

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ELLORA'S CAVE
Quickies

ADDICTED

Lisa
Renee
Jones

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ADDICTED

Lisa Renee Jones

Chapter One

Samantha Reynolds wanted to get laid.

The problem was her soon-to-be husband, David Alcoid, wasn't who she had in mind to do the laying. In truth, she had David's interest in mind. Whatever this itch was that consumed her, it needed to be scratched before she walked down the aisle. Especially since sex with David wasn't exactly stellar.

Music filled the air around her, mingling with the mumbling of her friends as they settled into their evening of celebration at one of Austin's hot spot, *Club Q*. Samantha had dressed the part of wild city girl. Her black skirt was shorter than her usual style and her velvet button-down vest cut too low for David's tastes, but then that was half the appeal in wearing the outfit. Nudging a lock of long, blonde hair behind her ear, she reached for her drink.

Tonight was about naughty fun.

There were five friends in total, including her, involved in the evening's agenda. Already two of them were missing from their high table, whisked away by men before they hardly sat down. Samantha liked that there were only a few women hanging together. It was the perfect bachelorette party. Samantha hadn't wanted a big, out of control, crazy event with too many women and not enough men. Those kinds of parties only led to catfights, bad attitudes and hurt feelings.

Sipping from her straw, she hit the empty point. She needed another drink. Swiveling slightly in her chair, she wrapped her hand around her now empty glass. It was drink two. She rarely passed one. The direction of her thoughts had her desperate for a third. Was it so terrible of her to want one last orgasm not from the bedside vibrator? Probably. Yes. It was. She was, after all, getting married. Bachelorette party is not another term for get-laid-one-last-time-party. The night was to celebrate her

marriage. To have fun with friends. Not mourn a future without great sex. If she went home with some guy, everyone would look at her like she was scum.

But that didn't stop her from wanting. From wishing.

She had one week from today to find peace with her upcoming marriage. One week to come to terms with a life that would be happy in all ways but one. There would be no passion. No big 'O'.

It was a reality she thought she had dealt with. Acceptance had been complete when that ring had been slipped on her finger. She'd seen what a relationship that consumed from the inside out did to a person. It took control and became everything you were. The need to be with the person, to feel their touch, to taste that unique flavor of shared desire.

It was addictive.

And painful.

When David had proposed, her answer had been immediate. He was everything a man was supposed to be to a woman. Dependable, handsome, a good businessman. He was even her father's protégé, working for the family law firm. And of course, her father thought David walked on water. Everything was great. Wonderful. Terrific. Life without great sex wouldn't be so bad.

She'd get a new vibrator and find a good hiding place. The old one was getting worn out. It would be a wedding gift from her to her.

Kelly, Samantha's best friend, elbowed her. "Are you ready for some football," she sang the age-old theme song, and then pointed one long pink-tipped finger toward the doorway. "Looks like we have several of the UT players here tonight."

Samantha blinked, and eyed the three big linebacker-looking guys wearing jerseys who had just made an entrance. "You mean those *kids*? They are too young and too big for me. Anyone who looks like they might squash me is a definitive no. Besides, how do you know they are UT players, not fans?"

"Unlike you, I watch football. Middle guy is Matt Turner. Made some big plays today." She nudged Samantha. "Wouldn't mind if he made a few more on me. Besides, he's twenty-two. I'm only three years older. He's not too young or too big in my book."

Samantha reached for her strawberry daiquiri, and blew a wayward strand of blonde hair from her eye. "I guess. Not what I would go for."

Kelly's big brown eyes were fixed on the football guy. "Right. You like men like David."

Her words surprised Samantha. Kelly didn't like David but rarely made it so obvious. Alcohol, however, always made Kelly a bit more vocal. Samantha turned a hard stare on her. "What does *that* mean?"

Kelly made a dramatic flip of her long, sandy-brown hair, and fixed Samantha in a knowing look. "Oh pleazzzzzz. We both know David doesn't do it for you. It's your father who has a hard-on for him."

There were some things a bride-to-be just didn't admit. Not even to her best friend. "David is very good to me."

"How many drinks have you had?" Kelly laughed as she asked the question.

"Not enough to take your attitude tonight," she said, only half-joking. To make her point she took another long sip of her straw.

Melinda, a Cher look-a-like, minus the bad clothes, grabbed Kelly's arm. "Yum if I ever saw it. Football players at five o'clock."

Samantha rolled her eyes. "What is it with you guys and jocks? I've never understood your obsession."

Melinda grinned. "Endurance baby. Endurance." She eyed Kelly. "Let's go stake our claim before someone else does."

Kelly's expression said she wanted to. But like a good best friend and bridesmaid she turned to Samantha, a question in her eyes. Samantha's other two friends, Tina and

Ellen, were already on the dance floor . Before Kelly could speak, Samantha waved her on. "Go. Get some jock action. I'll be fine."

Kelly studied Samantha for a moment. "Be back soon."

"I doubt it," Samantha laughed.

Leaning toward her, Kelly put her lips next to Samantha's ear. "Does he make you feel what Eric did?" she whispered. "Does he make you hot, and hungry, and begging for more?"

Samantha stiffened at the sound of his name, and opened her mouth to respond not even sure what she was going to say. Before she could form words, Kelly straightened and looked Samantha in the eye.

"Think about it. Think about it real hard. It's not too late."

* * * * *

Samantha sat staring into the crowd seeming to watching her friends dancing and flirting, but not really seeing them. Instead, she was lost in thought. Anticipating what her future was to be. Wishing for the passion of the past just one more time. Allowing her thoughts to drift to Eric, and a place she hadn't thought of in far too long.

A place that was dangerous for her future.

He was the drug she needed. The love of her life that had taken control and propelled her into a passionate, happy life. He had been her addiction.

"Samantha," a deep sensual voice said from behind her.

She didn't immediately turn. Afraid he would really be there. Afraid he wouldn't. Had her mind worked some strange magic, conjuring the very man she had been thinking about?

And then his hand was on her shoulder. Like a shock wave, one made of heat, lust, and seduction, her body came alive. Her heart raced, her skin heated. Warmth spread

into her stomach, and down her hips. It was as if he had made a permanent imprint on her soul.

A deep breath, and she turned. He looked the same, yet different. Always a cowboy, his soft jeans clung to muscular thighs and defined waist. His black button-down shirt was perfectly starched. His light brown hair was just a little too long to be considered conservative. He was older, yes, but more mature beyond his years. Confident, as usual, but with a new edge. Something she didn't quite understand.

"Eric."

"It's been a long time," he said softly.

"Three years," she said a bit too fast. As if she had been counting. She hadn't. Not past one year. That was when she had given up on him.

"Too long," he said, sliding his hand down her shoulder in a slow caress. "You look amazing."

She knew she should tell him not to touch her, but she didn't. Couldn't. So she tried to go on the attack. "How did you know I was here?"

His brow inched upward. Cocky. He'd always been good at that. She'd always found it sexy. Still did. "Who said I did?"

He removed his arm, and she felt the loss way too much. In the back of her mind, she had feared the problem with David was her, not him. That maybe she had lost her ability to feel passion. Now she knew, in a matter of minutes with Eric, that feeling *was* the problem.

"No games, Eric."

He smiled. "I hear you're getting married."

Bells went off in her head. Now it all made sense. Her friends leaving her alone. Kelly's questions. "I am."

His expression was indiscernible, but the heat between them was not. It was like a mist in the air, showering them with its presence. "Sounds like a reason to share a drink."

"Why are you here?"

