

VENUS PRESS



Money Man
Mary Winter
Mystical Sign Series

Mary Winter

MONEY MAN

Mystical Signs: Capricorn

By

Mary Winter



Money Man

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, places, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

MONEYMAN

Copyright © 2006 by Mary Winter

ISBN: 1-59836-245-3

Cover art and design © 2006 by Croco

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any form without permission, except as provided by the U.S. Copyright Law. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

For information, you can find us on the web at
www.VenusPress.com

Mary Winter

Chapter One

Sadie's perfect Friday night didn't include being covered with manure and blood. She unlocked the door and slipped inside the dark and quiet veterinary office where she worked. Her shoes squelched on the linoleum as she crossed the back entrance to the small shower facilities the vet office maintained. For a moment, she debated about going home, but she wanted to document the call and leave notes for Devon, her boss, who would be in tomorrow. That calf had been tangled in barbed wire, and Sadie didn't even want to contemplate the number of stitches she'd put in the wounded animal's body, along with the amount of fluids and antibiotics she'd used.

A small light shone through the open bathroom door. *Devon must have left the light on for her.* She tried not to be thankful he had, nor think of the thoughtfulness the gesture might have incurred. Dealing with his presence, reminding her with every passing minute that she couldn't muster the funds to buy out Dr. Kirkpatrick's half of the vet practice when he retired, was enough for her nerves. Devon and his thoughtful gestures could go straight to hell. But damn, he'd look good going.

Sadie headed for the light like a beacon, dragging her tired body along with her. Turning the corner, she stopped. Devon stood in front of the mirror rinsing off a razor. His sun-kissed blond hair curled along the back of his neck, still dripping water. She followed a drop along the long line of his naked back, tanned and muscled, to where the blue waistband of his Calvin Klein underwear soaked up the bit of moisture. Sadie's mouth went dry.

Dressed, Devon Markier III looked like he stepped out of the pages of GQ. Wearing only a pair of very high-cut briefs, he looked like a dream come to life.

Sadie sucked in a breath of air and backed away from the door. "I'm sorry," she said.

He raised his gaze to the mirror, his piercing blue stare catching her gaze. He smiled. "Sadie, I thought you went back to your own place. I'll be out of here in a

Money Man

minute. Had a hamster with an abscess that came in at the last minute, and I wanted to clean up before heading out.”

Sadie pressed her back against the wall, fiercely staring anywhere but toward the door from which Devon’s voice emerged. She sucked in gulps of air. With each breath, she reminded herself that she worked for Devon. The fact she lusted after his body didn’t change a thing. She heard rustling from the small bathroom, and a few moments later, he emerged wearing only a worn pair of jeans and carrying the rest of his clothing.

He glanced over her dirty coveralls. The heat of his gaze burned through her, and even reeking of cow and covered with blood and fluids, Devon’s searing look held the power to make her breath catch in her throat. *Water over the bridge, under the bridge. It doesn’t really matter. We’re from two different worlds. I put myself through vet school, and he was born with the platinum spoon in his mouth.* “Thanks,” she muttered, racing into the room and closing the door behind her.

Sadie leaned against the door and lowered the zipper on her coveralls. Gingerly, she peeled them from her t-shirt and jeans, both also not the cleanest and kicked the dirty garment into the corner. She rummaged in her bag for a towel and clean clothing, two things she never left for a job without, and quickly stepped into the shower, trying to banish thoughts of Devon from her mind. His scent filled the bathroom, rich and woodsy, and as she stepped beneath the shower spray, all she could think of was Devon standing just a few feet away dressed in only a pair of CK underwear.

Devon sat down at the small table in the break area just off the bathroom and ran his fingers through his still damp hair. He’d stayed after work partially to clean up after dealing with his last patient, and half with the hope that Sadie would return from her last call. Sadie Grissom. He’d seen her wit, her compassion, and her competence as she worked with the patients in the two months since he bought out Dr. Kirkpatrick’s practice. He’d worked beside her, inhaled her sweet floral perfume, and even been achingly close to her as they maneuvered around the operating table a time or two, but in none of that time had she even indicated an interest in him as a man.

Until tonight.

He pulled on a t-shirt from his locker and quickly tucked it into his jeans. Damn it, just thinking about Sadie had him hard as a rock, and he was thankful he stayed facing the sink. Just knowing she stood there watching him had him at full mast and ready to

Mary Winter

go. The patter of the shower against the tiled wall drifted out the closed bathroom door, and he bit back a groan.

He had to find some way to breach the icy wall Sadie had erected between them. He wanted to know her better. As a colleague, as a friend, and most definitely as a lover. When he took over the practice, Dr. Kirkpatrick sang Sadie's praises, and he'd seen her work first-hand. She was a hell of a vet.

The shower stopped. Devon's mouth went dry. He imagined her stepping from the shower, water sliding over her high, firm breasts, and down her long legs. Shoving his chair away from the table, Devon bolted to his feet. He slipped his feet into loafers and paced the small break room to work off the tension filling his body.

The bathroom door opened. Devon turned and watched as Sadie walked through wearing a t-shirt and jeans. With her brown hair pulled back into a ponytail, and her face devoid of makeup, she looked no less beautiful than when she came into the office. To him, she looked gorgeous.

She set her bag down by her locker. "Sorry I disturbed you," she said as she hung up her changing bag. "That calf was cut up pretty badly. Let me make some notes for you since you're covering tomorrow. Feel free to call me if you need anything." She smiled and stepped into the office to make notes.

Devon followed, unable to keep his gaze from her heart-shaped ass. "It's your first weekend off in a month. I don't want to disturb you." He leaned against the desk as she sat down and began keying notes into the computer.

Sadie looked up at him and grinned. "I might get lonely if I don't come in here. At least we don't have any overnight patients for once." She turned her attention back to the computer.

Devon took the opportunity to watch her while she worked. "I was just heading out to get a bite of eat. Why don't you come with me? My treat for hogging the bathroom."

Sadie saved her work and powered off the computer. "That's not necessary." She started to stand.

Devon slid his hand over hers. "Yes, it is. We've worked together for a few months now, and I feel we haven't gotten to know each other yet."

Her nearness burned him, reminding him he wanted to take their relationship beyond the personal. Sadie scowled and pulled her hand away. "We know each other all

Money Man

we need to. You're a good vet. That's all I need to know." Sadie wrapped her arms around herself and started for the door.

Devon reached out and grabbed her elbow. He turned her back toward him. "That's not all I need to know, though you're a hell of a vet too." His gaze swept over her from head to toe. "Now, how long has it been since a handsome man offered to buy you a drink?"

Sadie gulped. "That's none of your business." She debated about pulling her arm away, for Devon's fingers burned her arm. Awareness of him as a man. Heat. It seared her where she stood and reminded her of late night fantasies. Damn it, why did Devon have to be so handsome, so charming, the epitome of everything she hated.

"Hey, I didn't mean anything by it." Devon truly sounded sorry, and Sadie instantly regretted her prickly response. "I figure you get asked out on a daily basis."

Sadie laughed. "Not really." Her stomach growled. Nice of it to remind her she missed lunch and suppertime was long past. "All right," she said, deciding she'd give in before the conversation went any farther. "I'll go out to dinner."

"Great!"

Devon's enthusiasm was catching, and Sadie double-checked her locker. She slid her purse strap over her shoulder and announced she was ready. Devon steered her out the back door of the vet clinic, his hand proprietary at her elbow. Not that she minded, though his nearness did crazy things to her mind and libido. They paused long enough to set the alarm on the office, then Devon steered her toward his sporty blue Acura. He opened the door for her.

Sadie slid inside, noticing a few power bar wrappers on the floor of the car. A duffel bag sat on the backseat, a pair of running shoes on the floorboards. The light tan interior looked factory, with a bottle of water sitting in the cup holder. She contrasted his sleek car with her compact hatchback, the same vehicle that had gotten her through vet school.

Devon slid into the seat beside her and started the engine. A few moments later he pulled out of the parking lot and merged with the flow of traffic. Instead of heading toward the small family restaurant and bar downtown, Devon merged onto the interstate toward Liberty. Sadie looked at him, but her stomach rumbled again, and she decided the source of the food didn't matter so much as the fact she'd get fed.

"So you think the calf will pull through?" Devon asked.

Mary Winter

Sadie nodded. "Most likely."

An awkward silence fell over the car, and Sadie watched the moonlit scenery pass by. Mostly cornfields and the occasional farmstead, but it kept her from focusing on Devon's strong, tanned hands on the wheel or the way he shifted the car through the curves in the road. At last, he exited at Liberty and pulled into the parking lot of a popular Mexican restaurant.

"We're here," he announced, opening his car door. He walked around and opened the door for her, a gallant gesture he needn't do in light of their working relationship as far as Sadie was concerned.

As she stood, she inhaled the spicy scent of Mexican food and grinned.

"This place has the best burritos," he said. "Come on." Grinning like a kid, he tangled his fingers with hers and pulled her toward the door.

Sadie followed, a bit discomforted by this side of him. She stayed close as he chatted with the greeter, inquiring after the man's family. She caught a name, Diego, and it sounded as if they'd gone to college together, though the man still worked toward his degree. Diego directed them toward a small table in the corner shielded by a low wall topped with plants. The intimate setting set off alarms in Sadie's head, but when he brought out a basket full of warm tortilla chips and salsa, she forgot her concern with the onslaught of hunger.

"Thank you for bringing me here," Sadie said after eating about half a dozen chips. "I wasn't expecting a full meal."

"Don't worry about it." Devon stretched out his arm along the back of the booth and shifted his long legs beneath the table.

Diego returned with a menu, but Devon waved him away. "We'll have two of the specials."

Sadie's mouth watered. She'd seen the sign advertising steak fajitas on the board, complete with a margarita and sides for \$8.99, and it sounded heavenly. She'd contemplated ordering it when Devon spoke. "Sounds great," she said, adding her approval to the order.

"Good choice." Diego nodded and disappeared, only to return with two margaritas.

Sadie sipped, the punch of tequila hitting her strong.

Money Man

They fell into a companionable silence, broken only by muted discussion of patients and work. A part of her hated not being able to find more common ground with Devon, though she wondered if she really wanted to. The waiter returned with their food, which negated the need to talk at all. Then, as the meal dwindled into nothing, Sadie admitted to herself she shared a nice evening with him.

“You’d think we could find something other than work to talk about.” Sadie scooped a generous portion of salsa on a chip and popped it into her mouth. “I mean, surely we both have lives outside of the clinic.” She laughed.

Devon grinned. “Are you telling me you want to know more about me, Sadie?”

The sudden heat in his voice sent a flush creeping over the back of her neck. Its telltale heat burned her, and she hoped in the dim lighting he couldn’t see. “What I am saying is, is that we don’t have to talk about work all the time.”

The waiter returned, refilling her water glass. She noted he’d drunk less than a quarter of his drink, just as she’d barely touched hers. It came with the meal, but in some small way, she was glad to see he wasn’t a big social drinker. Unobtrusively, the waiter slid the check onto the table.

Sadie reached for it.

Devon’s hand closed over hers. “Let me,” he said.

“That’s not necessary.” Sadie closed her hand around the slip of paper. Devon might sign her paycheck, but she wouldn’t be indebted to him for anything else. She worked hard to get where she was. She didn’t need to rely on charity, even if he did ask her out to dinner.

Devon refused to release her hand. Heat burned her flesh, a warmth she couldn’t attribute to just his touch. “I invited you to dinner. I will pay the bill. It’s only right.” He stroked the back of her hand, his soft touch sending shivers down her spine.

Sadie shook her head. “No, I want to pay for my meal. I insist.” She pulled her hand from beneath his, bringing the check over. Laying it face down on her side of the table, she closed her other hand over it and stared at Devon. Stalemate. She grinned.

“It wouldn’t be gentlemanly of me to make you pay your way after I invited you.”

Sadie stared at Devon wondering why he was making such an issue over a ten-dollar dinner. Most men would be pleased if their company decided to pay their own way. She wondered why he was different. *And why am I not handing over the bill? I should be pleased he offered to pay for dinner. It’s been a damn long while since a man*

Mary Winter

offered to buy me a meal. Nibbling on her lower lip, Sadie knew the answer to her internal question. She wouldn't give Devon any leverage. She didn't like owing anyone.

