mean?" A red flush spread over Rex's face. "This isn't what you think." He looked over at the young woman. "We were having a business lunch."

"Right." She watched the blue eyes of the woman narrow in resentment at his description of their lunch as business. "I'm sure that's what you call it these days and that you were on your way to get down to real business if I didn't catch you."

Katherine arched her eyebrows. "And in which hotel did you plan to host that meeting?"

"Listen," Rex took a stepped closer and lowered his voice, "What I do when we're not together is none of your concern. You just continue to be the devoted wife and our marriage can survive...otherwise, forget it."

"That's exactly what I plan to do, Rex. Forget it."

"You'll regret having this attitude with me." He leaned closer, "You'll get your divorce, but you won't get a penny of my money. I'll make damned sure that pre-nup crap is voided."

"You know, Rex, you really are a little man," Katherine let her eyes wandered to his crotch, "and I don't mean just physically." She looked over at the blonde. "If you haven't discovered already, you're in for a surprise, or should I say disappointment, honey. The biggest thing about this man is his checkbook." Spasms of laughter bubbled up and Katherine turned to leave.

"No you don't." Rex grabbed her arm and whirled her around to face him. "You don't walk away just like that. You're as big a whore as that slut Monique, so don't start casting stones at me."

"Both of us are better than you, dear husband. Our combined list of sleepovers wouldn't come close to your number. I wasn't deaf to all those years of gossip, just stupid enough to ignore it." How had she ever convinced herself she loved this despicable excuse for a man?

"I'll take care of you the way I took care of that bitch you call a friend."

His free hand connected with the side of her face and Katherine tasted blood. Too stunned to initially do any more than stand and gape, her mind worked to process what just happened. The bastard slapped her hard enough that she bit her tongue. Lots of times through the years, Rex had subjected her to degrading mental abuse, but this was the first time he ever laid a hand on her. She twisted to release her arm from his grasp.

"If you want threats, Rex, I'll give you threats." The taste of venom was foul in her mouth and she resisted the urge to spit as she looked at the man she'd shared so much

of her life with. "I'm going to get ever fucking penny from you that I can. It's called community property, baby. And I want my share." Oh yeah, she was on a roll.

"I'll see you dead first and don't you forget it." The blonde stepped back, a look of fear and confusion on her face, when Rex raised his hand to strike Katherine again.

"Stop right there, Mr. Holland!" Rex dropped his hold on Katherine and whirled around to see who shouted the command.

Katherine rubbed her sore arm and stood mesmerized as a hulk larger than Monique's driver Paul, approached at a run, camera swinging from his neck.

"Who the fuck do you think you are sticking your nose in where it doesn't belong?" Rex glared at the man who loomed almost a head taller than the irate movie mogul. "And how the hell do you know who I am?" His eyes dropped to the camera that dangled around the man's neck. "Ahh, never mind. Paparazzi. Should have know one of you scum would be lurking."

"You wish." The large guy stepped aside in order to give Rex a good view of the three uniformed police officers and a man in a sports jacket with his badge already out of his pocket, coming toward them. They were followed by a flush-faced Monique, and hot on her heels, Paul and Corin. "No, Mr. Holland, I'm not paparazzi out to blackmail you, but you're going to wish I was."

"Rex Holland. Detective Horner, Las Vegas PD." The man in the sports jacket stepped forward and stuck the badge under Rex's nose. "I'm here to arrest you for the attempted murder of Monique Longet." The officer nodded to the uniforms with him and two of them handcuffed Rex as the detective read him his rights.

Katherine worked to close her mouth as the two uniformed cops led her husband away and the third one led the stunned young woman from Rex's lunch rendezvous after them. *What the hell just happened?*

"Mrs. Holland," the detective had come over to Katherine. "We have evidence of his slapping you." He pointed to the camera around the large man's neck. You can press charges for assault if you'd like, in addition to the charges we already have him on."

Wide-eyed, Katherine turned to look at him. She felt Monique's arm link through hers and never felt so grateful to have her friend's support. "You said attempted murder charges. When? How? He was here. Can someone please tell me what is going on?"

Several voices started to respond at once when Detective Horner held up his hand for silence. "Your husband has been implicated in an attempt on Ms. Longet's life. The man caught in the bombing of her vehicle sang like a well fed canary. Rex Holland won't be making any more movies for awhile."

"Oh my god, Mo." Katherine hugged her friend. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, thanks to the sharp eyes of my bodyguard." She smiled at Paul. "He saved me from being swept up off the street. You can thank your bodyguard for the great shot of Rex slapping you.—definitely a picture your attorney will be most happy to get a copy of."

"Bodyguard? I don't have a bodyguard."