His eyes locked with hers. The look in his eyes was direct. Hot. "You know why I'm here."

No, she didn't. They had parted with animosity. He was tired of trying to live up to her father's expectations. She didn't want him to, but it didn't matter. He came from a family with nothing. She came from money. Her father pointed out the difference at every opportunity. Eric hadn't handled it well. But word traveled and Samantha knew for a fact, Eric had joined his family business and turned it around. Horse breeding had turned into big money.

But even with the playing field even, he'd stayed away. And it hurt.

She lashed out. Anger from the past resurfacing. Mad that he hadn't loved her enough to deal with her father. "What? You want one last good fuck before I'm married?"

His eyes flashed with something hard to read. Before she could try and decipher it, he leaned forward, hand sliding on the table in front of her. He leaned in close. He smelled the same. His scent had always turned her on. She didn't know why, but it had. No. It did. God, she wanted him. She was the one who wanted one last fuck. And he was insurance it would be damn good.

Eyes locked with hers, face near, he said, "What if I do?"

Turnaround was fair play. She should have known not to put him on the spot. Eric had never been one to back down. But then, maybe subconsciously, she had known as much.

Life was short. Hers as a single woman had one week remaining. That little factor was enough to dictate her response. She sucked in a silent breath and then let it out, reaching for courage. "Your place or mine?"

For instant his face registered surprise before he wiped his expression clean. "Mine. I'm in the hotel right across the street."

"Your place it is."

She started to slide off the barstool but Eric took over. He'd always been one who liked control, and she had no doubt he was reminding her as much. Not that she minded. His form of control had always been more than pleasurable.

His arm slid around her waist, pulling her close, pressing his hard body against her softer one. As he eased her to her feet, he slowly eased her body down his. She hadn't felt such an electrifying charge since the last time she had been with him. No one did this to her but him. Already that little ache between her thighs, the one signaling arousal, had formed. Her stomach had butterflies, and her nipples were tingling and hard.

For the briefest of moments she wanted to sink into him body and soul. Everything in her cried to out to him and the need to be close was so urgent she could have crawled under his very skin. As her breath caught in her throat, her hands went to his upper arms. Slowly, her eyes lifted and met his.

In them she saw what she felt. The heat of a shared need, urgent, raw, and almost primal. But it went beyond the physical. It was like two parts of one whole coming back together. Her body ached with a need to join with his. She wanted him, and there was no fear or hesitation over her physical need.

As long as she kept things strictly physical...

The thought was like a slap. She diverted her gaze, quickly guarding her feelings. No. Denying them. She brusquely shoved them aside. Relentlessly, she pushed beyond her emotional urges. She had to keep this real. They were going to have sex. Nothing more. She was marrying another man. One who hadn't deserted her.

Eric would fuck her like a hero. Maybe getting him out of her system would allow her to enjoy David more. If so, a night with Eric might just save her from her sexless,

orgasm-free existence. He would perform like the sex god he was, and then she would kiss his way-too-fine ass goodbye.

She lifted her eyes to his, and fixed him in a cold stare. "What are we waiting for?"

* * * * *

Eric slid his hand over the curve of one perfect, full butt cheek, his eyes locked with hers. "Let's get out of here."

Samantha didn't speak, but her body said it all. Warm and ready, she pressed close to him, and he knew all too well she was melting. He took his hand over her smaller one, and reached for her purse where it hung on the edge of her chair. She accepted it, shoving it over her shoulder.

There was no need to tell her friends she was leaving. They already knew what Samantha didn't. He was here to claim her. To make her his for now and forever. If he had to make love to her all night long to prove it, he'd be more than obliged. But knowing Samantha it was going to take a wild ride to get past her shell. He'd have to fuck her brains out before he'd ever get to the slow lovemaking.

A smile played on his lips.

It was going to be a long, hard night.

Chapter Two

Eric slid the key into the slot on his hotel door, his arms enclosing Samantha between his hips and the wooden surface. God how he wanted to slide his hands around her hips, and press his cock into her nice ass. Anticipation raced through his veins making him was rock-hard, and more than ready. Yet...he knew he had to play the game right. He'd start by giving her the control. No matter how much he wanted to take it.

He dipped his head near her neck, inhaling in the sweet smell of jasmine. Like in his dreams. The years had been packed with them. Images so vivid sometimes he swore he woke with that very smell clinging to his skin.

Eric shoved the handle down on the door, and pushed it open. With a flip of the wrist he turned on the entrance light.

Samantha stepped forward, and walked into the room. He followed, but he didn't bother with the light. The curtains were drawn, and the moon was high and bright. She stopped at the foot of the bed, windows to her back as she turned to face him. Her long hair fell over her shoulders, sexy and a bit wild. A sultry smile played on her lips. Her eyes danced with mischief. The kind he knew all too well.

She wanted to play. And fuck.

Good, he thought, as the door shut behind him. The faster he was inside her the better. Besides, it was going to take a couple hard core orgasms to make her soften. He knew his Samantha. She'd use her knowledge of his sexual preferences as a weapon. Everything he wanted and needed she'd provide without hesitation. That was, until he reached for her heart. Which he fully intended to do.

He stood by the entrance, watching her. Waiting. Her finger wiggled at him. "Whatcha waiting for?" she purred. "I thought you wanted to fuck?"

She'd already started the game. He loved when she talked dirty, and she knew it. Something about her sweet exterior mixed with a little four-letter conversation lit him up like a match. And the hotter he let her play this out, the better the burn later. Once she came down from the sizzle, she melted like butter.

Taking a step toward her, he watched as her fingers moved to the buttons of her vest. The closer he got to her, the lower her hand moved. Stopping so close a mere step separated them, he watched as she shoved aside the velvet, exposing a bright red bra. He loved red, and his first reaction was to touch. His hands slid beneath her top and shoved it off her shoulders. It pooled to the floor, but he hardly noticed. Touching her was like a lightning charge. For an instant he considered ripping her clothes off and taking her hard and fast. Just to get the edge off.

But before he could act, she took a step backwards. Then another. Barely out of his reach. Enough to ensure he restrained himself. His eyes went to hers, and he knew she'd just taken the control back. She'd known he was slipping.

Samantha pointed at the bed. "Sit."

Slowly, he gave in, and perched on the end of the mattress. Containing the amount of pure lust coursing through his body wasn't an easy task. But then, he knew there was a reward coming soon. Samantha naked, and beneath him. Or on top of him. Any damn way was fine by him. The wait was almost over. That realization comforted where the rawness of need might otherwise demand action. He watched as she reached for her skirt and unzipped it. Then, the material slid down her curvy hips, and Eric felt sizzling anticipation of what came next. Of seeing those little silk panties.

His eyes went to the ground, and then made a slow slide up her sexy legs. Until he came to his destination. For all of two seconds, his eyes lingered on the red satin between those lush thighs. In a quick move that took him by surprise, she slid them off her body. His eyes locked on the dark triangle between her legs. Eric smiled. He'd been the first man to know she wasn't a true blonde. As sure as his cock throbbed with the reward of being first, knowing he hadn't been the last also burned a hole in his heart.

But there was no time to think of such things. Her hands slid up her body to the sides of her breasts. She palmed them, and then dropped her hands. The red satin bra parted and she shrugged it from her shoulders. His eyes watched the movement of those full, round breasts with absolute lust. There was no waiting. He had to have her.

Eric started to stand, intent on filling his hands with her beauty. Suddenly, her black high heel was between his legs and hit the bed, just barely missing the prize jewels. "I make tonight's rules," she said. "You move when I say you move."