Devon stared at the little spitfire sitting across from him. He hardly recognized her as Sadie, yet, he did. She hovered over the check, both hands flattened on top of it. He didn't expect her to pay her own way. Even if he hadn't seen the older compact car she drove, or the way she frugally brought her own lunches, he wouldn't expect a woman he asked out to pay her own way. Money wasn't an issue for him. He didn't want to put her in a financial hardship. Though he wondered if a simple supper out would blow her budget. No, he knew vet students. Vet school was expensive, notoriously so, and clearly Sadie had put herself through school.

"I buy you dinner tonight, and you can repay me later. Maybe you can buy next time," Devon offered. He smiled his most charming smile, the one that always had women falling at his feet.

Sadie's frown deepened. Damn it, he wished he knew how to get through to her.

"I'm going to flip this check over, and we'll split it. And, we'll split the tip. Right down the middle." Sadie curled her fingers around the slip of paper, ready to turn it over like a playing card.

Devon frowned. He didn't like it. Working with Sadie made him want to get to know her better, yet fighting with her over the check would only alienate her further. Releasing a sigh, he reached for her hand. "We'll turn it over together, and split everything fifty-fifty. All right?"

Sadie nodded. "On the count of three. One. Two. Three."

Together, they turned the bill over. He watched her eyes flicker over the check, doing the math in her head. "Looks like its \$10.85 each." She reached for her purse and pulled out her billfold. Quickly, she tossed thirteen dollars on the table. "There, that includes the tip." She shoved the money across the table. "I'm not sure how you're going to pay, but here's my half."

"It's generous of you to pay your way. Most women would have accepted the free meal with a smile." Devon slid her money into his billfold and pulled out his debit card. "Thank you." He hoped to give her the money back later. He didn't need to take Sadie's money. He wished she knew that. "Are you ready?"

Sadie suspected she hurt Devon's feelings. Nodding, she rose to her feet and waited for Devon to lead the way to the register by the door so he could pay. Deep

Money Man

inside, she knew she should have let her pride go, but damn it, Devon's attitude stung. He acted as if he had all the money in the world, and as far as she knew, the Markier family did. Arrogant, rich bastards. Taking a deep breath, she tried to shove past hurts behind her.

Devon led her to the car in silence, opening the door for her. The gentlemanly gesture wasn't lost on her, and she smiled her thanks. Working with Devon was proving to be more difficult than she thought, and not for the first time, Sadie entertained thoughts about moving to a different veterinary practice. As he pulled out of the parking lot, she wondered why she stayed. Then, she looked over at his strong profile, the determined set of his chin, and she knew why. For all his faults, real or perceived, Devon Markier III was a hell of a vet and a very handsome man.

A sudden need to explain her behavior filled her, and Sadie bit her lip to keep from telling Devon about her past. After all, this wasn't a romantic date. Simply business. Two vets, working late, catching a bite to eat. That's all it was and all it could ever be. Folding her hands in her lap, she leaned back in the surprisingly comfortable seat and closed her eyes.

Looking over at Sadie, eyes closed in repose, Devon wondered again about her stubborn reaction to his paying the bill at the restaurant. Ever since he arrived, she acted cool towards him. Competent, professional, but cool, sometimes so cold he welcomed the humid Missouri summer heat to warm him up after a day spent with her. His body ached. Smart, beautiful women were always his downfall, and Sadie was as smart and as beautiful as they came. Not squeamish about the less desirable aspects of their job, she cared for all animals equally.

So the question remained, why would she act so defensive about a little restaurant check?

Concentrating on the road, Devon admitted he didn't know the answer. But he wanted to. The more time he spent with Sadie, the more he wanted to know about her. She intrigued him like no woman had in a long time. Clutching the gearshift, he changed gears as he exited the interstate. Sitting beside him, Sadie still leaned back in the seat, eyes closed, chest rising and falling with deep breaths. She'd fallen asleep.

He grinned, taking the corner carefully to avoid waking her. Getting past Sadie's considerable defenses had to be his first order of business. He pulled into the back

Mary Winter

parking lot of the vet clinic and turned off the motor. Unfastening his seatbelt he turned to face her. Sadie still slept.

Devon caressed her arm, a feather-light touch. "Sadie," he said. "We're back at the vet clinic." His low voice barely carried to her, and she did nothing but turn in her sleep to face him. Her lips parted. Her eyelids fluttered, but she didn't wake.

Devon suppressed a groan. His cock hardened, full and tight in his jeans. The touch of her skin against his, the sight of her sleeping, stirred him. He wanted to taste her, and here was the perfect opportunity. Leaning forward, he brushed his lips across hers. A soft touch, a hesitant touch, and pulled away. In that brief instant, he tasted sunshine with a hint of salsa.

Sadie's eyelids fluttered open. "Devon?" she asked, blinking sleepily. She started to sit up, restrained by the seat belt. He quickly unfastened it, and she stretched within the small confines of the car.

Dear God, did she mean to kill him? The motion pushed her breasts against her shirt, drew his eyes to the sleek lines of her toned arms. After tasting her, he wanted more. Devon reached for the door handle. "We're here," he said with a smile.

"Good." She reached for her purse on the floorboard and opened the door. "Thanks for dinner, and the ride." She rose to her feet.

Devon followed, determined to taste her again. He closed the car door and walked to the back of the clinic, fishing keys out of his pocket. Unlocking the door, he held it open for her. She flipped on the light switch and headed to her locker. Devon followed.

He leaned against the lockers, one arm braced against the cool metal. He watched as Sadie grabbed her purse and slung it over a shoulder, then she turned and faced him. She stood, braced between the open locker door and his body, her face just inches from his.

Sadie looked at Devon standing so close she inhaled the scent of his cologne. The woodsy scent tormented her all night. Had he kissed her in the car? Hovering in the fuzzy state between sleep and full wakefulness, she didn't know for sure, only the soft pressure of his lips against hers, and maybe a sigh of pleasure? Boxed in, she fought the hammering of her heart. A part of her wanted to tilt her face to his and kiss him senseless. She battled her inner urges. He was her boss. She needed to act like the professional she was.

Money Man

Devon inched closer. Sadie swallowed hard. “Devon?” she said.

“Sadie.” Her name was a sigh on his lips. He caressed her chin, his fingers drawing her ever closer to him. He dipped his head toward hers.

Oh my god. He was going to kiss her. Sadie didn’t know whether to flee or stay. She wanted his kiss, dreamed about it at night, but her dreams were just that—dreams.

His lips moved across hers. The briefest of touches, then deepening as his hand slid around to cup the back of her head, holding her in place for his kiss. He held himself back, as if he wanted to deepen the kiss, but wondered if he dared.

Slowly, Sadie curled her fingers around Devon’s biceps. She leaned into him, her body craving the touch of his.

Stepping forward, Devon closed the space between them. His kiss grew hungry, demanding. His tongue swept the seal of her closed lips, demanding entrance, and beneath the sensual onslaught, Sadie opened her mouth.

Heaven. Devon tasted like salsa and tequila as his tongue dove into her mouth. Sparks flashed behind her closed eyelids. She swayed toward him, the instant her breasts brushed against his chest, heat flashed through her body. She moaned, caressing his tongue with her own, and clung to Devon.

Wait. She was kissing Devon. Sadie started to stiffen and pull away, ashamed at her wanton behavior. Private fantasies were one thing, but kissing him completely different. The need for air parted them, and she turned her face away. “Devon, wait.” Her breath came in tiny pants, and she couldn’t miss the hard ridge of his arousal pressing against her stomach.

Devon stepped back. “Sadie.” He brushed a stray lock of hair from her forehead.

She reached for her purse, and feeling it settled on her shoulder, started to walk around him. “Thank you again for dinner.” Her knees shook, but she refused to let him see that. Shoulders square, and head high, she started for the door.

Devon turned and blocked her path. “I had a wonderful time this evening, Sadie.”

She fought a flush of heat that filled her at his words. “So did I. But it can’t happen again.” With those words, she brushed passed him and stepped out into the cool night.

Mary Winter

Chapter Two

Sadie speared a piece of lettuce with her fork and stared at the green leaf. Normally a chicken Caesar salad from the restaurant next door would brighten her day. Instead, she ate, mindful of the man sitting behind the counter in the lobby. Three cat vaccinations, a dog deworming, and a neutering operation filled her morning. The afternoon looked to be less busy, and Sadie wondered if that was a good thing or not. Busy meant less time to think about Devon and his mind-blowing kisses.

She picked at her lunch, not really hungry. Torturing herself with the thoughts of Devon's kisses only led to heartache. Still, she couldn't get them from her mind. For so long she'd dreamed of Devon kissing her, and then he had, and she'd ran like a scared rabbit. Foolish girl. Sadie scowled.

Through the doorway she watched Devon turn the sign on the door to read "Closed for Lunch" then stroll back toward their dining area. Sadie smoothed her expression into one of bland neutrality. Many times they closed for lunch, though today, with few patients, she wondered why he didn't eat as he could. In the small town, they risked losing walk-in business, though in an emergency the paging service would call.

Devon stepped into the lounge and leaned his hip against the doorframe. "That looks good." He waited for a reply, and when he didn't get one, he went to the fridge and pulled out a brown paper bag. He sat down next to her and started to spread out his lunch.

"Thanks," Sadie belatedly answered. She glanced at the peanut butter and jelly sandwich, small bag of chips and can of soda thinking it looked more like a school lunch than something a grown man would pack for himself.

"Our cook has a strange idea of packing lunches. She still sees me as the kid she used to pack off to school." Devon pulled his sandwich from the plastic bag. "Oh well. It's food."

Money Man

Sadie nodded and tried to finish her salad. With Devon so near, hints of his cologne teased her nose. She fought against inhaling the scent. His long legs brushed against hers beneath the table, the contact electric.

Devon set down his sandwich. His gaze swept her body, from the light blue scrub top she wore covered with puppies wearing stethoscopes to her hair pulled back in a ponytail. "You look nice today, Sadie," he said.

"Thanks. You don't look so bad yourself." She didn't know what possessed her to add that last part. She grabbed another forkful of lettuce and swirled it in a small pool of dressing at the bottom of the plastic container.

"I feel like I should be apologizing for kissing you, but the truth of the matter is, I want to do it again." Reaching across the table, he curled his fingers around her wrist, stopping her nervous movements. His thumb stroked her pulse point, sending tiny flares of heat through her veins.

Sadie released her fork. She tried to pull her hand away, a half-hearted attempt. "Well, we can't." Her short, clipped words made him raise an eyebrow.

"Why not?" Not releasing her, Devon rose to his feet. He walked around the small table to lean against it.

Sadie forced her gaze up to his face, not wanting to stare at his crotch, impressive as the denim-covered bulge was. "Because you own this vet clinic. I work for you, and it wouldn't be a professional employee-employer relationship." She shoved her chair away, wanting to put some distance between them.

Devon released her wrist. "I'm not going to force you to do anything you don't want to do, but unless I'm not reading you correctly, you want me as much as I want you."

Sadie put the lid on her salad and carried it to the fridge, avoiding his question.

Devon followed. He braced one hand on the fridge door.

Sadie closed the refrigerator and found herself trapped between the metal door and Devon's hard body. She glanced down. His very hard body. An answering tingling began. A warm heat in her pussy that had her wondering how sturdy the table really was. Sadie bit her lip and shook her head. "You might have had women fall at the sound of the Markier name, but I'm not one of those," she said. "Your type doesn't appeal to me."

"And what type is that?" Devon growled. "You think I'm a rich playboy who has everything handed to me. I snap my fingers and the women flock to me, right?"

Mary Winter

Sadie shrugged. "You said it. Not me."

"I'm not like that." Devon closed his eyes. "Damn it, Sadie." He hauled her against him. The tension in his body left no doubt as to his intentions. His hard cock pressed against her stomach.

Sadie fought the urge to wiggle against it. With her breasts flattened against his chest, her nipples hardened into tiny little points.

Devon grabbed her wrists and held them behind her back. "You can slap me for this later," he whispered an instant before he crushed his lips against hers.

Sadie whimpered in the back of her throat. The full-on assault of his kiss scrambled her thoughts and sent tingles through her body. He didn't ask; he demanded. His tongue slid along the seal of her lips, plunging inside. He tasted like mint and kissed with all the skill of an expert. She'd dreamed, fantasized about this moment, and now Devon held her pinned against his hard body, his tongue clearly demonstrating what he'd like to do. In her pussy, heat flared. Desires thought long buried to the realm of dreams flared to life.