"Oh honey, you've had a bodyguard since you decided to move back in with that sleaze. I trusted Rex Holland about as far as I could throw him and brought in protection for both of us." She grinned and motioned for the Hulk to come forward. "Meet Tim. He and his partner have been your shadow for several weeks."

Holy crap. Someone had followed her around town and she had no idea. Goosebumps ran across Katherine's shoulders. It was weird to think of someone knowing your every move when you left your house and you were oblivious to it.

But what was scarier was Rex's threat to take care of her, too. She'd blown it off as another one of his rash comments. "I think I need to sit down." An arm slipped around her waist and she recognized Corin's scent.

\* \* \* \*

"We're getting married."



Blaine made the announcement with a straight face, but Katherine couldn't control the fit of giggles that resulted from it. The buzz in her head from all the alcohol didn't cloud her thinking enough to bite on that.

Looking over at Monique, she saw her friend's head nod up and down in agreement with her date's statement. "Yeah, right. And I didn't just get a court settlement that will keep me in style from my cheating, scum-bag ex-husband." They really must think she was drunk to fall for their joke.

Another fit of giggles consumed Katherine, but at the look on both their faces, the laughter tapered off. Holy shit, they were serious. Monique was drunker than her. What the hell, she was a big girl and if she wanted to hitch up with one of her boys, who was Katherine to try and stop her, especially when her world had its own rosy glow because of the guy sitting beside her? But marry him? No way.

She glanced over at Corin and managed to smile instead of roaring with laughter. He really was a sweetie and she was more than content to see how long their relationship would run, but marriage...no way.

The past few weeks had brought a lot of changes to her life. Rex's aborted attempt to have Monique murdered had resulted in his arrest when the man he hired for the job spilled his guts to the police. Rex's trial was set to begin the first of January and she'd have to stay in town to support Monique.

She'd also filed the assault charges against Rex for slapping her when she confronted him at his bimbo hookup, as Detective Horner suggested. But thankfully, James had worked out a deal with Rex's attorney that if she dropped the charges, Rex would sign the divorce papers giving an equal split to their assets. It took all of about a second for her to agree to that arrangement. Let his fool for an attorney think that would help him beat the attempted murder charge.

"You don't have to look so shocked." Monique listed in her chair, almost falling out and Corin reached over and helped her back up. It was a good thing one of the group could hold their booze or they'd all be falling down drunk, instead of just three of them.

"Let's make a toast to the most beautiful woman in the world." Blaine poured liberally from the champagne bottle he pulled out of the bucket next to their table. "Damn." He signaled to the waitress for another bottle when the one in his hand only deposited a few drops into his glass.

Katherine watched in amazement as Monique dabbed at her eyes with a paper napkin. Her friend hadn't shed tears at the thought of any of her previous marriages. Unsure if it was the moment or the alcohol, but knew she wanted to find out, Katherine leaned across the table, "I need a trip to the ladies room, care to join me?"

"Nope." Monique snuggled her head on Blaine's shoulder. "I'm fine."

So much for brilliant ideas. Katherine emptied the glass of champagne in front of her and held it out for a refill.

Another empty bottle of champagne later and shots of something that Katherine couldn't remember the name of, they were all at City Hall and she and Corin stood behind the happy couple when they requested the forms for a marriage license. The clerk squinted at them for a moment and shrugged her shoulders, handing two sets of forms across the counter.

"But we only need one." Katherine tried to hand the other set back, but the clerk walked away.

Halfway through the questions, Monique pushed the paper away and stood up. "I can't do this."

"What?" A pale-faced Blaine looked at his prospective bride. "I'm with you, babe, even if this was your idea." He pushed back from the table and the gap-toothed grin spread sunshine. "I'm glad you came to our senses."

Disappointment surged through Katherine. She'd adjusted to the idea of a wedding and being a bridesmaid...again. "So, who the hell is getting married?"

Monique squinted in her direction. "Guess it'll have to be you."

"Me?"

"Yeah, why don't you and Corin tie the knot? I mean you may as well be married. You're inseparable anyway."

Katherine turned and faced Corin working hard to eliminate the double vision of his face, "What do you think?"

"I like the idea. If you're game, I am."

"Why not? Where's that blank set of forms?" Helpful Blaine laid the papers on the table. Humming *I'm Getting Married in the Morning*, Katherine attempted to focus as she answered the questions and signed her name. Too bad this was such a blur. If they waited a few hours, she might sober up. After all, wasn't a gal supposed to remember her wedding?

\* \* \* \*

Lord, who hired the mariachi band to march through her head? If she didn't move for several days, the pain might ease up. What the hell did she drink to create a killer headache of this magnitude and why did she drink it?

Oh yeah, to celebrate her freedom. Monique had insisted they celebrate her divorce and the celebration had ended up at one of the clubs that had a minimum bottle requirement. They consumed several bottles of champagne. A fuzzy memory of shooters floated through her mind. Were they tequila or ouzo? She never drank that shit, so why last night?

