



**Dirty Girl**

Evangeline Anderson

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## **Dedication**

Dedicated to my wonderful editor, Tina for picking my baby up out of the dirt, washing her face, and making her presentable to the general public. Thanks for all your hard work. This book couldn't have been done without you.]

## Chapter 1

### The Dream

#### Kate

*Rough yet gentle hands caress my breasts. A hot mouth covers mine with soft kisses and then moves down to tease my nipples with a tender but insistent tongue. He sucks and nips my aching buds until I think I will go crazy with wanting him.*

*His mouth moves down further, leaving a trail of fire along my navel and hip bones, until he reaches the center of my need. Oh, God! He parts my thighs and the warmth of his breath blowing across my heated flesh is almost too much to bear. He spends an eternity kissing my inner thighs, the stubble of his five o'clock shadow scratches at my tender flesh until I'm moaning and begging him for more.*

*Teasingly, lightly at first, he kisses the outer lips of my sex, the same tender way he kissed my mouth. He gathers my hips in his large hands and pulls me to him, as though he is dying of thirst and my pelvis were a bowl of clear water. He parts my lips and begins to taste me in earnest.*

*I gasp in pleasure, gripping my lover's thick black hair, arching my back shamelessly to meet his exploring tongue and ride his mouth as he draws magical figure eights around my swollen clit. He thrusts his tongue into me, penetrating me gently but forcefully, stripping away the last of my dignity as I cry out for more, cry out for him to bring me to the edge and push me over...*

I woke abruptly, tangled in the sheets and breathing heavily. The dream still hung over me like a cloud, cluttering the inside of my head with confusing images. Groaning, I rolled onto my right side to glance at the bedside clock. Surely I had managed to get two or three hours sleep this time?

"Damn!" Not even one hour since the last time I had awoken in the grip of that awful dream. Three a.m. and no sleep in sight. I felt exhausted, but turning over and trying to get back to sleep wasn't an option right now. I'd only wake up again forty-five minutes later thrashing and moaning, clawing the sheets...

A quick trip to the bathroom and a glance in the mirror over the sink showed my blonde curls in a hopeless tangle, and bags under my bloodshot blue eyes Samsonite would be proud of. I needed a hot cup of herbal tea. In the past, I had sometimes been able to break the odd spell the dream had over me in this way—by taking a small break from sleep. I threw on a robe and ran my hands through my hair. I sighed heavily and padded to my kitchen to put on the kettle.

As the tea steeped I considered my predicament. How long had it been since I had had a decent night's rest? Two weeks? Three? It seemed like an eternity since I had slept the night through and it was starting to affect my performance at work.

Phillip Paxton, my partner of six years, had already tentatively asked me once or twice if I was all right, but I'd quickly rebuffed him. Phillip was a topnotch profiler—one of the best in the country—and I didn't want him inside my head. He didn't know about

my strange recurring dream and he didn't need to know either.

I shifted uneasily on my hard, wooden dining room chair. The ornately carved dining room set had belonged to my grandmother—a rather puritanical soul. In light of that fact, the chair hardly seemed the correct place to sit with the dream's disturbing images still trapped inside my brain.

Abruptly, I picked up my cup and retired to the cozy armchair in my favorite nook of the living room. I had bought this chair myself and it felt more comfortable than the hard, cold wooden one anyway.

"There, Kate." I curled into a comfortable ball with my feet tucked under me in the overstuffed armchair. "Think as many dirty thoughts as you want to. This is the place for it." Except lately, *any place* seemed to be the place for it. Because the damn dream wouldn't leave my head.

It's funny really because usually dreams are so fleeting. You wake up, even from a pretty horrible nightmare, thinking, "God ... I'll never forget that!" But by the time you're in the shower with hot water running across your skull, it's melted away to nothing and you can't remember a thing. But not this dream. This dream—or should I say *the* dream—went clicking through my head twenty-four hours a day until lately I thought I was going to go crazy. I mean, I could never completely get rid of it—the details, the images in my head were like a murmur, an undertone to all my other thoughts. And the thoughts and images weren't the worst either.