Devon released her hands. He cupped the back of her neck, holding her still for his kiss. He devoured her with little nibbles and licks of pleasure. He drew in a breath, and then kissed her again.

Sadie threaded her fingers through his hair. Just as she dreamed, the silky smooth strands felt like heaven in her hands. She arched against him, wanting more intimate contact, and when he curved his hand over one breast, she moaned into his mouth.

Devon flicked his thumb across the taut bead of her nipple, a husky groan rumbling through his chest. He pulled his lips away to trail open-mouthed kisses over her neck, her jaw, down to where the vee of her shirt pointed to the valley between her breasts. Slipping his hand beneath her shirt, he palmed her breast through the cotton fabric of her bra.

Sadie closed her eyes. For a moment, she wished she'd worn something sexier, more inviting than the supportive white cotton, but she never expected Devon would seduce her in the employee lounge. The thought stilled her fingers in his hair.

Then Devon shoved the shirt up and closed his lips around one turgid nipple through the fabric of her bra.

Sadie sighed with pleasure and trailed her fingers over his broad shoulders. Hard muscle greeted her searching fingers beneath the cotton of his short-sleeved button down

Money Man

shirt. Trailing her fingers to his chest, she flattened her palm over his pectorals. She wanted to memorize him. She knew this would never happen again.

Devon knelt before her.

Sadie clenched her hands on his shoulder, disappointed she couldn't continue her exploration. Then, he reached behind her and unfastened her bra. The straps slipped down her shoulders. He pulled off her shirt and bra to bare her to his hungry gaze. The first caress of his warm breath against her flesh sent shivers down her spine. "Mmm, perfect," he murmured, then laved her nipple with his tongue.

Sadie clung to him. Pleasure tugged from her breast to her pussy, and she felt moisture pool and gather. Her hips arched as Devon's hands smoothed down her back to cup her ass. Up against the wall, on the table. She didn't care, so long as she had Devon inside her, now. Reservations fled her mind with the torture of his lips against her flesh. He nibbled her abdomen, going as far south as the waistband of her pants, then kissed a path to the other breast. The air conditioner kicked in, and the chill air on her wet nipple hardened it even more.

"Devon, please," she whimpered.

"Please what?" he asked against her skin. He nipped gently, then licked the red spot on her breast with his tongue.

Devon stood. He grabbed her waist, and started to lift her.

Sadie wrapped her legs around his hips, and he hauled her against him. The hard length of his cock pressed against her intimately, and she squirmed against the pressure. He'd fill her, she knew, and she couldn't wait. Just feeling him against her swollen lips, even through the layers of clothing, sent shudders through her.

He carried her over to the table and sat her down.

Sadie reached for him. Her hands splayed across his taut abdomen, fingers tracing the ridge of each muscle. Sliding her fingers over the waistband of his dress trousers, she brushed the back of her knuckles against his straining erection. His indrawn hiss of breath made her smile. She unfastened the button and slid the zipper down. His pants pooled at his ankles.

Sadie reached for the burgundy silk boxers and caressed the smooth fabric. She stroked him through the cloth, loving the feel of the silk against his flesh. Devon must have agreed for he gave a husky moan and grabbed her wrist. "I'm not sure I can last."

Mary Winter

“Then let’s not worry about it.” Shimming from the table, Sadie quickly slid her drawstring pants down her legs.

Devon watched, naked hunger evident in his gaze.

Sadie tried not to feel self-conscious as she slid her pearl pink bikini panties down her legs and tossed off her nursing clogs she wore.

Devon kicked off his pants and shoes. He shrugged out of his shirt, then bent down and grabbed a condom out of his pants pocket.

Sadie arched an eyebrow at him.

Devon grinned, showing off his killer dimple. “I hoped, all right?” He quickly sheathed himself, then turned back to her. Stroking her legs, his fingers closed in on her pussy. Desire darkened his gaze, and Sadie thought if he didn’t touch her she’d pass out from the wanting. At last, his fingers stroked her lips, feeling her wetness. He slipped inside stroking across her clit.

Sadie grabbed his shoulders.

“Are you sure?” Devon buried a finger in her slick, tight channel.

Sadie nodded. “Yeah,” she breathed.

He added a second finger and thrust gently.

Sadie tilted her head back. Her moan of pleasure echoed in the room. A curl of his fingers, and he stroked the sweet spot just inside her pussy. Pleasure radiated through her body. Gripping the edge of the table, she tried just to hold on to some measure of control.

Then Devon brushed his thumb across her clit.

Sadie’s orgasm ripped through her body. She cried out, her body convulsing with ecstasy. Her breath caught in her throat, and for a moment, she thought she’d shatter into a million pieces.

Devon’s thumb continued its maddening strokes. At last he slid his hands to her breasts and moved between her parted thighs. The tip of his finger caressed her chin. He tilted her head to look at him and what she saw in his gaze took her breath away.

Power. Passion. Need. Sadie licked her lips, then reached out to draw him closer to her. The tip of his cock brushed her wet pussy, and she closed her eyes.

“Open your eyes. I want to watch you,” Devon whispered. “And I want you to watch me.”

Money Man

No words had aroused her more. Sadie forced her eyes open as Devon slowly slid his cock into her. His width stretched her, filled her. At last he rested balls-deep inside her and exhaled.

Nothing had ever felt so right. The stillness of the moment captured her. She could sit there forever with her hands braced on his shoulders and Devon's cock buried deep inside her. He filled her, completed her, like no other man had been able to do, and the thought shook her to the core. At last, he pulled out, and then thrust forward.

The motion broke the moment, and they were two bodies, each straining toward a common goal. Over and over he thrust into her. Sadie's hands drifted down to his ass, squeezing as he pumped into her. His low groans mingled with hers, until she clenched her hands around his taut cheeks and clung to him as a second orgasm ripped through her. Her pussy clenched around his cock.

Devon slammed forward. He stiffened, the cords on his neck standing out. A triumphant cry and he found his own release. Leaning forward, he rested his head against her shoulder. Their mingled pants filled the room. The smell of sex hung in the air and looking over Devon's shoulder, Sadie looked directly into an open exam room.

What had she done? Suddenly aware of where her hands were, she released his ass and pulled her hands away. Devon raised his head. He stepped back, then turned and removed the condom, dropping it in the waste can by the table. "That was..." he turned to look at her.

"Something that can't happen again." Sadie scooted off the table. Recently used muscles protested the movement. Bending over, she reached for her clothes and grabbed them, then hurried into the small bathroom. Quickly, she cleaned up and slipped back into her uniform. When she returned from the bathroom, she noticed Devon had also dressed.

"We just had some of the best sex I've ever had, and you're telling me it can't happen again?" Devon strode forward. He stopped before her and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "I've wanted you for so long. Now that I have you, I'm not going to let you go."

"You don't have me," Sadie growled. She stepped back to put some distance between them. "I work for you, remember? You bought this practice. We are colleagues, nothing more." She exhaled, trying to calm her jangled nerves. *Forget the fact I've wanted him since I first saw him. Forget our wonderful dinner last night. We*

Mary Winter

have to go back to being colleagues. I worked too hard for this to throw it away on a moment's passion.

"This has nothing to do with our jobs, Sadie."

"What do you mean it has nothing to do with our jobs? It's sexual harassment!"

Sadie regretted the words as soon as they left her mouth. "I'm sorry. That wasn't fair."

"No, it wasn't. And don't forget, you were a willing participant too." Devon took a deep breath, as if he, too, were trying to calm his emotions. "Look, if you're sorry this happened, then I'm sorry. I've wanted you for a long time. But I can be professional if you can. Okay?" He extended his hand. "Let's shake on it."

Sadie eyed him warily. His abrupt change from seducer to businessman startled her and reminded her of what he was—a rich boy who could afford to buy this practice. She'd seen enough spoiled rich boys in school. Born with a silver spoon in their mouths, they looked down on those like her who worked their way through college. Reluctantly, Sadie admitted she shouldn't paint all rich individuals with the same brush, but damn it, she'd had it happen to her. She was smart enough to study with, but approach the subject of dating, and they laughed in her face and treated her like a leper. Okay, one of them did, and not Devon. It didn't matter.

"You going to shake my hand or not?" Devon's words cut into her thoughts.

"Yeah, I'll shake your hand." The instant she wrapped her fingers around his heat jolted through her body. "Truce?" she asked, trying to distract her mind from the memory of Devon's fingers stroking her pussy or caressing her breast.

Devon nodded. "Truce."

"Good. Then let's get that gone to lunch sign off the door and get back to taking care of some patients." At that moment the doorbell buzzed, and Sadie strode back to the lobby, certain she could keep her feelings under control. At least for today. A glance at the large clock above the front desk showed at least three hours left before she could close the clinic. "Three hours, Sadie, you can do it," she muttered under her breath. Maybe she'd even talk Devon into leaving early since she had tomorrow off and he had to work. A glance over her shoulder showed Devon still in the back. Removing the sign and unlocking the door, Sadie opened it. "I hope you haven't been waiting long," she said as she recognized Mrs. Dawson, her two o'clock appointment. She smiled down at the Pomeranian. "Why don't you come on back and we'll get Toodles taken care of?" The dog yipped, and Sadie smiled, glad to be on familiar ground once more.

Money Man

Chapter Three

Her first Saturday off in three months. Leaning back in her chair and sipping a cool glass of water, Sadie still didn't know how she managed it, except that Devon took one look at the schedule and gave her today off. Sadie grinned. Devon sure could be charming when he wanted to.

Closing her eyes, she tried to shove the image of the two of them out of her mind. He'd been a considerate lover, making sure she found her pleasure before he did. And his cock. His wonderful, magnificent cock. It filled her, stretched her, and made her feel loved like she hadn't felt in a long time.

The doorbell rang. Trying to think who it might be, Sadie rose to her feet and went to the door. She glanced through the peephole at her friend Juli. Sadie groaned. She'd forgotten that the two of them were going to go shopping today for Riley's birthday present. Trying not to look guilty, she opened the door.

Her friend stood on the doorstep, her brown hair cut newly short. She wore a polo shirt and jeans with low boots, a small purse slung over her shoulder. Juli gazed at Sadie's pajamas and shook her head. "Did I wake you?"

"No, not at all. Come on in. I'll change and be right out. I was uh--" Sadie gestured to the couch where a paperback book lay spine up on the floor.

Juli glanced at the cover. "A romance novel? You, who swore off men forever?" She sat down. "There's a story here, one you're not telling me."

"Can't I just say you and Riley inspired me?" She ducked down the hall, not wanting to answer her too-perceptive friend's questions.

"You can't get away from me that easily," Juli called down the hall.

Once inside the sanctuary of her bedroom, Sadie changed into a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. She slipped her feet into low sandals and ran a brush through her hair. She hurried back out to find Juli sitting on the couch, a can of soda sitting on the coffee table

Mary Winter

before her. Sitting across from her, Sadie grinned. "It doesn't look like you're ready to go shopping."

Juli shook her head. "Don't change the subject, girl." She grinned. "You have that I've-been-fucked-good look in your eye, and you forgot about my coming over? That isn't like you. Now spill. You've been acting strangely ever since that new vet... Darron, Derrick--"

"Devon. Devon Markier III," Sadie interrupted.

"Ever since Devon took over the vet practice. So what's up? You have the hots for this guy or what?" Juli sipped her drink. "And don't think you can lie. I know that look, remember?" She held out her hand with the sparkling diamond engagement ring.

Warmth from a telltale flush crept over Sadie's cheeks and neck.

Juli grinned knowingly.

Sadie released a pent-up breath. Like a pit bull, Juli held on tenaciously once she grabbed hold of an idea. "All right, yes, I like Devon is more than a professional capacity. He's smart, handsome, has manners, and also quite rich. I know all about rich playboys. I won't go through that again."

"Oh, honey," Juli said. "Rich was a long time ago. Not all wealthy individuals are like him."

"Your ex was," Sadie countered.

"Well, yes, he certainly isn't a prime example, but you say Devon has manners. That means you've talked to him, right? How does he treat you?"

"Like a colleague. A friend. We had dinner Thursday night. I, um, caught him in the shower when I came back from stitching up a calf."