His hands clenched the bedcover, forcing restraint. He so wanted to reach up and touch her leg. Hell, to slide his hand right up her thigh and slip his fingers... "I want to feel how wet you are," he said.

"Who says I am?"

A slow smile turned up the corners of his lips. "I do." And he knew opportunity when he saw it. He wanted a confirmation. "Does he make you drip like I do, Samantha?"

Her eyes met his, and for just an instant he saw a flash of vulnerability. He had his answer in that moment. No one made her hot the way he did. Not even the man she had agreed to call her husband.

Abruptly, she pushed her foot off the bed and stood there, naked except for that damn sexy pair of strappy sandals. Her control was back in place. "When I turn back around, you better be naked."

She gave him a view of her perfect ass. Shit. She was punching his buttons in a major way. Making him pay for bringing up her husband-to-be. They both knew he was a butt man. He liked fucking her from behind. He liked touching her ass. Hell, he liked kissing it. And now he had to stand there and undress while he looked at it and not touch.

He didn't stand. Couldn't. Not yet. The urge to bend her over and slide right in was simply too immediate. His shirt came off without much effort. In fact, he didn't even

remember removing it. Then his shoes. Unbuttoning his jeans was like relief. He was near bursting. Standing he shoved his pants and underwear down in one swift move.

Samantha turned, her eyes meeting his for a split second before dropping. She ran her tongue along her bottom lip. "Hmmm," she said. "I always thought you had a big cock. I forgot just how big."

She walked toward him, and he felt the heat of anticipation of her touch. And the torture of her teases. She stopped several steps in front of him and motioned him forward. "You got to inspect the goods. Now it's my turn."

How much more he could take he wasn't sure, but he did as she said. He took a long step forward, his eyes locking on those inch-high, tight nipples. His mouth watered. His eyes lifted to find her gaze on his face.

"You like what you see?"

"You know I do, baby," he said, voice husky with passion. "I've always loved your body."

She bit her bottom lip and looked at his cock. Her hand reached but stopped in midair. Instead, one finger trailed the ridge around the head making his erection jumped. "Touch me," he said.

"I am." And then she started walking around him, stopping behind him. She pressed her breasts into his back, lips on his skin, and hands cupping his ass. She was everywhere. She gave him her body, touching him top to bottom. But she also teased him by denying him the touch he wanted.

Eric's hand went to his erection. "I really want you," he said, intending to turn. This round of the games was over.

Just then Samantha dropped to her knees. Teeth scraped his buttocks, and then her fingers found his sac. His eyes pressed shut, pleasure rocketing through his body. Her hands were everywhere, and so was her tongue. She licked and scraped a trail down his leg, and around his hip, until she was in front of him.

On her knees, beneath his cock.

Chapter Three

Samantha's hand closed around Eric's hard length, and she focused on the only thing that seemed important. Pleasing him. She needed to. It felt necessary, and right, and...addictive. His body was perfect, and this was her night to live. To play. To enjoy.

Her tongue touched the tip of his cock, and he sucked in a breath, telling her he enjoyed what she offered. He sucked in a breath, and she reveled in his response. And in the control it told her she had. This was about way more than physical need. It was about power.

Hers.

She needed to prove she could fuck him and leave. No emotional baggage. No regrets. No tears. She, Samantha Reynolds, could sleep with Eric Fletcher and then walk away. It would be liberating.

As she slid the soft head of his cock into her mouth, and tasted the salty presence of his arousal, she moaned. Because the need to take him deeper, to pull him into her mouth and enjoy all he had to offer, was unique to only Eric. The man she was about to call her husband never made her feel this way. A tiny part of her mind screamed for her to run away from the man who threatened the world she had now created.

Thoughts washed away in a tide of yearning. Her tongue slid along his length, back and forth, and then all around. And as she squeezed the base of his erection, thumb stroking the underside, she again drew him between her lips. His hands went to her head, lacing into her hair, and gently trying to push himself further into her mouth.

She pumped her hand, starting a slow rhythm, and loving the way his hips moved to the motions. Her tongue slid along the underside of his cock, and she inched downward, taking more and more of him. And suddenly, she was sucking and licking all at once. He was thrusting into her, and she slid closer, one of her hands reaching

around to his ass. The action was like providing an anchor. She could take his thrust more fully.

He was close to coming. She could taste the proof and hear his heavy moans of passion as he drove his cock into her mouth. It had always turned her on to know she made him like this. To feel the heat of his body as it pulsed between her lips. And then he came, driving deep into her mouth, shuddering. Her hand squeezed the tight muscle of his ass at the same time her lips pressed hard on his cock. Sucking every last drop of his pleasure into her mouth.

His body slowed, the muscles loosening. The grip on her head easing. Suddenly, her power was gone. Uncertainty over her actions came quick. She'd acted too rashly. Allowing him to come had taken off his edge. Now, either she had to give him the control or she had to get the hell out of here.

It was time to leave.

His hands, which had been firmly planted in her hair, now moved in a soft swirl of a motion. Her nipples tingled in reaction. She so wanted him. Maybe she'd done this right after all. She'd made him come. Now she would go. No orgasm for her. No memory to rush back to when married life was sexless.

She eased away from him, letting both her hands move to the floor behind her. Looking up at him, she smiled. "That was a fun little interlude. Now I better get back to my party."

* * * * *

Eric wasn't going to give her time to think, let alone move. If she thought for one damn minute she was about to escape, she was crazy.

He was on his knees, leaning over her, hands on her breasts before she could blink. With her arms behind her, she was not in a position to resist. Not that she tried. The minute he pinched both of her plump, red nipples, she moaned, arching her back.

Clearly, Samantha was already lost to pleasure, and her need for release.

He pressed his lips against her skin, and trailed kisses up her neck, until he found her lips. He lingered a breath away from claiming her mouth. She'd avoid kissing him, and he knew why. Samantha wanted this to be about sex and nothing more. An impossible task.

"I want to taste you, baby." His hand slid down her soft skin and cupped her ass with a firm grip, pulling her tight against his body. She gasped. "Damn, you feel good," he said, barely brushing his lips across hers. "Even better than I remember."

"Eric," she whispered. "I—"

He cut off her words with his mouth, sliding his tongue past her lips in a slow caress. Savoring the moment with every fiber of his being. Finally, kissing her again. Kissing the only woman he'd ever loved. The one he'd foolishly left. For a split second she didn't respond. He knew she wanted to hate him, but he also knew she couldn't. With a low moan, she sank into the kiss, her mouth slanting to take him more fully.

She wanted this as much as he did.

His hands moved along the curves of her body. In one moment, he was soft and gentle, his tongue moving in a slow tale of seduction. In the next, he felt wild, almost out of control. This was *his* woman. He cupped her ass, and stood. She clung to him and they kissed passionately, almost wild with their hunger for one another.

Moments later, Eric urged her onto the bed. Side by side, they faced one another. He pulled her leg over his hip. His cock throbbed with readiness. Only Samantha could do that to him. And he knew why—because she was his everything. All the games, the sexual foreplay and agendas, were no longer an option. He loved her. He wanted her. And Eric knew he had to tell her. At the least, show her.

Nibbling her lips, he brushed hair from her eyes. "I missed you, Samantha."

She pulled back enough to look him in the eyes—searching. "Don't talk. Just touch."

"Samantha—"

She cut him off with her mouth. Warm and demanding her lips touched his, her body pressing closer. Suddenly, she was pushing him onto his back, using her leg as leverage. Her hand wrapped around his cock, and guided it inside her. The impact was so intense – so potent – he lost his breath as she impaled herself on his length.