No, the worst was definitely the constant state of arousal I was in lately. From the dream? I didn't know. Can someone be bombarded with sexual images and thoughts all day and not become aroused? It didn't seem likely, but for whatever reason I felt like a goddamn cat in heat lately and I had for the last three weeks ever since the dream started. And what's more, it was getting worse.

"What's wrong with me?" I asked myself for the umpteenth million time. "I know it's not physical..."

I knew that because the battery of blood tests and the MRI brain scan I ordered for myself the week before had all come back negative. Being an M.D. does have its advantages, even if my work as a pathologist with the District of Columbia's serial killer division did mean most of my best work was done on corpses.

But all the tests I had ordered had come back completely negative, nothing wrong with my body chemistry, and no brain tumor to explain my strange dreams or my mood of late. The fact remained that I was constantly, continuously aroused and thinking of sex. That, coupled with three weeks of sleep deprivation, was beginning to wear me down. No, scratch that, I was *already* worn down—almost to the point of a breakdown even. But what could I do? It was just as bad when I was home as it was when I was at work—worse maybe. At least the work distracted my mind.

"This must be what it feels like to be a man. Always horny. My God, how do they stand it?"

I took another sip of tea, concentrating on the hot, soothing liquid running down my throat. And what did men do about it? Hell—what did anyone do about it when they felt this way? Well they ... took care of themselves. Well, let's not put too fine a point on it...

"They masturbate, Katie." I said aloud to the empty room. "Why don't you try it?"

I knew why, though I was thoroughly ashamed to admit even to myself that a

childhood memory was keeping me from relieving myself of this tortuous state of arousal. It was so stupid! But it was still so vivid... Perhaps the most vivid memory in my whole childhood. And pretty horrible to.

I couldn't have been more than four or five at the time. Whatever my age, I guess I wasn't old enough to know better. I remember I was in a small, secluded corner of the playground of our little Catholic school. I think I was sitting behind a bush because it was quite a long time before anyone found me.

I was utterly engaged in the new activity I had discovered only that morning. I had found that I had a spot—right between my legs—that felt so ... *different* when I touched it. When I touched myself there, I felt all tingly and warm and really quite wonderful. In fact, the spot seem to feel better and better the more I touched it. So it seemed natural to want to touch it as often as possible. Accordingly, I had hidden myself in a corner of the play yard behind a bush so that I could touch my “spot” uninterrupted. I don't know how long I had been at it, skirt hiked up, cotton candy-pink panties down around my ankles, thoroughly absorbed in my new activity when a thin, shrewish voice pierced my concentration.

“Now then, little Miss McKinley, and what are you doing hiding back there?” The bad-tempered voice belonged to the meanest nun at the school—Sister Mary Frances. Sister M. F., as some of the more daring older students called her behind her back, was six feet tall if she was an inch and she weighed in at least two hundred and fifty pounds.

She towered over me, her high, massive bosom heaving with indignation and the tight wimple and high collar pinching her face and neck into a lumpy pale mass. All her features were scrunched together in the center like raisins in an undercooked lump of dough. Somehow I knew I was in trouble.

It came to me suddenly that nothing that felt as good as what I had been doing to myself could possibly be anything less than a mortal sin. Frantically, I tried to hide myself, but it was too late. Her doughy face turned tomato red and her bosom heaved even more frantically than ever when she realized what I had been up too.

“Why you the filthy, dirty little imp!” she exclaimed, reaching out one long, black clad arm and seized me tightly in a pincer-like grip. Her massive, puffy digits wrapped around my small forearm, snatching my offending fingers away from my “special spot” and dragging me upright.

As I am a small woman now, so I was a very small child at that time. Pictures of me back then show a tiny, delicate little girl with a halo of blonde curls and wide, scared blue eyes. A little pixie, my mother used to call me. So, as tiny as I was, when the huge mountain of a nun, Sister Mary Frances reached for me, I was frightened to death.

The black cloth that covered her hair swung down over one shoulder and almost into my face as she bent to pull me up. I remember being terrified of that black cloth—thinking that it was what happened to a woman's hair when she became a nun. I had a strange idea in my four-year-old head that if that black stuff touched me, I would become a nun too. That it was catching, like some weird disease.