"And from the look on your face, I say he's quite the hottie, right?" Juli grinned and took another drink. "So, you have a smart, rich, nice veterinarian. How does he feel about you? If he likes you, I say go for it."

"But he owns the clinic." Sadie rose to her feet and began to pace. "It wouldn't be right. He's my boss."

Juli laughed. "He works in the trenches alongside you, doesn't he?"

Sadie nodded.

"You think he's handsome. Have you told him?"

Sadie felt the blush deepening. "We, uh, had sex yesterday. On the table in the break room."

Money Man

“And you didn’t call me to tell me?” Juli grinned. “So obviously he finds you attractive. Was it good?” She paused for a moment. “No, don’t answer that. From the look on your face I can tell it was good. Better than good even. So what’s stopping you from pursuing his relationship?”

“What’s stopping me?” Sadie sat on the arm of a chair and held up her hand. “For starter’s he owns the clinic. He’s my boss. Secondly, he’s a rich playboy. Third, he’s my boss.”

“You already used that one,” Juli offered, trying to stifle her laughter.

Sadie glared at her friend.

“I was only trying to be helpful. Have you told him your concerns?”

“Yep, and he acted like they didn’t matter.”

“So there you go. You haven’t had a date in months, Sadie. Let’s look at this logically. What’s the worst that could happen? It doesn’t work out. He fires you. You go find a new job somewhere else. If you count the Kansas City area, there are hundreds of vet clinics. I’ve no doubt someone as talented as you could find a job anywhere. Heck, I’d recommend you at my place since I’ll be leaving soon.”

Juli’s words made sense. As much as Sadie hated to admit it, they made perfect sense. “So you’re telling me to go for it.”

“Yep. Don’t look back. You never know where following your heart might lead.” Sunlight sparkled from the diamond on Juli’s ring, and Sadie admitted that once again, her friend was right.

“Can we go shopping now?” Sadie asked. “And thank you. I’ll think about what you’ve said.”

Juli picked up her purse and stood. “I was just waiting for you. I want something perfect for Riley, aside from me tied up in a bow.” She laughed at her own joke as Sadie grabbed her purse and got ready to go shopping with her friend.

For a Saturday at the vet clinic, time dragged. Devon sat behind the desk in the front lobby anxiously waiting for his last appointment of the day. A glance at the clock showed fifteen minutes past noon, and Devon contemplated locking up and leaving. Leaning back in the chair, he stared at the desk, so neat and clean from Sadie’s work. No pictures or personal touches sat on the desk. It looked as cool and impersonal as one of the exam rooms.

Mary Winter

Devon raked his fingers through his hair and tried to shove thoughts of Sadie from his mind. He doubted she knew he bought the vet practice because of her. He admired her as a colleague and a woman. Just remembering her hot, tight pussy wrapped around his cock put his body on alert. “Down boy,” Devon growled. He wished he knew how to get past Sadie’s defenses.

The bell above the door jingled. Devon looked up to see a frantic-looking woman carrying a not very happy cat through the doors. “Ms. Whitefield?” Devon rose to his feet.

She nodded. “Sorry I’m late. I think Patches knew he was getting ready for the vet. It took me nearly half an hour to catch him.” The cat hissed, punctuating her statement.

“That’s all right. Why don’t you bring him back to exam room one?” Devon led the way down the short hallway to the exam room. He closed the door behind them, and the woman set the cat down on the table. The cat yowled and hissed. Focusing his attention on the cat, thoughts of Sadie fled.

Half an hour later and one nasty looking scratch on his hand, Devon accepted Ms. Whitfield’s check and bid them both good afternoon. As soon as they left, he locked the door and changed the sign to closed. A few moments spent cleaning the exam room, then he could head out and enjoy his Saturday. He wouldn’t enjoy it as much without Sadie. Exhaling, he wondered if she really disliked him that much. She fucked him, and quite well. He doubted she really hated him.

He sprayed cleaner on the exam table. As he wiped it away, he wondered if it was because he took over the practice. Dr. Kirkpatrick told him she had tried to get the money. Only no bank would loan to someone so young, and she lacked the assets. Could she be jealous?

Devon finished drying the table. He made one last round of the clinic, and satisfied everything was ready for Monday morning, stepped into the lounge. The table haunted him. Just looking at it reminded him of Sadie’s legs wrapped around his hips, how perfectly her breasts fit into his palms. His cock tightened. “Why do you dislike me so much, Sadie?” His question faded away in the silence.

Releasing a sigh, he grabbed his car keys and finished locking up the clinic. She called him a playboy, sounded as if she hated the very things he represented. What had

Money Man

happened in her past and why did she fight their attraction? He slid behind the wheel, started the car, and eased into traffic.

The surprisingly well-traveled two-lane road carried him out of the small town. He merged onto the interstate toward Kansas City and the exclusive neighborhood in which he lived. Looking around him at the traffic and city, he knew he could have worked anywhere. Iowa State University offered him a teaching position. For a moment he debated telling Sadie what he gave up for her, then dismissed it. Placing undue pressure on her would fracture their relationship before it even started.

The need to convince Sadie of his intentions burned in his blood. Damn it, she had to see he wasn't the kind of monster she thought he was. To her having sex might be a one-time forgivable mistake. To him, he wanted it again. And again. She intoxicated him like no other.

In two days he'd see her again. Perhaps they'd have time to talk, though Mondays usually were busy days. Maybe if he laid out his side of the story, his plans, he could get farther. It meant laying his heart on the line, but for Sadie, he'd do it. For her, he'd do anything.

Sadie's heart pounded as she unlocked the back door to the veterinary clinic. *Please don't let Devon be here. Not yet.* In her mind, she had it all planned out, what she would say, how she would act. If he were there, her best-laid plans would go astray.

The door squeaked open into darkness. Reaching for the light switch, Sadie stepped inside and closed the door behind her. She didn't bother to lock it, not when Devon would be arriving any time now. Quickly, she went through the office, switching on lights and powering up the computers. She checked the messages, only two, both non-emergencies. Making notes to call the individuals back when it was closer to opening time, Sadie hurried back to the lounge to microwave some oatmeal before the day started.

She'd just sat down when the door opened. Sadie looked up and watched as Devon entered. He looked good enough to eat in a light blue shirt and a pair of jeans worn in all the right places. The top two buttons were undone, revealing a triangle of tanned skin. Sadie swallowed hard and set her spoon down.

"Good morning," she said, taking a quick drink of her bottle of orange juice. "You're early."

Mary Winter

“So are you,” he commented, as he pulled out a chair and sat. “Good morning.” He glanced down at her breakfast. “No time to eat at home?” He arched an eyebrow and glanced at the clock.

Sadie didn’t need to follow his gaze to know the clock read six thirty in the morning. Considering they usually didn’t bother to get the clinic ready until about seven, she knew she was early, and she knew the reason why. The question was, what was Devon doing here so early? “Wanted to make sure we were ready to open, that’s all.” She took another bite and forced it down her throat.

“Afraid I wouldn’t have cleaned up on Saturday?” His defensive words made her look at him.

Sadie looked at Devon, really looked at him. “No, not at all. Did you get up on the wrong side of the bed this morning?” As soon as she asked the question, she regretted it, for she had an image of lying beside him, their legs intertwined. Sharing good morning kisses and morning sex filled her mind.

Devon’s eyes darkened. He leaned forward, hands clasped on the table. His gaze lingered on the vee of her scrub top and the pale skin it revealed. Slowly, he drew his gaze back to her face. “Considering you weren’t there, I’d say it was the wrong side of the bed.”

Sadie’s mouth went dry. Her spoon hovered in mid-air. Her breath shook, and low in her stomach, a coil of heat unfurled. Devon’s words painted a delicious picture in her mind. “I don’t know,” she said. “I steal the covers. I also toss and turn. Maybe you wouldn’t want to sleep with me.”

“Baby, if we shared a bed, we wouldn’t be sleeping.” Devon’s husky voice washed over her.

Sadie swallowed hard. Now, her mind screamed at her. Tell him now. She exhaled and wished the pounding of her heart would ease. “I, um, wanted to talk to you about that.” Inwardly, she cursed herself for fumbling.

“About sharing a bed with me? Have you reconsidered?”

Sadie shook her head. “Not about that. About Friday. I, um, might have overreacted.” She spilled the words out, not caring if she sounded poised. “I’m sorry. We, uh, got a little carried away, and I freaked. It was nice.”

Devon reached for her, twining his fingers with hers. “Nice? I don’t think anyone has called fucking me ‘nice’.” His thumb caressed her palm. Tiny shivers of

Money Man

pleasure darted through Sadie. Her nipples pebbled, and damn it, she wanted to take him again, right there on the same table.

“That’s not what I meant.” Sadie tried to pull her hand way, but Devon held her tight. “Look, why don’t you come over to my house this Friday? I’ll cook a nice dinner and we can call a truce, all right?”

Devon slid his fingers from hers. Rising to his feet, he circled the table, and then leaned one lean hip against it. He cupped her cheek. “A truce then?”

Sadie nodded.

“Sounds good. Shall we seal it with a kiss? We sealed the last one with a handshake, and look, now we need another one.” He grinned impishly, and before she had a chance to protest, he leaned over.

Devon brushed his lips across hers, a gentle touch that quickly deepened. His tongue slid across the seal of her lips, and eagerly Sadie opened for him. Heat blossomed in her body. Her nipples, already painfully hard, tightened even further. With the stroke of his tongue across hers, moisture flooded her pussy.

Sadie reached up and tunneled her fingers through Devon’s hair. The silky strands caressed her fingers. She anchored him, his lips pressed against hers. He nibbled on her lower lip, suckling before sliding his tongue into her mouth once more. A low moan rumbled through his chest.

The vet office, opening, all of it forgotten as Devon kissed her. She splayed her other hand against his chest, but whether to pull him closer or push him away, she didn’t know. He cupped the back of her head, holding her still for his ministrations. He drank from her.

Sadie pulled away, painfully aware she was about to offer a repeat of what happened Friday night. Her breath came in short pants, and she fought against the urge to scoot her chair back. “We’ve got to get the clinic ready to open,” she said when at last coherent words would form.

Devon nodded. “Yeah, we do.” His smoky gaze fastened on hers.

For a moment, Sadie thought about throwing caution to the wind and making love with Devon right there on the table—again. Rising to her feet, she backed toward the refrigerator. “So you’ll come to dinner Friday night?”

Mary Winter

Devon stood. "I'll be there." He turned and headed down the hall to the examining rooms, leaving Sadie alone with her thoughts. She resisted the urge to whoop for joy, and instead, focused on getting the clinic ready.

For a dinner with Devon, Sadie braved the mall after work. Normally she avoided the place like the plague, but for a chance to stand before Devon dressed in sheer lace, she knew a visit to Victoria's Secret was in order. The store sat towards an end of the mall, with an Old Navy on one side and a Spencer's Gifts on the other. Reminding herself she was on a mission, she bypassed both stores and stepped into Victoria's Secret.

Strolling past displays of designer underwear, Sadie wondered what might impress Devon. As a rich man, no doubt he'd seen his share of hideously expensive lingerie. And looking at it, she doubted she could pull some of it off without much blushing and a desire for a cover-up on her part. Sadie paused in front of a rack of tunics, deciding to stick with the safe stuff for a while.

Two women, clearly well off, entered the store. The tallest, a willowy blonde in Prada mules and hipster jeans looked bored. She also looked familiar, and Sadie tried not to stare as she tried to place the woman. A picture, a marina...Snippets of details came to mind, but nothing concrete. Her companion, a slightly shorter brunette in a flowing summer dress with spiky sandals laughed at something she said.

The details snapped into place. A picture on Devon's desk showed him and his sister on the family yacht. Sadie stepped forward. Devon spoke highly of his sister, and Sadie wanted to meet her. The woman's name graced the society pages regularly, from overseas trips and parties, to charity work she did for the humane society and Red Cross. "Excuse me, Maureen Markier?"

The blonde turned. Her green cat-eyed stare took in Sadie's hair, pulled back, and her scrub top, her Wrangler jeans, and sneakers. Without makeup, and five inches shorter in flats, Sadie felt positively dumpy.

"And you are?" Her eyes narrowed.

The brunette turned and glared at Sadie with a haughty stare.