For long moments, she simply sat atop him, breasts thrust high in the air, and hair wild around her shoulders. She was absolutely fucking gorgeous. And it only got better because she started moving, palms settling on his stomach. It was the beginning of a slow, seductive rhythm.

She ground her hips against his, leaning forward so that her clit slid along his pelvic bone. Eric thrust as she rolled her hips. Once. Twice. Again. Her eyes fluttered shut, and he watched her head roll backwards. And he took the opportunity. He sat up, hands sliding up her back. One hand inching into her hair as her hands slipped around his neck. He kissed her a hunger born of a need to claim, and to possess.

No matter how hard she tried to escape he wasn't letting her. This was about more than sexual gratification.

His tongue delved deep, stroking with a passion bred of love. He couldn't get enough of her. And the way she kissed him, with starving urgency, proved she needed this as much as he did. His hands slid down her sides, and pressed her hips down. Buried deep inside her he moved side to side, and all around. They clung to one another, kissing and touching, and yet he felt he still wasn't close enough.

Eric flipped her over on her back, no longer allowing her the control of being on top. Settling between her legs, he kissed her even as he pushed deeper inside the wet, hot confines of her body. God, she felt so good. So perfect. Lifting upward, she pressed her breasts into his chest, and arched her hips. She cried out when he met the action with a thrust, pushing hard into her depth. Her legs lifted, and one of her feet settled around his ass.

"Eric...Eric –"

His name on her lips sent him over the edge. A wild frenzy of needs erupted. Over and over, he plunged into her and pulled back. If he could have crawled under her skin, he would have. Hand under her ass, he rotated her hips upward, tilting her pelvis and rocking.

Back and forth, back and forth, until... "Oh God, Eric," she cried.

And he knew what came next. She stiffed. One beat. Two. Then the spasms started, rippling through his cock with brilliant pleasure. He moved. Or maybe he didn't. He couldn't think. He just felt. And then he shuttered, and reached ultimate release, spilling himself deep in her core. His eyes squeezed shut, and he lost his breath with the absoluteness of the release.

Long moments later, he stilled, his weight held on his elbows. He raised his head and stared down at Samantha. Her eyes were heavy from the potency of her release. Her lips parted, and appeared full from being kissed. And he said what he'd come to say. Or at least part of it.

"I missed you, Samantha."

Chapter Four

Samantha blinked, staring up at Eric where he still rested on top of her. Had Eric just said he missed her? For several long seconds, she simply stared at him. Processing.

Part of her wanted to cry out in joy, and tell him she loved him too. For so very long she had waited on him. She'd wanted him to come for her. But after months and months, and too many tears to count, dreaming had ended.

But a night of passion and memories didn't change what was past and present. She'd lived the pain he'd created and survived it. She couldn't do it again. And another emotion stirred, ripe with its presence. Anger. He had no right to make such a claim. To walk into her life and complicate it was crap. For three long years she'd not seen hide nor hair of him.

She forced herself into ice princess mode, ignoring the knife-like jab in her heart. "It's called the aftershock of an orgasm. Happens to the best of us. Morning light is the usual cure."

"Three years hasn't cured me. I doubt morning will."

"Yet you had no trouble staying away?" she asked before she could stop herself.

"I never intended to be gone this long."

She laughed. Bitter. "It just happened."

"Don't say it like that. I was foolish to leave in the first place. But there are things I need to explain. Give me a chance. I swear I wanted everything to be perfect when I came for you."

"Perfect for whom?" she demanded, wishing he'd get off her. He was still inside her and it made rational thought near impossible. "For you? For my father? I know you don't mean for me because I was alone." She shoved at his chest. "Get off me."

"Not yet," he said. "You weren't alone. You're getting married."

"Because you left me," she bit out angrily. "Get off."

He didn't budge. "Do you love him?"

She needed away from him. "It's none of your business."

"You don't."

Her hands tightened on his arms. "I didn't say that!"

A smile slid onto his lips. "You don't have to."

She pressed her eyes shut fighting back an onslaught of emotions. His lips were instantly on hers. She tried to resist, but couldn't. A deep caress of his tongue, and she was lost in a soft, tender kiss.

When he raised his head again, he said, "I love you, Samantha."

"Stop saying that," she whispered, but when his lips brushed hers she accepted them.

"Why?"

"It means nothing," she said. "The past is over."

"It doesn't have to be."

"It does," she insisted. "Can you get off me? Talking would be much easier if I wasn't trapped."

Eric repeated his words and ignored her request. "The past doesn't have to be over."

"It does. It is. This was about one last —"

"Fuck?"

Something about the choice of words was like a sharp jab at her. Samantha shut her eyes trying to hide her feelings.

"Your word, not mine," he reminded her.

Samantha's eyes opened and she fixed him in a probing stare. What did that mean? She didn't understand her feelings or his agenda. "I told you no games, Eric."

His lips brushed her cheek, and then he pulled back enough to make eye contact. "No games." He ran his finger downward, easing his body so that he could trail the center of her chest. Then he touched the tip to one nipple and began to tease it. "Cross my heart."

She reached for his hand. "Stop. This is just another way to play games."

He tweaked the peak harder and she moaned. "You like it when I pinch your nipples. I'm simply proving how well I know you, Samantha."

Pleasure radiated through her body. She did like this. Too much. Her other nipple begged for attention. As if he knew her thoughts, he tweaked it. Inching downward, his cock slid from her body. She wanted to call him back but, then, his teeth scraped her nipple and the words were gone.

He bit down on the aching peak with just the right amount of pressure. Eric was rough, nipping and suckling with just enough force to give her a painful bliss. Just the right amount of pressure to set her on fire. Indeed, he knew just what she liked. Her fingers laced into his hair. The pleasure he offered compelled her to live in the moment. Suckling, biting, licking. He teased her with such amazing perfection, she could do nothing but arch her back, and whimper.

One finger, and then two, slid along her core, and then eased inside her body. Knowing she was close to no return, she reached for reason. "This is only sex."

He moved, sliding her legs over his shoulders. "No." The tone of his voice was low. Intimate. "And I'll prove it." His tongue lapped at her clit. "I'll make love to you until you believe me."

Her hips bucked with the contact and her head pressed hard against the pillows, pleasure alive in every one of her nerve endings. "This...changes nothing." The words barely came out.

"What if it does?" he asked, and closed his mouth over her nub and suckled.

She should protest, but it was too late. She was lost...

* * * * *

Samantha blinked open her eyes, feeling the first light of the new day with a warm, secure feeling. And then a jolt of cold, hard, male reality.

Eric.

He was behind her, body wrapped around hers, their legs entwined. They'd slept like this often in the past. It was both familiar and frightening. Eric was everything her current world wasn't. With him things were sensual and intimate...and perfect.

And there was that word—perfect. A dangerous word she often used when thinking of Eric. Yet she couldn't make herself move. For just a moment, she wanted to linger. To feel the man she had missed for so very long. Very slowly she sucked in a breath, absorbing the soft, spicy scent of his nearness. She'd never meant to wake up with him. This was about one last wild night not about reinventing heartache of the past.

Memories flooded her mind. Hours of making love. Why had she called it that! But deep down she knew why. It had been as if they'd been transported back in time. And she'd allowed herself to forget the game. To simply feel the moments. She'd felt loved though he'd not said the words again. With a flutter of her stomach, she knew she'd wanted him too. She was getting married to another man but she'd wanted Eric to love her.