I didn't want my pretty blonde hair to turn to dark, ugly stiff stuff that smelled of starch and stale sweat so when Sister Mary Frances yanked me up by the arm (nearly dislocating my humeral head from its socket in the process) I screamed hysterically, “Don't touch me! Don't touch me!”

The huge nun was absolutely unmoved by my impassioned plea. “And why not?”

she roared, her thin, nasally voice deepening and becoming strident with anger and disgust. “Haven’t you been sitting there touching yourself all this time? Dirty Girl!” she barked, pulling me stumbling and wailing, my panties still down around my ankles out to the middle of the play yard.

“Dirty girl! Don’t you know that you’ll sink to the deepest pits of hell and burn in eternal fire for ever for doing that? For ... *touching yourself*?” She spat out the words as if they were the filthiest curse she knew. “Disgusting!” she bugled and then, to my utter horror, at the top of her lungs she began to call...”Boys and girls ... please gather around here. Come here now, I have something important to discuss with each and every one of you.”

Horried and humiliated beyond words that my peers would see me this way, I made a snatch with my free hand for my panties and tried to pull them up before too many people noticed. But Sister Mary Frances saw me and quickly slapped my hand away.

“Trying to touch yourself some more you filthy creature?” she hissed. “We’re going to put a stop to that right now.” I gave up at that point and drooped miserably at Sister Mary Frances’s side, my arm caught in her iron grasp, my pretty, cotton candy-pink panties puddled around my patent leather shoes, my eyes cast down at the ground.

“This dirty girl,” I heard Sister Mary Frances boom above me. “This filthy, dirty girl has been caught *touching herself* in the forbidden area just now. Do you know what I mean boys and girls?”

Some of the children were no older than me and I saw looks of puzzlement on their faces. But most of the children on the play yard that day—there couldn’t have been more than thirty as it was a very small school, but it seemed more like three hundred—were quite a bit older and wiser than me. These older students gave each other knowing looks and sniggers of amused understanding. Their unkind laughter was like a nail in my heart. If authority had indicated the activity I had been engaged in was wrong, the mocking laughter of my peers confirmed it.

I squeeze my eyes shut against the hot and awful sobs building up inside me. My cheeks burned a hot, guilty red. I had never felt so exposed, so horribly naked before.

“Never,” intoned Sister Mary Frances, shaking me like a huge Doberman might shake a Pomeranian for emphasis, “Never touch yourselves in your forbidden places. It is wrong and you will burn! Burn for it children! Burn forever in the lake of fire!”

She was nearly screaming at that point and I remember wishing distinctly that the ground would open and swallow me up. I remember thinking that I wouldn’t care if the devil himself came and speared me on the end of his wickedly sharp, pointy tail and dragged me down to hell as long as I could be away from that horrible scene in the play yard that instant.

I don’t remember much else about that day except for the dreadful humiliation of having to wear a large sign hung around my neck on which Sister Mary Frances had printed in black block letters the words, “Dirty Girl.” I was, at last, allowed to pull up my panties, but the derision of my classmates and the hounding of Sister Mary Francis lasted for the rest of that school year and I knew that somewhere in my head the words “Dirty Girl” were echoing still.

“Dirty Girl.” I whispered, wiping a stray tear from the corner of my eye. The memory remained fresh—so vivid that it could still draw tears. Is it any wonder I never masturbated again? Not that I hadn’t wanted to, especially in adolescence when my

hormones were rioting along with everyone else's but somehow... I just couldn't. That pain and shame came rocketing up from inside me the moment my hand went 'south of the border.' It was stupid, but undeniably true. Sister Mary Frances had successfully eradicated my ability to "touch myself."

I sighed. No, masturbation was definitely out of the question. I'd just have to live with the dream and its maddening side effects for now.

Surely something would break loose at work soon. It had been quiet for while but very soon a new case would hit the desk that would utterly engross all my time and energy. Then the stupid dream and the relentless arousal it brought with it would fade. Surely...

I looked down in my empty cup, the tea was gone. Time to go back to bed and try again to get a little sleep. It was only four a.m.—I could still get two hours of sleep if I went directly to bed. If I was lucky.