"Sadie Grissom. I work at the veterinary clinic with your brother." Sadie extended her hand. "It's nice to meet you at last. He speaks very highly of you."

Money Man

Maureen shook Sadie's hand with a limp shake. "It's, um, nice to meet you, too. You do work with my brother, right? Because you don't look like the type to be his girlfriend of the week."

Maureen's words cut Sadie to the quick. She nearly stepped back, stunned by the hurtful words. "I really admire your work with the humane society. You've helped raise a lot of funds." *And what type is that?* The question lingered in Sadie's mind.

"Oh, those mutts." Maureen grimaced. "Devon makes me do it each year. Besides, it looks good for daddy."

"Why don't we go find me something for next weekend?" the brunette said with a leering glance at Sadie. "I want to look my best for Devon."

Sadie couldn't mask the hurt on her face.

Maureen patted her on the shoulder. "It's all right. Lots of girls think they're in love with him. But I hear daddy is going to help him buy a large clinic closer to town that way he won't have to work in the sticks. I doubt you'll be seeing much of my brother, anyway." She turned to her friend and began chatting animatedly about stylists and fashion designers Sadie hadn't even heard of.

She watched the two women walk away and wondered why she even bothered buying something nice to wear. Sadie shook her head. Letting two rich bitches dictate her life wasn't her style. Turning on her heel, she headed straight for the lingerie. Time to buy something to knock Devon's socks off. She hoped the rest of his clothes came with them.

Chapter Four

With her back to the door, Sadie concentrated on wiping off the counter of the last examination room before she could leave. She tucked stray strands of hair behind her ear and scrubbed until the counter gleamed. Lights glinted off the stainless steel table, and the tiny bench in the corner had been wiped down as well. With the floors mopped and the supplies replenished, she was about to call it quits for the evening.

Her hand stilled on the cleansing cloth. She listened for Devon. All week she'd thought of their impending date, and the clothing she'd bought for it. Devon acted like the complete gentleman, only stealing a few kisses. Her body hummed from his nearness, and she didn't know how much longer she could stand the tension, or if she even wanted to. The more she worked with Devon, the more she realized his money never had been an issue between them. At least not on her end. Sure, she hated the fact she couldn't afford to buy out the vet, but with the amount of work it took to keep the place running, a part of her was thankful she didn't have the responsibility, even if she still wanted it.

Footsteps sounded in the hall. Sadie resumed her scrubbing, not wanting Devon to realize she had halted in her work. She heard the steps near, and then felt Devon's presence as he entered the examination room. He halted behind her, then reached around her and closed his hand over the counter. Warm breath tickled the side of her neck, and when he pressed against her, the hard ridge of his cock pressed into her.

"I think we've done enough work, don't you?" Devon's husky voice sent shivers running down her spine.

Sadie licked her suddenly dry lips. "I want to make sure everything is ready for tomorrow morning. Seven o'clock comes way too early." *And it comes even earlier now that my nights are haunted by dreams of you.* She inhaled his scent, woody cologne that made her want to wrap him around her and never let go. Her nipples hardened. Heat

Money Man

flared, and she struggled to bank it. She didn't need to jump his bones right here in the examination room.

Devon rocked hips against her. He plucked the rag from her fingers. "As your boss, I'm telling you that your work is finished tonight. Although," he reached up and traced the curve of a breast, "there is something that needs examining."

Sadie laughed. The cheesy line made her think of bad porno movies. "I'm sorry," she said between spurts of laughter. Sadie turned in his arms. "But do you know how bad that line is?"

Devon chuckled. "But the results would feel so good."

With the thrust of his cock against her, Sadie admitted he was right. This close, her breasts brushed against his chest, and she could imagine their legs tangled in satin sheets. So why didn't she twine her arms around his neck and kiss him? Memories of her trip into Victoria's Secret haunted her mind.

Devon cupped her chin. For long moments he stared into her eyes. "Is everything all right?" he asked after long moments.

Sadie nodded, ashamed that she might have been so transparent. "Yeah. Everything's fine."

"So why aren't you wrapping your arms around my neck and kissing me like I've never been kissed before?" A smile quirked the corner of his mouth. "You're acting like I'm not affecting you, but I know differently." He closed his hand over her breast, massaging it through her scrub top and bra.

Sadie bit her lip to keep from moaning with pleasure. "I just..." She fished for words. "I thought.... Are you going to Kansas City this weekend?" She blurted out the question before she could stop.

Devon shrugged. "We have dinner tomorrow night. I didn't know what my weekend would bring." He brushed his thumb across her lower lip. "Are you wanting to take me away to the city?"

Sadie shook her head. "I thought." She sighed. "Never mind what I thought." Suddenly, pinned between Devon's body and the counter, she felt claustrophobic. Raising her hand, she flattened it against his chest, meaning to push him out of the way. Instead, she curled her fingers into his soft, cotton, polo shirt. Heat radiated into her palm.

"Are you all right?" Concern filled Devon's gaze. "If I'm pushing--"

Mary Winter

“No, you’re not.” Sadie fought against the urge to rest her head against his broad chest and let him ease her troubles away. “I guess I’m just tired. I haven’t been sleeping well.”

“Neither have I baby, but I understand.” He brushed a kiss across her temple and backed away. “If there’s anything I can do, you’ll let me know, all right?”

Sadie managed a wan smile and a nod. “I will, thanks.”

“Why don’t you head on home? I’ll finish up things here. Get some rest.”

“All right.” His thoughtfulness soothed her troubled nerves. Perhaps the women were only being catty. Then again, she knew how rich playboys worked. Exhaling a breath, she followed him out of the exam room and down the hall. Tomorrow night, he was all hers.

The scent of steaks seared to perfection filled the kitchen. Sadie set wooden bowls filled with romaine lettuce and field greens next to her best plates. A wine glass sat by each plate along with a full compliment of silverware. In the center of the table, chilling in a bucket of ice was a moderately priced Shiraz wine. Devon strolled into the dining room and grinned. “Smells wonderful. Is there anything I can do?”

“Why don’t you pour the wine?” Sadie whirled back into the kitchen and forked both steaks onto a large platter. She added two plump baking potatoes. Walking to the dining table, she set the platter down, then hurried back to the kitchen for butter and the rolls she baked.

Returning to the table, she watched Devon pour the wine. His shirtsleeves were rolled up, revealing tanned forearms lightly sprinkled with hair. Heat roiled low in her stomach. She emptied her hands, then leaned back against the counter. Devon poured wine masterfully. He set both glasses back on the table, before sliding the bottle back into the ice.

“I haven’t had food like this in a while.” Devon stepped behind her and pulled out a chair. “Ladies first.”

Sadie brushed her lips across his as she sat. “Thank you. I love to cook.” She placed her cloth napkin in her lap. For this dinner with Devon, she went all out. Cloth napkins, fine wine, she’d even purchased organic steaks.

Devon sat across from her.

“Bon Appetit,” she said.

Money Man

He nodded. "Appetit."

For long moments neither said anything. Sadie watched Devon eat, noticing the way his lips wrapped around the tender morsel of steak. His Adam's apple moved when he swallowed. His lips on the wine glass only made her want to taste the expensive wine directly from him. Behind the silk camisole she wore, her nipples hardened. Heat flared deep within her, and her pussy clenched and grew moist.

She decided against finishing dinner and decided to skip straight to desert. The open neck of Devon's shirt revealed first few buttons of his shirt were undone, revealing a slice of tanned, hair-sprinkled skin. Setting down her fork, she surveyed the remainder of her plate, mostly half a potato, and some of her salad. She decided she had enough to eat. Leaning back in her chair, Sadie watched Devon.

He ate like a man truly enjoying his meal. Sadie wondered if his family hired a cook and what kinds of things he ate on a regular basis. The meal, one of the largest she'd had in a while, probably looked plebeian compared to the high cuisine a cook would make. Sadie didn't care. Devon enjoyed it. She doubted he could fake the murmur of appreciation.

"This is good stuff. You're not hungry?" He asked before polishing off his steak.

"I'm getting full," she said. "But I wouldn't mind desert."

Devon arched his eyebrow. "Something tells me you're not thinking of tiramisu or even ice cream."

Sadie licked her lips like a cat. She chuckled. "Nope. Though I might have some strawberries in the fridge. And maybe a can of Redi-Whip." Leaning back in her chair, she took a sip of her nearly empty wine glass.

Devon's eyes twinkled. Lust burned in their depths, and looking at him, Sadie wanted to drown in his hungry gaze. Instead, she pushed her chair back, folded her napkin on her plate, and walked to the other side of the table where Devon sat. Standing behind him, she braced her hands on his shoulders and began to knead.

"Mmm, now that's what I call service." Devon leaned back, his lush mouth too much a temptation to resist.

Sadie leaned forward. She brushed her lips across his, tasting steak and wine. "You taste good," she murmured against his lips and dipped down for another kiss. With her tongue, she traced the seal of his mouth. He opened to her, and with a moan, she delved inside. His hands reached up, one cupping the side of her face, the other reaching

Mary Winter

behind to hold the back of her neck. It was an awkward angle, but one Sadie didn't try to change. Her fingers kneaded his shoulders, contracting and releasing like a cat in the throes of happiness.

Leaning forward, she nuzzled his neck. His aroma tantalized her nose, a heady musk that had her thinking of naked bodies twining on silk sheets. With tiny nips, she traced a trail along the side of his neck, working from the sensitive spot behind his ear all the way to where his neck met his shoulder, then trailing back up. She pulled his earlobe into her mouth and suckled.

Devon moaned. Reaching for her, he pulled her around him until she toppled into his lap.

Sitting with her rear pressed against Devon's hard cock removed any doubts in Sadie's mind. Devon cupped her chin and tilted her face up to his for a long, hungry kiss. His free hand slid across her stomach cupping her ribs as he worked toward her breasts. His thumb flicked against her nipple. Sadie moaned. She threaded her fingers through his hair, wanting to hold him against her, drink him in and never let him go.

His tongue slid across hers. She wanted him to suckle her breasts, and then go lower until he savored her like a fine prime rib. Sadie clutched fistfuls of his shirt. If his kisses were too practiced, his hand too sure on her breast, it didn't matter. His searing kiss burned jealous thoughts from her mind, and she willingly let herself drown in the sensation.

Sadie wiggled against his cock. Her pussy ached for him. She wanted him, right here, right now, the perfect end to a perfect meal. Without releasing his lips, she slid away long enough to straddle him. The thrust of his cock against the fabric separating them drove another moan from her, and she wiggled against it.

Devon groaned. Freer now, she worked on his shirt, unfastening the buttons preventing her from exploring his chest thoroughly. She skimmed her fingers across revealed skin until his chest was bare to her touch. She flattened her palms against his pecs. Hard muscle met her touch, and between her legs, his cock jumped. Sadie grinned as she pulled away from the kiss to suck in a needed gulp of air.

She nuzzled his jaw, then his neck, working her way to his collarbone. Lower, still, until she laved his flat, male nipples with her tongue. His shiver answered her own. Tonight, she had Dr. Markier exactly where she wanted him, and she wasn't letting go. Her hands dropped to the waistband of his jeans, quickly unfastening them. Gently, she

Money Man

lowered the zipper over his burgeoning erection. The thin cotton of his boxers almost failed to hold it bay, and reaching in, she wrapped her fingers around his shaft.

“Sadie.” Her name was a growl of barely restrained need.

She stroked, squeezing gently as she ran her fingers from base to tip. Having Devon in her power, helpless to do anything but allow her free roam of his body, shot heat straight through to her core. Her pussy clenched with the knowledge she’d soon have him deep inside. Her nipples pebbled and ached for the touch of his slender, talented fingers. With her nails, she caressed the underside of his cock. Devon’s swift intake of air put a grin on her face, and she shimmied on his lap.

“Do you know how long I’ve fantasized about this?” she asked, her lips hovering over his skin.

“Sadie, please.” His hands tightened on her waist. “I don’t know if I can take much more.” His cock jerked and a drop of fluid leaked from the tip.

Devon unfastened her pants and started to pull them over her hips. He reached inside her panties and stroked her. His fingers slid into her slick lips. A flick of his fingers and he found her clit. He rubbed it, his other fingers tunneling inside her. Sadie leaned back and moaned as pleasure spiraled through her body. She rose up and grabbed her pants, shoving them as far down as she could. His fingers felt like magic, finding her sweet spot just inside her channel and stroking it. Her pussy clenched around his fingers. She worked her hips. Just one touch and he made her come apart. She clamped her hands onto his shoulders, and with a jerk of her hips, she came. She buried her face against his chest, moaning as wave after wave of pleasure broke over her.