She waited for the guilt to wash over her but it didn't come. The man she was about to marry wanted her for the perfection of the plan. They fit together like a fairy tale. Their families and their lives meshed. But they weren't in true, heartfelt, love. The kind she had convinced herself didn't exist. Once upon a time she'd thought that was what she and Eric had shared.

But if that had been true, would he have left her behind?

It was time to leave. She needed to move on with her life. This one night stand had turned into something complicated. It hadn't freed her one bit. Maybe with space it would. Yes...space.

She needed to leave.

Suddenly, he moved, and she felt a rush of panic. She hadn't figured out how to handle this yet. There was only one option. Pretend she was asleep. But his hand slid down her hip, and remaining still was difficult. His palm glided across her skin stirring arousal. Evoking passion.

He kissed her ear, nuzzled the sensitive spot behind it, and then nipped at the lobe with his teeth. Excitement slid through her body, hot and intense. Somehow, she managed to remain still...to continue to play asleep.

But then his lips brushed her neck, it felt so damn good. She found herself ever so slightly snuggling closer to him.

"Morning," he whispered.

Squeezing her already shut eyes tighter, she clung to her only avenue of escape... avoidance. It was her only true ally at this point.

She could feel him smile against her neck. "I know you're awake," he said, and laughed. Her eyes opened. And then she gasped, because he slid his very aroused body between her legs.

His cock slid back and forth, teasing her sensitive, and now very wet, core.

"I certainly am," he said. "Can you tell?"

But he didn't give her time to respond. His hands slid up her side, and he palmed her breast. She moaned, unable to hold back the response. "I need to go home," Samantha murmured, but she knew she wasn't going anywhere. Not yet.

Chapter Five

Samantha whispered the words again. "I should leave."

"No one is stopping you," Eric said, nibbling her ear again, and then pinching her nipple.

Without meaning to, she reached for his mouth, her upper body turning to allow her better access. She couldn't stop herself. It felt necessary. As if she had to kiss him. To have just one more taste. But she needed more than that. With everything female inside her, she yearned for Eric. She turned to him, one hand finding his shoulder. Instincts pressed her to maneuver her body, trying to get as close as possible. Then, he was kissing her, his tongue stroking hers with long, sensual caresses. She wasn't sure if he had claimed her mouth or she his. It didn't seem to matter. She just needed. Wanted. Had to have. Regrets, past history, and doubt were gone. What ifs slipped into the dark haze of desire.

Eric reached for her leg and pulled it over his hip, sliding his cock between her thighs, and then molding their bodies tight. The result was a funny feeling deep in her stomach. Arousal, yes. Passion, most definitely. But there was something more. His lips slid over hers and then lingered. They breathed together, holding that kiss without tongue. Just feeling the soft press of lips to lips and body to body.

Waves of thoughts, one after another, crashed down in her mind. This was what he'd made her feel in the past. So...close in a consuming, intensely private kind of joining. It was a product of more than simple lust. She felt it like an emotional eruption starting at her heart and then slowly spreading through her body. Inch by inch.

"Samantha," he whispered into her mouth, passion lacing his tone with clear precision. In that one word, her name, she heard his emotions and knew he shared in

this crazy, consuming feeling that was rocking her world. His hand moved up her back with slow, perfect pressure, molding them even closer.

And then they snapped. Like a rubber band that had been held back and let loose, they were kissing, nipping, touching. Her hands absorbed those rippling muscles even as her hips slid along the heavy presence of his arousal between her legs. Kissing her, he pushed her backwards, back against the mattress, and slid between her legs. In some far reach of her mind, she recognized his need to be on top as a power thing. This was twice he'd claimed the position when he usually preferred her on top.

But the thought was quickly forgotten.

Eric palmed her breasts and then squeezed. He pushed the two mounds together and then his tongue lapped at her nipple. Her hands went to his hair, her fingers tunneling into the soft strands. And her back arched as his tongue, teeth, and lips teased each nipple.

Samantha moaned. He would tease her until she asked. She knew him. "I want you inside me, Eric."

He looked up at her, his hands still filled with her breasts, her nipples peaked and wet from his mouth. For long moments, he stared at her, his gaze burning hot. And then, finally, he moved. His mouth claimed hers with a demanded kiss bred of something raw and alive. Possessive and fired with one stroke of the tongue after the other, she could do nothing more than submit.

Without warning, his cock slid inside her, and he sunk deep. Samantha gasped into his mouth, surprised but, oh so, thankful. This was what she needed. The absolute, utter completeness of the moment made her breath lodge in her throat. Eric tore his mouth from hers and rose up on his hands. He held himself up on his muscular arms, staring down at her again. Only this time it was to watch what his actions did to her. Slowly, he slid his cock backwards. She wanted to pull him back. Inch by inch, he tortured her. Taking what she so wanted. He stopped when just the head was inside her. Samantha arched her hips, trying to keep him from pulling all of the way out.

And then with one, hard thrust, he plunged into her, throwing his head back and letting out a guttural roar. Samantha's head pressed backwards into the pillow, her eyelids forced shut from the rocket of bliss that pounded down into the center of her body. It hit her core and then shot through the rest of her like a glass shattering.

Before she could recover, Eric started a fast rhythm. He drove into her, over and over. Samantha raised her hips, arching into him. Wanting more. Faster. Harder. Deeper. Her legs went over his calves, her hands on his nice, tight ass. Anyway, anyhow, she could try to get more because this tingling, perfect ache was building and building...and she just needed it to explode.

Suddenly, Eric lowered his body, his mouth finding hers, his chest pressing against her breast. Kissing her with hot passion even as he moved inside her. And then he rocked. Side to side, back and forth, and that little ache began to expand...

"Oh God," she murmured. "Oh..."

Samantha stiffened, ripples of unbelievable pleasure actually shaking her body. Eric continued his moves, riding her like a hero and letting her feel every, explicit piece of perfection there was to embrace.

Reality surfaced, but she was completely zapped. But she so wanted him to feel the same pleasure. With all she had, she arched into him, meeting his thrust. And thankful, he shook and shuttered, and cried out her name.

He had come, and she collapsed.

His body on top of hers, face buried inside her she felt her chest tighten. Why did things have to be like they were? Why had he left her? And why was she marrying another man? Eric was more than her addiction. He was the man she loved. And no matter how much she wanted to run, he wasn't making it easy. But somewhere deep inside she promised herself she'd be strong. Later.

Just not now.

But soon. The minute she had the opportunity, she had to leave.

Just not now.

* * * * *

An hour later, Eric shut the bathroom door, and Samantha let out a breath. Her eyes went to the clock. Noon. She couldn't believe it. How had she spent so many hours with Eric? Only it hadn't felt like a long time at all. Which meant she had failed her own test. She loved him. There was no hope of the hop in bed, have hot sex, and then *adios*. Her big ole heartache was starting all over. He'd go back to his ranch and cowboy ways. She'd marry a man who couldn't hold her attention let alone give her an orgasm.

She had only one option. Shoving the sheet aside, Samantha scrambled for her clothes.

She had to leave right now.

Before she talked herself into staying.

And *that* would be very bad.

* * * * *

Eric sat down on the edge of the bed, feeling the slap of Samantha's departure. She'd failed his test. He'd promised himself if she left when he was in that bathroom he'd let her go. Only now, faced with the reality of the empty hotel room, he wasn't finding it easy to swallow.

The writing was on the wall. He'd waited too long to come for her. Even believing she was marrying another had been hard to swallow. But then, really, it shouldn't have been. What had he been waiting for?