"Shit." The attempt to sit up ended with her head back on the pillow. They were toasting Monique and Blaine's decision to get married. Was there a wedding?

She placed her hands up to her face and something hard and heavy hit her chin. Lowering her hands, she saw a thick gold band encircling the ring finger on her left hand. Her mind danced around foggy memories of a wedding ceremony, only the bride wasn't Monique.

"Holy crap." Katherine turned her head cautiously and viewed the top of Corin's head peeking from under the covers. She and Corin had been the ones standing in front of the Elvis impersonator saying, "I do."

This had to earn her the Idiot of the Year Award, or at the very least, a Dumb Brittany Spears Moment Award. Well, like the shortly married pop star, she too could get a quickie divorce. The difference here, she'd hold the record for shortest time between marriages to go with it.

Slipping from the bed, Katherine went into the bathroom and splashed cold water on her face. The pale face in the mirror stared back at her accusingly.

*Think. Think. What are you going to do? You've been living with the guy for several weeks.*

*I know, maybe I should give it a chance.*

*No, he's young enough to be your son.*

*But he makes me feel so good.*

She slid down to the floor and rested her back against the large marble tub that took up half the room. Bracing her head on her knees, the tears flowed. She'd really fucked up this time.

"Katherine?" Corin stood in the doorway looking concerned. "Are you all right, honey?"

Honey. He called her honey like he really cared, but he had to be as drunk as her last night. Did he realize what they'd done? "I'm sorry."

"For what?" He appeared genuinely confused. "For marrying me?"

"You know?" Relief filled her. If he remembered and wasn't freaking, then maybe they could fix this mess together.

"Come here." Corin reached out a hand and when she placed hers in his, he pulled her up and led her to the bedroom. He sat down on the edge of the bed and pulled her onto his lap. "I remember every detail."

"Do you feel tricked?"

"Never. Is that the problem? Do you feel tricked?"

A swish released the breath she'd been holding. "Foolish. I feel foolish."

"Don't feel foolish and if anyone was tricked it was you. When Monique suggested we get married instead of her and Blaine, I jumped at the idea." He hugged her closer and kissed the top of her head. "I saw it as my opportunity to get you to commit."

"I committed when I agreed to move in with you."

"You committed to the 'now' and I wanted commitment to the forever. I'm aware of your hang-up about our ages, but that doesn't matter to me."

"But...but..."

"No buts. You're my wife now and I hope you give our lives together a fair chance." Corin eased her away and looked into her eyes. "Katherine, I don't need your money or your connections to the Hollywood crowd. I need your love and the chance to prove that love isn't based around the dates on a birth certificate. I love you and I'm a forever type guy."

He loved her and there was no doubt that she loved him...all of him. Laughter bubbled up in Katherine's throat as she realized she had the opportunity to continue to have the hottest sex in her life and grow as a woman, no matter how old she lived to be.

Sure, things could change down the road, but for now, she had a hell of a good ride ahead. Besides, she always believed in Fairy Tales and forever being just that. In today's world, too many people thought forever was only as long as anything lasted.

\* \* \* \*

"I've come up with a brilliant idea."

Monique rubbed her hands in glee and Katherine knew whatever was coming would be good. "And that would be?"

"We're going to start a Cougar Club." The cat like smile spread across Monique's face. "We're going to reach out to other women who wonder about relationships with younger men."

Sometimes Monique did come up with an idea that wasn't all about her. This one had possibilities. There were times, even now in her marriage to Corin, that age came into play and having women in the same boat so to speak, to talk with would be a great way to get ideas about what to do. "Just how are we going to accomplish this?"

"The internet. We're going to host an internet loop for women over forty who enjoy younger men. It can be for fun like me, or a more serious situation like yours. We can benefit from each other's experiences."

"I like the idea, Mo, but I'm not ready to have my name splashed all over the internet."

"Don't be silly. We'll use internet handles. I'll be Bosscougar..."

Katherine giggled, "Imagine that." The comment earned her a glare.

"And you can be Cublover. Does that fit or what?"

"You hit the nail on the head with that one. I do love my cub. Get it set up and send me the link. This Cublover has to run. Promised the cub I'd be home early to give him some love before he has to go back to school."

"I still can't believe he's training to become a chef. Next thing you'll tell me is the two of you are opening a restaurant."

Katherine laughed and kissed her friend's cheek. Monique shouldn't be too surprised then, when she and Corin made the announcement about the restaurant after he graduated. "Later." She called back over her shoulder. "Don't forget the Cougar Club."

We hoped you enjoyed this erotic romance by Lizzie T. Leaf. Be sure you keep an eye out for the further exploits of the Cougar Club as they seek out their cubs.

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