She stilled against him, trying to get her bearings.

Devon yanked on her pants. “I got to be inside you.”

“Uh huh.” Sadie nodded. She stepped over him, using the back of the chair for support, then shimmied out of her pants.

Devon stood and pushed his jeans to the floor. He kicked off shoes and pants, then returned to his seat on the chair.

Sadie straddled him again. This time, she rubbed her slick pussy against the head of his cock. It slipped between her labia. She teased him, rolling her hips first one way then the other. Devon closed his hands around her hips and started to pull her down.

Sadie shook her head. Reaching between them, she fondled his balls. “Not yet,” she whispered, and took him inside her another inch.

Mary Winter

Pleasure built. At last she couldn't stand it anymore and sheathed herself on his hard cock. "Oh yes," she hissed as she settled on him, their bodies flush.

Devon palmed her breasts. For long moments, she sat there, letting him caress her breasts, his cock deep inside her body. Savoring the moment, she looked at him and smiled. Then, she began to move.

She made no pretenses of it being a slow, leisurely ride. Instead, she pumped him, rising and falling. He met her, stroke for stroke. Pleasure wound through her, tighter and tighter, until with a cry, she came.

Devon pinched her nipples, the pleasure-pain only drawing out her orgasm. Beneath her, he stiffened, and she felt him spill into her.

Sadie leaned forward and rested her head against his shoulder. She panted as if she'd won a race. Devon wrapped a loose arm around her. Together they sat.

Sadie rested her head against his shoulder. A soft smile curved her lips, and her hand rested against his ribs. She nuzzled his neck. "Mmm," she said when at last she could form coherent thoughts. "I think that was the best desert I've ever had."

Devon chuckled. Wrapping his arms around her he slid his hand beneath her rear. "Hold on," he whispered, and in a single movement rose to his feet.

Sadie grinned as Devon carried her into the living room. He sat down on the couch, Sadie sprawled in his lap. "There," he said. "Much better."

She curled against him, loving the after-coital comfort he provided. She traced the flat ridge of a pectoral muscle with a soft finger, trailing down over his washboard abs. Sitting here, curled up against Devon, she knew she could grow used to this. The thought stilled her searching fingers.

She loved him.

How, when or why she didn't know, but love him she did. Curled up next to him on her couch, she didn't want this night, this weekend to end. She bit her lip, unsure whether she should tell him or feelings or not.

Devon rubbed her back. His hand moved lazily over her skin. Glancing over him, back at the table, she wondered whether she should go put things away. Candles still burned, casting a soft glow, and the aroma of a well-cooked meal hung in the air, mingling with the smell of sex. "We should probably..."

Devon pressed his finger against her lips, quieting her. "Not now. Let's just savor the moment."

Money Man

“Okay.” Sadie snuggled against him. The depth of her feelings eluded her. Sure, she worked with him, lusted after him, but never imagined herself falling in love with Devon Markier III. He was wrong for her. Totally and completely wrong. Panic seized her.

She looked up at him, covertly studying him from beneath lowered eyelashes. If she loved him, what was this to him? Did he see this as a one-night stand? It had to be something more, if nothing else he couldn’t seem to keep his hands off of her. But love? She doubted Devon loved anyone beside himself.

She closed her eyes at the harsh thought. Damn it, he didn’t deserve her anger. Not like that. Releasing a breath, she tried to relax against him.

Devon pressed a kiss to the top of her head. “Everything okay? You seem a bit jumpy.”

His tenderness evoked tears. She squeezed her eyes against the telltale drops of moisture. “This isn’t just a one night stand is it?” She cringed the moment she spoke.

Devon grinned and counted on his fingers. “No, definitely more than a one-night stand.”

Sadie stiffened at his jovial attitude. She loved him, and he made light of their situation. She knew this would happen. Expected it even, and yet, sitting next to him, skin against skin, it hurt. If he’d taken a scalpel and split her sternum to navel he couldn’t have hurt her worse. An image of his sister and her friend at Victoria’s Secret haunted her. The clothing garnered the response she’d hoped for, but she hadn’t worn the underwear. *I don’t need fancy things to seduce Devon.* She wished she felt so sure.

Devon leaned back and caressed her cheek. “Hey, sweetheart, I didn’t mean it that way. If I wanted a one-night stand I could have gotten it anywhere. You deserve more than that—” The shrill ring of a cell phone cut off his words.

Automatically he reached for his hip, then grinned as he realized he was still naked. “My pants. I’m sorry. I’m on call this weekend.”

Sadie nodded. Her heart ached to hear the rest of his words. She knew the nature of their business, and sick animals didn’t wait. She didn’t want them too, either, and even in the middle of this serious conversation, Devon’s wanting to answer the phone impressed in her his sense of duty. She watched him scramble into the dining room and fish his cell phone out of his hip pocket of the jeans.

Mary Winter

He flipped it open. "Devon here." He listened for a moment, his expression growing grave. "How is he?" Devon frowned.

Suddenly chilled by Devon's expression, Sadie pulled an afghan from the back of her couch and wrapped herself in it. He would be leaving her. She knew it came with the job, but not tonight, not when they'd been so close. She watched as his scowl deepened.

"I don't like that." He held the phone in the crook of his neck and pulled on his pants. "Yeah, I'll be there right away." He slipped the phone into his pocket and looked to her. He sighed. "I'm sorry. I got to go. There's an emergency, and they need a vet."

Sadie started to rise from the couch. "What is it? I can help."

Devon glanced back at the table. "If you go, hon, I don't think I'd be able to concentrate. I'll be back soon. I promise." He strode over to her and pressed a kiss to the top of her head. "And when I come back we'll pick up where we left off. I'm horribly sorry I'm leaving you with the clean-up."

Sadie forced a grin. He said he'd return. That had to count for something, right? So why did she feel as if she were being abandoned? "Okay. Be safe and come back soon." She stood and pressed a kiss to his lips. "I'll be waiting."

Devon grabbed her around the waist and hauled her against his body. The afghan slid, but neither noticed. He slanted his mouth over hers and kissed her. When he pulled back for air, Sadie saw the desire in his eyes. "Go," She made a shooing motion with her hand. "You're needed."

"I'm needed here too, but I'll be back. I promise." Slipping his arms into his shirt he pulled his car keys from his jeans pocket, and a few moments later, walked out the door.

Money Man

Chapter Five

Sunlight slanted across the bed, brilliant beams that bore into Sadie's closed eyelids. With a growl, she pulled the comforter over her head and burrowed deeper into the covers. She reached across the bed, the welcoming expanse of her King-sized bed suddenly cold and empty. Her stomach fell. Devon hadn't returned.

Sadie squeezed her eyes closed. Her stomach dropped. Tears pricked her eyes, and she refused to give into their salty release. A patient. Devon had been called away to tend to a patient. Pain flared, quickly pushed aside, that he hadn't invited her to go along. He'd be distracted, he said, and Sadie didn't know if it was a compliment or a lie. She exhaled and rolled over. The red digital numbers of her alarm clock read after noon.

She bolted upright. The clinic. She'd promised to work today, and now, she'd slept through the clinic's opening and closing. Damn it, it hadn't been that late when she'd gone to bed, but the hours of pacing and worrying added to her exhaustion. Tossing off the covers, she hurried into the shower.

Five minutes later, she banded her hair back with an elastic band and dried off. Dressed in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt, she sat down on the couch, remembering the way she cuddled with Devon after their dinner and desert. Heat flushed through her. Picking up the phone, she dialed the clinic.

No answer. The answering service kicked in, and thanking the operator, Sadie hung up. Now she remembered they'd closed the clinic today. They didn't have any patients scheduled, and both Devon and Sadie agreed a weekend off, especially this one, would be welcome. She dialed Devon's cell phone. No answer.

Tears stung her eyes. Hurt twisted deep inside her. He should have taken her with him. She proved time and time again her capableness as a veterinarian. His flimsy excuse about her distracting him seemed shallow, maybe even a poor attempt to flatter her. Then, he didn't return. Didn't even call to let her know he wasn't returning.

Mary Winter

She scowled, trying hard not to give into the urge to cry. She dialed his home number. An older woman answered the phone. "Hello."

"Hi. Is Devon there?" Sadie tried to keep her voice light.

"No. He said he was going away for the weekend. May I take a message?"

The woman's kindly voice lodged a lump in her throat. "No, that's okay. Thank you." She hung up the phone before the damning tears could fall. He'd left. Perhaps with the svelte blonde she saw at Victoria's Secret, maybe with someone else. Her stomach churned with anger. Damn him for playing her for a fool.

Sadie paced, storming from room to room trying to figure out a plan of action. She could confront him. She had his cell phone, and eventually he'd come into the office. The idea of bursting in on him and some blonde bimbo filled her with a sense of purpose, of satisfaction, and of pain. No, she didn't want to see him like that. Thinking of how he hurt her only served to carve a deeper hole into her soul.

Releasing a sigh, she slumped against the kitchen counter and grabbed a bottle of orange juice from the refrigerator. Drowning it in two gulps, she rinsed out the plastic container and dropped it in her recycling bin. She'd go into the office. Then she'd find out the truth about his claims. Maybe it was a call calculated to get him out of her house as soon as possible, and maybe it was true. If it was, the office would tell.

Sadie slipped her feet into sneakers and grabbed her purse and car keys off the counter. The drying dishes in the sink mocked her with their presence, reminding her of a meal shared with the man she loved. Swallowing hard, Sadie blinked back tears. She loved him, and he'd conspired to hurt her. She should have known. Rich playboys were all alike.

She drove to the clinic torn between hurt over Devon's actions and anger at his betrayal. She hoped she'd find proof of a sick animal. If she didn't, she didn't know what she'd do. She swallowed back bitter tears, furious at herself for letting him get to her. When Dr. Fitzpatrick sold the vet clinic, she should have moved. She'd contemplated it, but then decided against it, liking the small town atmosphere so close a major city. Now, she wondered if she'd made the right choice.

She pulled into the back parking lot of the vet clinic, pleasantly surprised to see Devon's car parked there. It sat at an angle, as if its driver had hastily parked it, and she took it as another good sign. She turned off the ignition, and with keys in hand, walked to the back door of the clinic. She tried it. Locked.

Money Man

She unlocked the door, peering inside the small window into the darkened clinic. She stepped inside, struck by how quiet it was. Not bothering to flip on the light, she closed the door behind her and strolled into the kennel area.

Soft whimpers came from one of the cages. Sadie's heart stopped. She stepped forward, making out a small, prone shape. An IV pole stood outside the kennel, and Sadie noticed a drip line disappearing between the bars. Stepping forward, she turned on one of the softer lights above the sink, not wanting to disturb the creature. In the low lighting, she stood by the kennel bars, and her heart caught in her throat.

A puppy, his black and tan muzzle looking part pug, his legs too long for his body, lay on his side. Large rows of stitches closed lacerations across its hip and side. Bandages wrapped around an ear and over a nasty wound on its chest. IV fluids dripped into the body, where only the shallow raising and lowering of ribs and soft whimpers broke the stillness of the creature.

Sadie wrapped her fingers around the kennel bars and released her breath in a rush. Her anger drained out of her, leaving her limp with exhaustion. A tear finally welled up in the corner of her eye and slid over her cheek. "I'm sorry," she whispered, not daring to reach through the bars and touch the puppy's soft muzzle. "I'm so sorry." Though whether her words were for Devon or the injured dog, she couldn't say.

She stepped away long enough to turn on another light switch so she'd have light for working. Quickly, she checked the level of fluids in the IV and the lines. Bandages looked clean. She opened the kennel and gingerly cleaned up the minor soiling that happened during the night, then closed it. She glanced at the bottle of antibiotics on the counter, but uncertain when the puppy had its last medicine, knew better than to provide another dose. The poor thing looked as if a car had hit it. Looking at the tag on the kennel, she saw no information listed as to the puppy's owners. Someone ought to call the local humane society and check lost dog notices. The little puppy looked gangly, but cute, and she had no doubt it had a loving home waiting somewhere.

A hand rested on her shoulder.

Sadie jumped.