He should have come back for her a long time ago. But he couldn't turn back time or correct the stupidity of his youthful actions. His desire to be perfect upon his return had always led him to waiting a little longer. Maybe in the back of his mind, he'd been afraid.

Afraid of what had just happened.

So now he had to decide. Was this done or wasn't it? Did he stay or go?

Chapter Six

"Coffee?"

Samantha looked up from the case file she was pretending to study to find her assistant Vilma Rogers standing in the doorway.

"No." She tried to smile but failed. "Thanks though."

Vilma's dark brow inched upward. Short and full-figured, with a round, happy face, it took effort for her to look stern. She crossed her arms in front of her big bosom as if she might try, but then softened, showing concern instead. "No coffee? What's wrong? Pre-wedding jitters?" She moved into the room, and stopped in front of Samantha's desk. "I hardly think dealing with divorce cases right before your wedding day is motivational."

"It's my job." Samantha shrugged. "I'm a divorce attorney." She made another lame attempt at a smile trying to make her words seem as if in jest. "I help people get unmarried who shouldn't have ever done it in the first place."

Vilma's lips pursed. "Like I said, I can't believe you're working today."

"It's Monday," Samantha said. "The wedding isn't until Saturday."

Tossing her pencil on the desk, Samantha leaned back in her chair. Monday had come slow. Sunday had been filled with thoughts of Eric. And hopes. A part of her had really wanted him to show up at her doorstep. Or to call. He'd done neither.

Staying home to let her mind run wild hadn't been an option. Working on wedding plans hadn't either. "The last thing I need is more time on my hands to think or worry."

A deep voice interjected. "Which you're very good at."

David. Vilma turned a smile on him. "Well there he is. The man of the hour has arrived. I hope you're going to talk her into taking off the rest of the week. She's a ball of nerves."

He smiled at Vilma. "I tried last night on the phone, but she wouldn't listen. I thought maybe a little in person persuasion might be in order and it seems I'm correct."

Watching David move closer, Samantha held her breath. Waiting for something to happen. Anything. But there was no funny feeling in her stomach. No sizzling awareness. He was an attractive man. Tall, blond, and sun-bronzed. He kept fit and sported a muscular body as a reward. With money, confidence, and looks, most would consider him a prime catch.

Why didn't she? To her he was a logical, safe choice. He didn't make her feel what Eric did. So what did that mean? Was it good or bad?

"I'll just leave you two alone," Vilma said, and winked at David. Then she scurried from the room in a rush and shut the door behind her.

David smiled and started walking toward her. "So what's my lovely wife-to-be say to taking the rest of the day off?"

Instincts made Samantha raise her hand, stop sign fashion. She needed space. Time to think. "No. I can't. Besides, the day just started."

"I've been out of town for days." He stopped walking, and stood behind one of the guest chairs. "We could grab some coffee and then you can go do wedding stuff."

So he wasn't even going to spend the day with her if she took off. There was the making of a quality relationship. "I really can't."

"Why?" he asked.

"I have a lunch meeting." With Kelly, but he didn't have to know that.

He smiled. "Cancel it. You're a bride."

"Not yet, I'm not." She didn't like it when he did that...that thing he did. Acting like her father. Telling her what to do. "No." Her response came a bit too sharp.

His brow inched upward and his hands went to the back of the chair. "No?"

He didn't say 'no' in an irritated way. It had sounded more wounded than anything. That took her off guard, though really it shouldn't have though. David wasn't her father. She just wanted him to do something wrong right now and she knew it. He did tend to be a bit controlling, which resembled her father attitude. On the other hand, he was attentive and kind and gentle. If she responded negatively to a push, he backed off.

Her father would keep pushing.

Samantha let out a long breath. Maybe she was just having pre-wedding jitters. Maybe. Or maybe Eric had invaded her life with hot sex, past and recent, and now her fear of losing hot sex for the rest of her life.

"Samantha?"

David's voice drew her out of her own little personal hell thoughts. "Sorry," she said, forcing a smile. "I really need to make this lunch. I'm trying to clear everything for while I'm gone."

"How about making it an early day then? I think I can get out of my late meetings. I'll come by at 3:00. We can go have drinks and dinner."

Okay so that was nice. He wanted to spend time with her. That should make her happy. Why, now that he offered, was she so hesitant to be with the man she was supposed to marry? "I can try," she said. "I...I'd like to."

He moved then, rounding the desk. She turned to face him, knowing an embrace was expected and suddenly welcoming it. It had become urgent that she feel something, anything, when he touched her. His hands slid to her waist, she felt his thighs brush hers. Her hands went to his chest. It was a nice chest, broad and muscular. So why the hell did it not turn her on?

David reached down and tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. Tender and gentle. There were those words again. "You're very beautiful," he said.

She studied his face. No passion burned in his eyes. No desire. He had said the words as if he commented on a painting. "Kiss me," she said.

He laughed. "Demanding this morning, aren't you?"

Eric wouldn't have thought twice about taking what she offered. Hell, he might have taken *before* it was offered. "Just kiss me, David."

Laughing, he tilted his head down, and brushed his lips against hers. She pushed up on her toes, and refused to end the contact. Trying desperately to spark some heat between them. But while she tried to claim his mouth, he tried to escape.

"What is wrong with you?" he asked. "This is your office."

She let out a long breath and eased down from her tiptoes. "Right. Call me at three."

He stared at her a moment, but she turned away, claiming her chair and sitting down. It was her silent approval of his departure.

"You're acting very strange, Samantha."

She glanced up at him. "I told you I'm very busy."

A pregnant silence.

"Alright then, I'll call you at three."

David left without another word, and Samantha stared at the door as it closed behind him. And her mind went to Eric. If he had been here instead of David, she'd be bent over the desk right now.

She squeezed a pencil in her hand. When that wasn't enough she squeezed her eyes shut too. "What is wrong with you?" she murmured to herself. Stop thinking about Eric! Stop comparing Eric to David and David to Eric!

With Eric everything was about sex. Or was it? All of a sudden, air felt trapped in her chest. Samantha found it hard to breathe. She forced the feeling aside, blowing out air and trying to relax. To think. Eric turned her on but that was it. Hot sex did not mean love. But didn't people who were in love, have hot sex? This was so confusing.

Why was sex with David so...nothing? If love equaled passion and passion equaled love, what did that mean?

Chapter Seven

Samantha and Kelly sat in the corner booth of the tiny Mexican restaurant on Fifth. The owner barely spoke English, and the atmosphere was nothing fancy, but it housed the best *queso* and chips in all of Austin.

Samantha scooped up cheese with her chip and took a bite. "Hmmm," she murmured. "I love this stuff."

Kelly gave her a level stare. "Talk, woman. Quit stalling. I want the dirt. Tell me about Eric."

"You're the one who needs to do some talking," Samantha retorted, picking up a new chip and pointing it at her. "What the hell was the other night all about?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Kelly said coyly, and reached for a chip.

"You know very well what I'm talking about. Eric didn't find me at that bar without some help. I know you set me up." Samantha scooped more cheese. She needed something to do and eating seemed as good as anything.

"Oh please," Kelly said, waving off the words. "You should thank me not yell."

"What?" Samantha said, and dropped her chip on the plate. "Thank you?"

Kelly rolled her eyes. "You and I both know you needed that."

"That?" Samantha shook her head. "What exactly are you talking about? *That* meaning what?"

Kelly sighed and settled her arms on the table, abandoning food. "Look," she said. "You're about to marry a man you don't even get hot for. A best friend doesn't take her best friend's deprivation without a fight."