*His mouth covers mine, eager hands caress my breasts and twist my nipples until I moan, arching my back for more.*

*"Take me!" I beg him. "Fuck me—you know how I want it, how I need it. Deep and rough... God, don't stop!" He moves between my legs, his thick cock nudging my inner thigh as I spread myself for him, needing him deep inside me...*

I was awake, staring groggily around me, half reaching for the dream lover, though my conscious mind knew he didn't exist. Or did he? Whose mouth? Whose hands were on me in the dream? The answer drifted slowly up from my subconscious but my waking mind pushed it violently away. Surely not. Surely not ... *him*? I fell back into uneasy sleep and this time managed to make it to the six a.m. alarm.

\* \* \* \*

I felt like hell the next morning and I knew I looked like it too, because those were the first words that popped out of Phillip Paxton, my longtime friend and partner's mouth when I dragged myself into the office, thirty minutes late and yawning miserably.

"Damn, McKinley, you look like hell!" he exclaimed, eyeing my disheveled hair and bloodshot eyes critically. I made a small effort at smoothing my curls, which hadn't wanted to cooperate in the least that morning.

"Thanks so much, Paxton. You really know how to make a girl feel beautiful," I snapped sarcastically, dropping my purse on my desk.

"No, McKinley—I mean it!" He was up from his desk in an instant and grasping my arms with both large hands. His fingers felt warm even through the maroon jacket of my career-woman power suit. He peered anxiously down into my face.

Phillip is six foot two to my rather diminutive five foot four and there used to be a lot of jokes about our height difference around the department when we were first paired up as partners. That was before it became apparent that whatever our differences, we got the job done.

You might not think that a pathologist and a profiler could work effectively together, but it was almost as if we completed each other. As long as I had known him, it was like Phillip had one half of an idea and I had the other. Together we were a very effective team, so effective in fact that we were often loaned out to police departments outside our jurisdiction when they needed a little extra help.

Since we had been working together for so long and neither one of us was married or



had family in town, we had also become very close friends. Usually it was wonderful working with someone who knew me so well, we almost seemed to share a happy kind of telepathy. Phillip always happened come back from his break with a cup of tea I desperately needed, or have just the file I was looking for on his desk at any given time. But judging from the concerned look in his hazel eyes, being so close to my partner while I wanted to keep a secret from him was definitely going to work against me now.

"I'm fine," I muttered, trying to pull away from him.

Phillip wouldn't let me go.

"Bullshit," he said flatly. "You've been looking kind of peaked for weeks but today you look really..." he grasped for a word. "Ill. You're not sick are you, McKinley? Please tell me you'd let me know if you were. Are you?"

He shook me a little for emphasis and the action brought back my childhood memory of the night before. Sister Mary Francis shaking me like a small dog...

"I said I'm fine, Paxton." I snapped, finally pulling out of his grasp with undue irritation. "I just haven't been sleeping well lately. Okay?"

"No," he shook his head in that determined way he has when he's decided he's going to get to the bottom of something no matter what. Seeing that look on his face I groaned inwardly. Phillip on the scent of some mystery is like a dog with a bone—he won't let it go.

"Paxton..." I said in warning.

"There's something you're not telling me and it's affecting your health and well-being. As your partner, I'm entitled to know what it is." Phillip ran one large hand through his untidy, thick black hair and his hazel eyes blazed at me, daring me to contradict him.

I groaned again, this time aloud.

"Screw you, Paxton. And just how do you think you're entitled? Can't I have any private life at all?"

"Not if it's making you sick," he shot back. "Damn it, McKinley, sometimes you're so damn stubborn I just want to turn you over my knee..."

My eyes widened at his words. "What did you say?" In all our years as partners, Phillip had never spoken like that to me before. Of course, I had never tried to hide something as damaging as the dream I was having from him either. Clearly my secretive ways were upsetting to him.

"Nothing, forget I said it." Phillip's voice suddenly turned soft and coaxing, although he was rubbing his right palm against the side of his pants leg as though it were itching fiercely.

"Come on, McKinley, you know you'll tell me sooner or later. You know I always wear you down. So why don't you just tell me now and spare us both the suspense?" He flashed that charming, crooked grin of his.