"I didn't mean to startle you," Devon's sleep-roughened voice soothed her nerves. "I'm sorry I didn't make it back last night. It was touch and go there for a while with this little guy."

Mary Winter

Sadie turned to face him. A growth of stubble covered his jaw, and he wore a pair of sweatpants. Seeing his bare chest reminded her of what they shared, and she took a step back. "You should have called me. I would have been glad to come in and help." She tried to keep the accusing tone out of her voice, but it crept in anyway. "I was worried."

Devon reached for her. "I know. I'm sorry. I didn't want to leave him unattended, so I crashed on the futon in the office." Creases from the mattress and pillow marred the side of his face.

"Have you contacted the puppy's owners? Let me go home and get some things, and I'll return to stay with the patient. What happened?"

Devon went to the counter and crushed up a pain pill. "It's time for his next medicine." He wrapped it in a piece of cheese and fed it through the bars.

The puppy ate, and Sadie saw the ribs poking against the poor puppy's coat.

"He's a stray. No owners. A car hit him. He's lucky nothing is broken, just banged up pretty bad. You don't need to stay."

"What if I want to?" she asked, wondering why he didn't want her there. "I have a change of clothes in the locker, guess I don't need to go home after all." She looked him up and down. "You look like hell. Why don't you tell me his schedule, and I can keep watch for a while."

Devon managed a soft grin. "I didn't get much sleep last night."

"Well then it's settled," she said a bit too briskly. "I'll go ahead and watch him while you get some decent sleep."

"You don't have to do that." Devon said. He glanced at the card, seeing the notation she made about the puppy's bowl movement. "I'm sorry I drug you out here."

"Sorry?" Sadie forced her voice down, not wanting to upset the puppy. "Why are you sorry? I should have been by your side last night. It looks like you had to stitch up a hell of a lot of wounds, and I'm sure it didn't go easy with only one set of hands. I'm a vet. It's my job to help. I'm only sorry I didn't get here earlier, but after worrying half the night, I didn't get to bed too early myself." She winced at the last selfish statement, but he had to know.

Devon stepped back to grab the counter. He sagged, and then straightened. "I didn't know how bad it was, and then once I did, I really couldn't take time out for a phone call. I thought I'd lose him several times last night, and it was only within the last

Money Man

five hours or so that he's really stabilized. By then, I figured you were asleep, and we get woken up by pagers enough in this business. I'm sorry." He rubbed his hands over his head. "Look. I'll take you up on your offer. I want a shower and yeah, a nap would be nice. Are you sure you don't mind staying?"

Sadie balled her hands at her sides. The urge to reach out to him nearly overwhelmed her. "I don't mind," she said.

Devon nodded. "He shouldn't need anything for a few hours. I'd like to try and get some food down him, but other than that, he just needs monitoring. I sure didn't expect to spend the weekend at the clinic. I kind of wanted to spend it in your bed." He shrugged. "But you're here now, and the futon is big enough for two. Maybe when our patient is stabilized we can pick up where we left off." With a wicked grin that left her breathless, he turned and sauntered back to the lounge and the employee bathroom.

Sadie swallowed hard, battling the rush of heat that filled her. Devon hadn't acted like a man who wanted nothing to do with her. Instead, he acted as much enamored of her as she was of him. Closing her eyes, she breathed deeply.

From the other room a cell phone rang. Sadie turned toward the employee area. The phone rang again, and this time she recognized the ring as not her own. She strode through the door to find Devon scooping his cell phone out of his locker. Closing her eyes, Sadie leaned against the wall. *Not again.* The memory of how he left her house last night, albeit for a patient, hung in her mind. She swallowed hard and tried not to listen too intently to the conversation.

"I'm so glad you called," Devon's voice carried to where she stood.

He leaned against the lockers in a casual pose. With his back to her, Sadie couldn't see his face, but she really didn't have to. Memories flashed in her mind, of her in college, listening as her then-boyfriend told her she wasn't rich enough to date, only sleep with, and then watching him flounce away in a red Jag with some blonde who wore more diamonds than an Oscar nominee.

"Yeah, I know we planned to get together this afternoon. I'm sorry I missed. Something came up at the clinic. Can we reschedule?" Devon sounded casual.

No mention of her. Sadie listened. Whatever Devon had planned, it obviously hadn't involved her at all. She scowled and tried not to feel hurt. She knew this would happen, one way or another. Eventually, he'd grow tired of her, see her as a diversion,

Mary Winter

and go his own way. On the pretense of needing to watch over their patient--no his patient--she turned back to the kennels.

"That sounds fine. I'll get back in touch with you next week sometime. I really appreciate your flexibility. Yes, you do know how it is. Okay then. Thanks so much. Have a good weekend." The call ended.

Sadie stiffened, not sure whether she wanted to talk to Devon right now. A part of her told her being suspicious of him was silly. After all, hadn't he proved with the puppy that he put his job first, and he did care about her? She shook her head. She held no claims to him. He didn't have to tell her his plans. And that, she supposed, rankled the most.

Pulling out a chair, she sank into it and watched the puppy sleep. She loved him. Rich, playboy, had everything handed onto his plate, Devon. And she didn't know how he felt about her. Sadie rested her head in her hands. Footsteps sounded just outside the room, the clang of a locker, then running water. Sucking in a deep breath, Sadie tried to prepare herself for a confrontation she really didn't want to have. *Why can't I just give him the benefit of the doubt?* She shook her head. *Because I don't want to be a fool, that's why.*

The running water stopped. The puppy whimpered. Sadie rose to her feet and checked on him. Just a dream, but still, she spent a few moments just touching the puppy through the bars of the cage. The IV drip looked as if it would last for a few more hours, and she checked bandages and supplies. With the extent of his injuries, the puppy appeared to be resting peacefully.

"Sadie," Devon's voice carried across the kennel area.

She turned and saw him leaning against the doorframe. Exhaustion tugged at his features, and his skin was ashen from lack of sleep. "Why don't you go lay down?" she offered. "You look like hell." She closed her eyes. *Please don't let us get into it here. He's tired. I'm upset.*

Devon grinned. "Yeah, I certainly don't feel like my usual, charming self." He started to shuffle out of the room, back to the office with its waiting futon. "Why don't you come with me?"

Sadie shook her head. "Someone has to stay here with the dog."

"Squeakers will rest comfortably for a while. Besides, we need to talk."

Money Man

Sadie stiffened. Having been through the scene before, she didn't want to hear him tell her she was only a fling, something to get out of his system. Yet, looking at him, she couldn't refuse to comply. "Yeah." She expelled a ragged breath. "We need to talk." Her heart pounding and her stomach flipping somersaults, she followed him into the office.

Sadie's heart ached. Devon's shoulders slumped, exhaustion wearing him down. He stumbled, his bare feet shuffling across the floor. She gave a last, longing look at the puppy, and then turned into the office. He bent over, folded the futon down flat for two people, then sank onto it like a falling sack of flour. Rubbing his hand over his eyes, he blinked sleepily at her and patted the mattress next to him.

Sadie sat. She kept her back straight, both feet planted firmly on the floor like in a fifty's sitcom.

Devon rolled over and reached for her.

God she felt like a heel. Reluctantly, Sadie leaned back onto the pillows, still keeping one foot firmly on the floor. In his condition, she doubted he could seduce her, but she didn't want to take any chances. She stared at the ceiling trying to come to grips with the warring emotions inside her.

One moment she hated him, hated his playboy ways, the fact that in the end, he'd no doubt break her heart. The other she loved him, and wanted to smooth the wrinkles exhaustion etched into his features, and maybe rub his shoulders to release some of the tension. The phone call reminded him of his sister and her friend at Victoria's Secret, and while she knew she shouldn't hold it against him, she wanted to. She really did. *But I can't punish him for something someone else did. Oh hell.*

With the realization, she squeezed her eyes closed and opened them again. Turning she looked at Devon.

He lay beside her, eyes half-closed. "I'm sorry I didn't call you. I really should have, but I'm glad you're here." Reaching out, he brushed a strand of hair across her face. "That was Dr. Kirkpatrick on the phone. I was going to meet with him to discuss how the vet clinic is doing. That's why he called."

"We're doing all right, aren't we?" Dr. Kirkpatrick rarely spoke money, but Sadie knew they had a broad clientele and always kept busy. For a moment, she wondered if things had changed that badly. No, not when she still worked weekends, and most appointments had to be booked a week in advance.

Mary Winter

“We’re doing just fine. I just like to keep him in the loop. Sometimes I still feel like it’s his practice, and I’m just watching it for a while.” Devon gave a sleepy grin. “Actually, if the emergency hadn’t come up, I was going to invite you to dinner with us.”

Sadie relaxed. “Really? I just work here. You guys know more about the financial end of things than I do, though I will admit I have a pretty good idea.”

“You do more than just work here. You’re the heart of this place. Dr. Kirkpatrick knew when he retired he’d be leaving the place in your hands, and yes, I know you tried to buy out his half of the practice and failed. And I knew of you. Your instructors spoke highly of you, as do the pet owners, and I’d heard good things about you. You deserve to sit at that table as much as I do, and that’s why I was going to invite you.” Devon leaned back and closed his eyes.

Silence stretched between them while Sadie digested Devon’s words. He valued her work, and he valued her as a colleague. She smiled, finally feeling as if all her hard work paid off. Swallowing hard, she fought against a rush of emotion.

“Something’s been bothering you, though. You were distant for most of this week, and then last night at dinner.” Devon sighed. “God, you took me by surprise. A wonderful dinner, and then dessert. If I weren’t completely dead on my feet, I’d ask for second helpings. But then today, you came barreling in here, out for blood. What happened? Why don’t you trust me?”

Devon’s words made her feel completely like an ass. “Last week, I, um, ran into your sister and a friend. She said you were going to Kansas City with her this weekend, and I thought...” Sadie’s words trailed off as she tried to put what she felt into words. “I know you come from money, and this woman looked rich. I put myself through college. I worked two jobs at times, and it was only with Dr. Kirkpatrick taking me on as a vet here that I’ve finally been able to make headway. My financial situation pales, and I know that other girl is probably more your type.” She frowned.

“More my ‘type’?” Devon reared up on the futon and glared at her. “How would you know what my type is when you’re the woman I spend most of my days with? You’re the woman I made love to last night.”

“Made love?” Sadie squeaked.

“Yeah, made love. My sister has many friends who would love for me to spend a weekend with them in Kansas City. But you know what? I’m here. With you. With Squeakers.”

Money Man

“It’s your job,” Sadie threw her arm over her eyes wishing the ground would open up and suck her inside. “You’re with me because you work here.”

“I wouldn’t work here if I didn’t want to.” Devon yawned. “God, I’m tired. Look, I don’t want to fall asleep on you, but I’m exhausted.” Reaching over, he grabbed her wrist and pulled her arm away from her eyes.

Sadie looked at him. The raw emotion in his gaze shook her. Devon stared at her as if she were the only woman in the world, and the hunger simmering in the depths of his eyes sparked an answering desire within her. “I—um—”

Devon pressed a finger across her lips. “Look. There’s so much I want to say, I want to tell you, but I’m exhausted. And this is a conversation I want to have when I’m wide-awake. I’d be honored if you stayed here with me. It isn’t the weekend I had planned. I can’t think of anywhere else I’d want to be right now, then sleeping beside you.” He brushed his lips across her forehead and settled down beside her.

Sadie lay stunned. Devon’s words rocked her world. She hoped for this moment, wanted it more than breathing itself, and now, she had it. He’d as much as admitted his love for her. Smiling, she rolled over and rested her head against his shoulder. He snuggled against her and a few moments later drifted off to sleep.

Lying beside Devon, listening to his deep, steady heartbeat and hearing his breath, she basked in the knowledge that he cared for her. She hoped it was love.

Mary Winter

Chapter Six

Whoever determined Wednesday was “hump day” deserved to be shot. Of course, watching Sadie handle her animal patients and thinking of the word “hump” only reminded Devon of the five days it’d been since they’d had sex. His body ached. In the examining rooms, he’d watch her bend over to tend to a patient or extract something from a cupboard. Treated to a view of her delectable ass, he struggled to keep his hands off of her and his demeanor professional. The computer screen in front of him demanded input, and Devon struggled to pull his mind back to work. He finished typing in the day’s receipts, then shoved his chair back. For tonight, he was calling it quits. Sadie hadn’t come in to tell him she was leaving, so he went in search of her.