"Good grief, Kelly," Samantha said, disgust in her voice. "You make it sound like I'm about to go without food. Poor deprived Samantha needs regular orgasms? What the heck is it with you?"

"We're talking serious stuff here," Kelly insisted. "Marriage is a lifetime. Choose properly. Frankly, I'm disappointed in how you're handling your life right now."

Samantha blinked. "What?" Kelly had never, ever said anything like this to her in all the years they had been friends. "Suddenly my life is crap because I don't rank orgasm as the primary motivation in happily-ever-after?" She paused. "Have you been drinking?"

Kelly sighed. "You're making me do this." She reached beside her and picked up an envelope. Handing it to Samantha, she said, "Open it."

Samantha frowned but curiosity made her accept what was offered. Kelly cleared everything on top of the table, pushing it into a corner. "Put them side by side in front of you," she ordered.

Inside the envelope, Samantha found two pictures. The first one was the engagement picture taken of her and David. It was a nice picture. They looked happy. The photographer had done an excellent job of making the image professional yet romantic.

Kelly patted the table. "Lay it here."

Samantha did as she said.

Glancing at the picture, Kelly said. "It's a nice shot, wouldn't you say?"

"Yes it is," Samantha said feeling defensive despite Kelly's compliment sensing it was a trick of some sort.

Waving her hand, Kelly said, "Now the next one."

The next picture made Samantha's eyes go wide. It was of her and Eric at her bachelorette party. They were talking and Eric was holding her close. She swallowed.

They looked seductive and hot and...like... She sat the picture down not wanting to even allow the words to form in her head.

Kelly didn't look down. She looked at Samantha. "This is not about an orgasm or two or three or a million for that matter. Look at these images and be honest with yourself about what you see." She picked up the picture of Samantha and Eric. "This is two people in love. Hot for each other, yes, but also in love."

Samantha swallowed hard. That was exactly the thought she hadn't allowed herself to think. What was she going to do? Panic rose. She reached for the pictures, taking the one of her and Eric out of Kelly's hand. Then, she reached for the other one. "I need to get back to work."

With a shrug, Kelly reached for the bowl of queso. "Fine with me. Just as long as you take those pictures with you."

Stuffing the photos into the envelope, Samantha didn't know *what* to say. She settled for nothing. The minute her hand rested on the table, Kelly leaned forward, and covered it with her own. "Does Eric love you?"

"Kelly, stop."

"Or do you fit his business plan?" Kelly asked. "Don't get me wrong, I think he cares for you but it's important to him you fit into his world. The question is does he fit your world? Do *you* love him?"

Reaching for her purse, Samantha eased away from Kelly's hand, and made a frustrated sound.

"You've never once told me you love him, Samantha. Tell me and I will shut up."

Samantha pushed to her feet. "This conversation is over. I certainly hope you can be nice on my wedding day. It really sucks to feel like my maid of honor doesn't support me."

With a flip of her hair, Samantha stormed away, feeling more alone than she had in a very long time.

Chapter Eight

The two pictures lay on Samantha's desk, side by side. She held a pencil in her hand tapping the desk with it. Over and over the wood hit the desk, nervous tension directing her actions.

Someone cleared their throat. "Hello, Beautiful."

It was David. In a scurry of activity, Samantha grabbed the pictures and stuffed them in a drawer. "You were supposed to call."

He smiled, and shut the door, closing them into the privacy of her office. "I tried your cell three times."

"Oh." Now she remembered she'd put it on silent at the restaurant. "You should have called the of –"

"They told me you were in a meeting."

She frowned. "Oh." That was true too. A client had stopped by very upset over a turn in her case. It had been horrible timing because she's needed time to think about David and really her life in general.

"So?" he asked. "Can you tear yourself away?"

Staring at him, her thoughts played like a whirlwind in her mind. Marriage or no marriage? She had to make a decision. Samantha straightened as the reality of the situation pressed her to act. Somehow, if she and David were to marry, Samantha had to find a way to light the fire between them...she didn't want to think about the alternative. Pushing her chair away from the desk, she stood.

"That depends," Samantha said, walking around the desk. She stopped in front of him and leaned against the wooden surface behind her. Her mid-length black skirt

didn't do much to show any skin. Sexy wasn't her work style. She'd have to get creative.

"It depends on what?" he asked, his brow furrowed.

She slid onto the top of the desk and hiked material up her leg. As she'd hoped, his eyes dropped. But only for a moment. If it had been Eric he'd have lingered. She shoved the thought aside, and said, "Are you taking off with me?"

His eyes narrowed. "You know I can't do that. Your father is already worried about me being gone next week."

She crossed her leg, and leaned back on her palms. She wondered if she'd have to spread her legs to get the man to forget her father. "Are you?" she asked. "It's our honeymoon."

He hesitated a split second too long and she knew the answer. He was worried. Trying to cover it, he stepped closer, and his hand settled on her knee. "I can't wait for next week."

She didn't believe him. Samantha put her hand on his and then slid it upward. Under her skirt, and inward. Their eyes locked. "Prove it."

"What?" he asked. "What are you talking about?"

She spread her legs and pressed his hand to her panties. He didn't resist but he also didn't act. "Make love to me right here and now." One hand made his fingers stroke her clit. The other went to the buttons on her blouse. He was going to make love to her and like it.

His free hand went to hers, stopping the first button from coming loose. "What are you doing?"

"Taking my shirt off." Her voice was packed with demand. Even challenge. She forgot the efforts between her legs. Thus far they weren't productive anyway. "Showing you my breasts. You do like them, don't you?"

He laughed, but not with humor. His voice was low. "This is crazy. We're in your office."

She stared up at him, and what she saw in his face said it all. There wasn't one inkling of temptation in his face. Only panic. Maybe even a hint of irritation. "Do you want me, David?"

He shook his head slightly, frustration in the gesture. "What kind of question is that?" His hand still held hers, near her breast but not moving.

"A good one. We're about to get married and you don't want me to the point of distraction."

"That's...that's simply not true." He stiffened. "Because I'm adult enough to not grope you in the office doesn't mean I don't want you."

Samantha sighed and let her hands drop to her side, nudging his away. "It means we are destined for trouble."

"This is ridiculous." He turned, walking away and giving her his back. "I can't believe we are having this conversation."

Neither could she, but she was glad. And she was thankful to Eric. Even if he had left her not once, but twice, he proved something to her. Eric had taught her the importance of waiting for the right man. "I'm not willing to settle, David."

He turned, eyes wide, face starting to redden. "What the hell does that mean?"

"Do you love me?" she asked.

Shock registered in his eyes. "You know I do."

"The kind of love that makes your heart beat faster every time I'm near? The kind of love that makes the thought of being away from me put you in knots. The kind of love that is happily ever after?"

"What the hell, Samantha? I came here to take you to dinner. The woman I have asked to be my wife. What have I done to deserve this?"

"Answer me," she said, feeling the pain of reality in her stomach. "Do you love me in the ways I described?"

"You're talking romance novels and fairy tales." He flattened his palm on the desk as if his energy was being zapped. "We have the kind of relationship that you build on. The things that create stability and solid futures."

"So the answer is no."

He ground his teeth together. "What have I done to deserve this?"

She walked to stand in front of him. Her hand went to his. "Nothing. See, one day you will love someone in the ways I described. I can't take that from you."

Silence. "What are you saying?" he asked.

"It means I can't marry you."