I frowned stubbornly in reply. "It's just what I said," I told him carefully. I knew I had to give him a little something to get him off my back. Phillip can be relentless—utterly relentless. "I haven't been sleeping well lately."

"Because?" he prompted.

"Because..." I sank wearily into my cushy office chair. "Because ... because I keep having this ... strange, recurring dream."

"Is it like a nightmare? God knows we see enough horrible shit to give anyone

nightmares, McKinley.” Phillip knelt in an attitude of concern before my chair and took my hands in his. “Can you remember the details? Maybe I can help you work it out...”

I pulled my hands away quickly and sat up straighter, putting some distance between us. Phillip had advanced degrees in both criminal and clinical psychology. The last thing I needed was to have him inside my head. After all, I wasn’t some serial killer to be profiled, I was his partner. And that was how things had to stay.

“No, Paxton. I won’t tell you the details. Only that ... it’s disturbing.”

My pulse pounded in my ears and I could feel myself flush with his nearness. His spicy, masculine scent, part aftershave and part just Phillip filled my senses. He was so close I could feel his body heat radiating against my skin. His deep, hazel eyes were thoughtful—concerned.

Dream images chased through my brain and I close my eyes, struggling with the tension coursing through my body. Damn him—couldn’t he see that his proximity to me was making my condition that much worse? Apparently not.

Phillip leaned even closer and captured one of my hands again. I opened my eyes to see him comparing my small hand to his much larger one. Palm to palm, my fingertips didn’t even reached the first joint of his long, strong fingers. The touch sent warm fire up my arm.

“I notice you say won’t, not can’t,” Phillip said softly, seeming to concentrate on our hands. He raised his eyes to meet mine. “Why not? What is so terrible that you can’t tell your partner about it? We’ve been through a lot together. Are you gonna let a dream come between us now? Please Kate, I’ve been patient but I can’t be patient anymore. I’m worried about you. I can see that you’re hurting—maybe even sick. Please tell me the details of your dream ... if that’s what’s really hurting you. It might help to talk about it.”

I knew he was sincere; the way he slipped and used my first name instead of my last told me that. But I just couldn’t do what he was asking.

Mutely, I shook my head. ‘No way, Phillip,’ I thought. ‘This is too damn personal.’ Aloud I said, “It’s personal, Paxton. Give it up.”

I spoke in my best patient-confidentiality tone of voice. Only this time, the patient I was trying to protect was myself.

He searched my eyes for answers.

I made my face as blank as possible and tried to ignore the feelings rushing through me as he slowly and gently massaged my small hand with his large one. I tried not to think of the dream, or that time in the hallway of his apartment complex, not so many months ago when it looked like we were going to let the barriers of professionalism fall and do something reckless—something I had rigorously avoided for six years. If only my phone hadn’t picked just that time to ring...

If only ... if only... My ‘ifs’ were starting to piss me off. If only this stupid dream would leave me alone. If only I could sleep at night without dreaming about ... *that*. I didn’t want to name my sexual frustration, even to myself, in front of Phillip.

Phillip was still staring into my face so searchingly that I felt compelled to drop my eyes. I just couldn’t meet his intense hazel gaze any longer. Damn him, I was coming apart at the seams, but he was kneeling in front of me, calmly looking at me as though he could read my mind. “Is it me? I mean, am I in it?” he asked me in a low, searching tone.

“No! God, no!” I jumped up, pulling my hand from his. In my haste, I overturned my office chair and nearly tripped over it trying to get away from him. He remained kneeling

on one knee, like a suitor who has been rejected. He stared up at my furiously blushing face, surprise evident on his sharp features.

"Damn, what did I say? Would it be so bad to have a little dream about me once in awhile?" He was trying to turn the whole thing into a joke, but obviously my violent reaction had startled him—perhaps hurt him.

"No, Paxton. *God!*" I exploded. "Look—all right—if I tell you a little, do you promise to leave me alone and let us get on with work?"

Phillip's eyes narrowed. "Deal—for now, anyway. Spill it, McKinley."