The lights in the kennel area called to him. He followed their glow through the darkened corridor of the clinic. Squeakers yipped, a high-pitched playful sound. Sadie laughed. Devon increased his pace, anxious to watch the two of them together. Once again Squeakers had the kennel area to himself, a recently neutered cat having gone home with his owners, and Sadie did her best to spoil the recovering pup.

Though still on pain medicine and antibiotics, the pup’s resilience was quite remarkable. Freed of his IV, Squeakers enjoyed spending time in one of the outdoor kennels, though he still didn’t move too quickly. Devon stepped into the doorway of the kennels.

Sadie had Squeaker’s door open, a bright red ball in her hands. She rolled it front of the dog, inviting him to nose it, or touch it with its paw. As she pulled the ball away to fill it with another treat, Squeakers barked again.

“If you don’t let me have the ball you won’t get any more treats,” Sadie admonished, a grin on her face. She quickly stuffed four small, meaty squares into the ball, then handed it back. Immediately, the puppy licked the ball, then held it still with a paw, while he worked the first treat free. He ate it quickly, and then resumed his work. Definitely an improvement in his condition.

Money Man

Sadie braced a hand on the floor, then sat, stretching her legs out to one side. As soon as the dog showed signs of life, they'd moved him to the bottom row of kennels. Made it awkward to care for him, but much easier to get him in and out for examinations and to take outdoors. She reached into the metallic kennel and scratched the puppy between his ears. "You're too cute for your own good," she murmured at the playing dog. "Like a pug with too-long legs. Your mommy must have been smitten with someone from the wrong side of the tracks, huh? I know how that goes. I can't fault her." Sadie sighed.

Devon stilled. The wrong side of the tracks? If Sadie were talking about him, then either she had her facts wrong, or she thought money was the wrong side of the tracks. He pressed his lips into a straight line, remembering her objections over his taking their relationship to a more personal level. Then, he grinned. She said she was smitten with him.

He could say the same about her. The thought made him take a tentative step out of the kennel area, until he realized what he was doing and stepped forward. No, he wasn't smitten. He was in love. He loved Sadie. When had it begun, or how it had started, he couldn't say. Dr. Fitzpatrick spoke Sadie's praises even before Devon's offer to buy out his half of the clinic. Now, watching her play with Squeakers, a plan formed in his mind. She changed out the treat toy for a tug rope and eagerly, the dog grabbed onto one end and faked a growl.

Sadie gently tugged. He watched her hold in her laughter, and even so, tiny chortles escaped. "I shouldn't laugh at you," she said softly. "You're only doing what comes natural." She tugged again and Squeakers yanked his head back. He yipped in pain, releasing the toy.

Sadie leaned forward and patted his head. "I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have played so rough with you." Squeakers licked her hand, as if in apology.

Devon shifted his weight.

Sadie turned. She looked at him, her eyes widening and a big smile crossing her face. "I didn't hear you there. How long have you been watching?" Instead of being embarrassed at being caught playing with the puppy, she motioned for him to step inside. At the motion Squeakers looked up. He started to rise to his feet, but a soft command from Sadie kept him lying down.

Mary Winter

Devon eased to the floor next to her. Squeakers moved, laying his head against Devon's knee. He petted the dog, careful to avoid the angry lines of sutures still covering the puppy's body. Being next to Sadie like this seemed as natural as breathing. She belonged in this vet practice, and he wondered what would have happened if he hadn't taken Dr. Kirkpatrick's offer. Would Sadie be as happy with another vet in his place? He shuddered to think she might.

Squeakers closed his eyes with a sigh of happiness. His short, stubby tail thumped the linoleum floor.

"I think I tired him out." Sadie set the toys off to one side, and the dozing pup didn't even notice.

"Yeah, I think you did. But he looks happy, so I guess it's all right." Devon tried to sound stern and failed.

Sadie looked at him quizzically. Then, she laughed. "Its doctor's orders. After all, I'm one of the treating veterinarians."

"Are you?" Looking at her, need punched him in the gut. "I have something that needs treating." He leaned forward until his lips hovered over hers.

Sadie closed the distance between them. She pressed her lips to his, her hard kiss instantly softening. Twining her fingers through his hair, she held him still for ministrations. Her tongue slid along the seal of his lips, and then delved into the warmth inside. A low moan of pleasure rumbled through his chest. His cock hardened, tight against his jeans. He started to lean towards her, one hand reaching for her breast, the other her hip. The movement jostled Squeakers. He looked up and barked.

Devon pulled back, his breathing ragged. In small ways, Sadie surprised him, which made what he had to do all the easier. He opened his mouth to speak.

Squeakers barked again.

Devon sighed. He knew that bark, the I-have-to-pee-right-now bark.

"Squeakers," Sadie said.

Devon nodded. He rose to his feet and snagged the dog's leash from the kennel. "I'll take him. We'll be right back." He knelt down and fastened it.

"I'll go with you." She fell into step beside him as he let the dog slowly lead the way out the back door to the dog yard.

"Do you want to have dinner at my place on Friday?" Devon asked as Squeakers finished and turned back toward the clinic.

Money Man

In the gathering twilight he couldn't see Sadie's gaze. "Sure," she said, though he would have liked to hear more enthusiasm in her voice.

"Just the two of us. Very casual. Shall we go straight from work?" He helped Squeakers back into the kennel and latched it closed.

"That's probably the most practical."

He accompanied her into the lounge while she grabbed her small purse and car keys from the locker she used. She sounded resigned, not thrilled, and certainly hadn't squealed with delight and planted another kiss on his lips like he hoped. So maybe his delivery was a little flat. It was the thought that counted, right? He turned her toward him and pressed a quick kiss on her lips. "I'll walk you out. And maybe we can make it a whole weekend this time?"

"That'd be nice," Sadie admitted. Longing filled her words, and like a kid waiting for Christmas, he knew he'd have to focus to make it until Friday.

Devon tried to put her at ease, tried too hard in all probability, but even though she used the right fork and ignored the unobtrusive presence of the cook, Sadie couldn't help but compare the posh surroundings to her own humble beginnings. Though she wore a pretty silk blouse and a flowing denim skirt with slip-on sandals, and her hair was neatly braded, she felt like the country bumpkin calling on a rich landowner. She wasn't far from the mark.

She finished her beef medallions in a succulent wine sauce and her fresh vegetables, then gently laid the fork beside her plate. She glanced at the white tablecloth, thankful not to have dropped anything on it, and except for the barest impression of her pink lip-gloss, the napkin remained pristine in her lap. Down the long table, Devon finished his meal.

"More wine?" he asked.

Sadie shook her head. "No thanks." Already she felt the telltale heat of alcohol in her cheeks. Not much of a drinker, her low tolerance surprised even her. "Dinner was wonderful. Thank you." She refused to stoop to inane chitchat, though that's exactly what it felt like. Struggling against expelling a harsh breath, she sat back in her chair and laid her napkin next to her plate. She folded her hands in her lap and watched Devon finish the last few bites of his meal. Part of her longed for him to take her upstairs--or

Mary Winter

wherever his bedroom was--and make love to her. The other part just wanted to leave this rich world behind and forget she ever aspired to be here with Devon.

Looking across the table at Sadie, Devon kicked himself for bringing her here. The large dining room with a table large enough to seat fourteen, fifteen if he counted his younger cousin's new baby, set complete with crystal candle holders and one of the many china place settings, overwhelmed her. He knew it. Bringing her home had been a silly, foolish idea. Especially when he should have taken her out back to his cottage and surprised her with a home cooked meal.

He wanted her to accept his family. The truth wound its way through him, making him hope and pray he hadn't made a mistake. Sadie belonged with him, in his life, in his bed. His heart beat a staccato beat as he set his napkin down and rose to his feet. "I'm going to the kitchen, I'll be right back."

Sadie nodded, lips pressed tightly together.

He shoved back to the chair and rose to his feet. Leaning over he brushed a quick kiss across her temples, aching to taste her further, before disappearing into the kitchen. As he requested, the cook had left, leaving the dessert, a small decadent chocolate torte, a small box, and an envelope on a tray. Gold wrapped mints completed the display along with a single rose bud in a vase.

Devon willed his hands not to shake. He squared his shoulders, closed his eyes, and mentally prepared himself. Just like before a delicate surgery, he imagined the scene in his mind. Certain Sadie would react the way he expected her to, he hefted the tray and carried it back to the table.

As he stepped into the room, he saw her glance darting around, from the antique glass behind a glass-fronted cabinet to the poster of his grandfather with a champion racehorse at the Woodlands. Slowly, her gaze focused on him and she smiled. A good sign, one that relaxed him.

"What's that?" Sadie asked as he neared the table. "It looks wonderfully decadent."

"Well, as decadent as I can get in my parent's house anyway." He winked. "If you really want decadent, we'll go out to my small cottage where no one can hear."

Hunger filled her eyes and an enchanting blush crept over her cheeks. He set the tray down on the table, then picked up the small, burgundy velvet-covered jeweler's box and concealed it in his hand.

Money Man

It's now or never. He picked up the envelope off the tray and handed it to her, then dropped to one knee.

Sadie's eyes widened as she watched Devon drop to one knee. She thought she'd seen him sweep a jewelry box into his hands, but no, it couldn't be. Women like her didn't marry into money without ending up in the gossip columns, and men like him did what they had to do to keep up appearances. Only Devon had shown himself bigger than that, more caring. With him, the differences in their social stations didn't matter. Her heart jumped as he handed her an envelope.

"Sadie, this is something I should have done a long time ago. You're a hell of a vet, and a warm and caring woman. I know what you went through to try and buy out Dr. Kirkpatrick's half of the clinic, and damn it, I should have marched down the bank and demanded they give you a loan. But the truth is, I wanted to work beside you, to get to know you better. So I said nothing, did nothing while they turned you down."

Devon's words punched her in the gut. Her breath caught in her throat. Had she gotten the loan, then found out he'd pulled strings, she would have hated it--and him--for the rest of her life. "No," she whispered. "It's all right. I want to do it on my own."

Devon pushed the envelope into her hands. "That's it, honey, you do. You keep the clinic running, the owners happy, and their pets healthy single-handedly. I don't have to look over the records to know how many times you cut your evening, or your weekend, short to go and care for an injured or sick animal."

Sadie wrapped her fingers around the envelope, half afraid of what she'd find inside. "Are you..." she let her question drop, half afraid of what she was about to ask.

Devon nodded. "Yeah, I am. Those papers proclaim you half owner in our veterinary clinic."

Sadie opened her mouth to protest.

He pressed two fingers over her smooth, moist lips. Sadie wished he'd kiss her into silence, though she knew one taste and she'd be lost. "That's not all." He whispered as he removed his fingers and produced the box.

Sadie blinked back the sudden sting of happy tears. "Oh my," she whispered.

He opened it, revealing a sparkling diamond that must be at least a carat.

"Sadie Grissom, my love, my other half." Devon closed his eyes. "Damn, I had a flowery speech prepared, but looking at you, you take my breath away. Whatever words I had planned fled the instant I saw you again, pushed aside by a desire to take you back

Mary Winter

to my place and love you until neither one of us could walk for a week. I love you, Sadie. Will you marry me?"

Sadie glanced from the ring, to Devon's face blazing with love, then back to the ring. She couldn't check the tears of happiness from running down her cheeks. She loved Devon. And he said he loved her. She set the envelope on the table, then launched herself from the chair and wrapped her arms around him.

Her exuberance knocked him backwards onto the carpet. Sadie sprawled on top of him. "Yes," she said against his neck. "Oh God, Devon, I love you so much. Yes, I'll marry you." She pulled back to kiss him, pouring her heart, her soul into the sensual slide of her lips against his. Not only did she finally have her vet practice, but she also could share it with the love of her life. As Devon changed the angle of the kiss, she counted herself a very lucky woman.

Money Man

About the Author

Mary commutes between her dream home near the Mark Twain national forest in Missouri, and her current residence in Iowa. She lives with a menagerie of animals including an opinionated horse and a cat who was a dog in past life. When not writing spicy tales of erotic romance, she enjoys writing science fiction and fantasy, spending time with her horse, and enjoying the outdoors. Lucky for her, her partner (hero) shares these same passions, and usually both of them can be found in their respective dens writing.