Silence again. Then, he laughed. A hollow, pitiful sound of unaccepted defeat. "You're joking, right? We have it all planned. Your father is thrilled. This is what he wants. This is what is best."

"For whom?" she asked, but he didn't answer. David cared for her, but he didn't love her.

And her heart belonged to another, but she couldn't say that to David. Not that she thought it would matter. This had never been about emotions nor had it been about sex. It had been about power.

But for Samantha it needed to be about burning hot passion and love.

* * * * *

Hours after David had left, and the craziness had stilled, Samantha sat behind her desk. Darkness had begun to envelop the room. It was really quite amazing she'd managed to work the entire day. She'd broken up with David, and then made a few phone calls. Her father and Kelly. No one else. She'd looked skyward and known her mother would have approved. And though her father had lost it when he'd received the

news, deep down she knew he respected her decision. He had loved her mother. Theirs had been a true love match. How could he want less for her?

Vilma had accepted the news with surprising calm. She'd smiled a soft little knowing smile and then started making phone calls. The wedding was on its way to being cancelled. And that was a good thing. So why did she feel so damn bad? Well, one thing was for sure. Going home alone was only going to make her feel worse. Working late had been her choice, but Kelly was so damn excited about the wedding being off, she'd insisted on drinks and details.

But Samantha had refused. All she wanted was a hot bath and a book. And a fairy-tale romance novel that would promise happily ever after because she desperately wanted to believe it really existed. For now, she would work. She needed alone time. Just not too much.

Chapter Nine

A glance at the clock told her it was well past eight. Samantha gave in to the fact that she couldn't hide at work all night. Instead, she plotted her expanded version of her escape home. Her list of pleasure items had grown. She'd stop by the store for ice cream, a book, wine, and bubble bath. Perfect replacements for a walk down the aisle.

Okay, not perfect, but they'd do.

With a sigh, she reached for her purse. Movement in the lobby made her still. She looked toward the sound but saw nothing but darkness. "Hello?" She took a deep breath in an effort to ward off the flutters rushing from her stomach to her chest. Everyone had gone home hours before.

And then he appeared. A tall figure standing in her doorway. She swallowed. It couldn't be. "Eric?"

Arm above his head, he simply stood there. Casual. Perfect. "You're working late."

She wasn't sure what to do. A rush of emotion was so mixed it was hard to decipher her feelings. Part of her was damn near ready to run across the room and jump his bones. If ever a woman needed a man, tonight, she needed him. But then warning bells rang in her head. Heartache. Pain.

She abandoned her purse and pushed to her feet, fingertips pressed to the top of her desk. "I thought you'd gone back home."

He pushed off the door and started walking toward her. "I thought about it."

The closer he came to her, the wilder her heart beat. This was what she wanted to feel with David. This hot-all-over, burn-to-the-core, urgency. It was lust and love and all kinds of wild feelings all wrapped into one, potent rush.

Somehow she managed a steady, albeit short, response. "But?"

"Why'd you leave?" he asked. "That's the real question."

They both knew what he was talking about. "I never meant to stay all night."

He moved around the desk, closing the distance between them, and stopping beside her. She turned to face him, but she kept one hand on the desk, needing the support it offered.

"Wrong answer," he said in a low voice. "Wrong answer."

She swallowed. "What? I don't know what you're talking about."

Another step forward. Now he was so close she could lean a bit and touch him. He smelled that way he always smelled. Deliciously male. Addictive. Arousing. God. She was losing it. Her body was ripe with wanting. She could feel her nipples pebbled against her bra.

"Yes," he insisted. "You do."

She looked down, hiding her emotions from his. Afraid he would see the truth in her eyes. That she had been running from him. Not the physical him, but the emotional context of all he represented. And from the end of her engagement. Maybe even from life.

A whisper was all she managed. "No."

"You ran." His fingers touched her cheek, light but intense in their impact. She felt the contact in every inch of her body. "Why Sam?"

Slowly, she let her gaze lift. The truth was there, between them, whether she hid from it or faced it. She preferred the head-on method. Too much had happened to shove this all aside. Her marriage had been cancelled. It was time to face the whole big picture. "I broke my engagement."

Their eyes locked and held. He moved to touch her and she held up a hand. "Stop." Her finger pressed into the soft cotton of his t-shirt. Muscles flexed beneath. She forced his eyes back to his. "This changes nothing."

A slow smile turned up the corners of his mouth. "Oh but it does." And then he moved. Before she even knew what had happened he was holding her, his mouth closing down on hers in an onslaught of pure passion.

She tried to hold back but it wasn't possible. All the emotion inside, the desire, and longing, and years of wanting, exploded in a mad yearning for satisfaction. For him. For all they once had been. How long they clung, and kissed, she didn't know. But it wasn't enough. It never would be. She tugged at his shirt, needing skin. Before she completed her task Eric hoisted her onto the desk, and shoved her skirt up her legs. Aggressive and perfect. Just the way she liked him. Her hands ran down his tight, muscular thighs, and around his nice round ass.

She wanted to touch every tiny perfect muscle, but his mouth was everywhere. Teasing and distracting it nipped and tickled. Her ear. Her chest. Her lips. It turned her into putty, and made her dazed with pure heat. Suddenly, her shirt was undone and she hardly remembered how. And then she was topless, her nipples feeling the cool air-conditioning just before the rough perfection of his fingers stroked. A moment of apprehension made her stiffen. She didn't want to be hurt again. Samantha's hands went to Eric's wrist.

This man was making her crazy. She'd forgotten all reason. "No," she said but it came out a gasp as his mouth claimed hers. Eric kissed her with a sensual stroke of his tongue. Somehow, against his lips, she managed, "No."

Pulling back, he looked at her. His eyes were dark and hot and she could see desire there, potent and alive. Samantha knew that look well. It said he wanted to slide inside her and bury himself deep. But his hands slid to her cheeks in an amazingly tender response. "What is it?"

His reaction made her heart squeeze. She knew he wanted her beyond the physical. That they were meant to be, but she was afraid to blindly believe. She needed reassurance. "I can't... I... You left me." Emotion knifed at her heart, suddenly more alive and real than it had been for many years. She'd loved him and he'd left. All this

passion flaring between them, for her at least, was simply a creation of the very thing that caused her pain...her love for him. "You left me."

His lips went to her forehead and then he bent at his knees, bringing himself to eye level with her. "I was a fool. Give me a chance to make it up to you."

If only it were so easy. "You can't just say sorry and it's all better."

"I know, baby. I know." He eased to one knee and stared up at her. "I know. I was young and stupid. Then I was afraid to come back for you. Afraid I'd find exactly what I did, you with another man. It tore me up to find out you belonged to another. I love you."

She shook her head. "Then, you couldn't have left me."

"I understand how you feel," he said in a low, intense voice, "but you *are* my woman, Samantha. No one is taking you from me again. Not ever. I'm not leaving without you."

Her eyes went wide at the potency of his words. For the first time since his return, she started to feel that maybe, just maybe, he was in fact, her man. And yes...she was his woman. "You want me to come to your home with you?"

He nodded. "To start."

She couldn't hold back a tiny smile. "That's a big request." But one she so wanted to make reality. "I think I might need convincing."

His brow inched upward. "What do I have to do to make it an appealing offer?"

She leaned back on her hands, and let her thighs inch outward. "You can start by getting naked."

He smiled and pushed to his feet. "Your wish is my command."

About the Author

Lisa Renee Jones lives in Austin, Texas. She owned and operated a seven-office staffing company for eleven years. She discovered a love for writing in 2003 and sold her business, and now has a dozen published titles.

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