"Fine. Well, the truth is..." I busied myself righting my overturned chair and straightening my rumpled suit jacket so I wouldn't have to see him as I spoke. "The truth is that for about three weeks I've been having the same dream, more than once a night and it's so disturbing that it's making it difficult, if not impossible, for me to get any sleep."

"And?" he prompted. "The dream's contents...?"

"The dream's contents are ... sexual in nature." I used my best 'we are discussing medical matters now' voice. Very proper and professional. There was dead silence for an instant and then Phillip gave a short, incredulous laugh.

"Damn, McKinley, are you trying to tell me that you've been kept up for the last three weeks running by a ... by a *wet dream*?" He laughed again.

"Stop it!" I snapped. "It's not like that. Does it begin to become obvious why I didn't want to discuss this with you in the first place? Now you've had your fun, can we please get back to work?"

Phillip was serious again in an instant. "I'm sorry," he said contritely. "I didn't mean to make fun of what's obviously a real problem for you. Forgive me?" He looked at me appealingly with those hazel-brown eyes, the lost puppy dog look he knew I couldn't resist.

"All right," I muttered. "But can we please, *please* just drop it now?"

"Okay." He paused. "For now..."

We both sat down to work, but assistant director Murtaugh walked in and dropped a file on Phillip's desk. Our boss looks like exactly what he is—ex-military. From his gray crew cut to his spit and polish shoes that you can see your reflection in, he's as tightly wound as they come.

"Got a hot one for you two," he announced abruptly. "Some sick bastard's set up shop in Biloxi."

"Biloxi?" Phillip seemed startled.

"Yes, Paxton, that's what I said. Several girls have been drugged, sexually assaulted and dumped to drown, probably off one of the riverboats down there. We think there may be two of the bastards working together."

"Riverboats?" It was my turn to be startled.

"Yes, McKinley. Riverboats. They use them for gambling. Regular little mini Las Vegas down there. They've got shows, gambling, the works. All right? Good. The locals have requested our help so I want you two packed and on the road by this afternoon. It's not quite far enough to fly you so you'll have to drive there. New regulations. Sorry."

"Oh, that's all right, sir," Phillip replied easily. "We don't mind driving." He grinned at me. He knew how much I hated car trips. I scowled back.

“Fine. Just keep receipts as usual and I’ll expect regular reports once you get there.” Murtaugh turned on his heel and as abruptly as he had entered, he left.

“Whew, well—guess we’d better get packing.” Misinterpreting the look on my face Phillip said, “Oh, come on, McKinley, it won’t be so bad. I’ll drive all the way and maybe you can catch up on some sleep.”

And that was exactly what I was afraid of.

## Chapter 2

### The Trip Down

#### Kate

After Murtaugh left the office, I went home to pack, cursing under my breath all the way. Even if we got on the road by noon—as Phillip maintained we could—it was still going to be at least a two-day road trip both going and coming to Biloxi. I didn't see why our department had gotten so damn cheap they wouldn't even pay for a plane ticket unless you were going practically coast to coast. Or, actually, as Phillip explained it to me, if you had to go east to west or west to east they would pay for the ticket. But north to south or south to north you were out of luck. Road trip all the way.

"What idiot in accounting made up that boneheaded rule?" I grumped to Phillip when he explained it.

"Dunno, McKinley. Probably somebody who's got a lot of business in California." He shrugged. "Well, you know, that's bureaucracy for you—never makes any sense." He rose easily from behind his desk where he was finishing up a last bit of paperwork that couldn't wait.

"Better get packing, McKinley. We've got a long drive ahead of us. I'll meet you back here at noon, okay?"

"Okay," I mumbled, half asleep already. On the drive home, between mumbled curses, I tried to look on the bright side.

After Murtaugh left, I got in my car and went home to pack, cursing under my breath all the way. Even if we got on the road by noon, as Phillip maintained we could, it was still going to be at least a two-day road trip both going and coming to Biloxi. And a lot could happen in that amount of time alone with my partner. But there was nothing I could do about it. With a sigh, I tried to look on the bright side.

After all, this could be that huge, engrossing case I had been hoping and praying for. The one that would blast the dream and all its nonsense clear out of my head and leave no room for sex or wanting or craving. No room for anything but business.

I was good at my job and I welcomed a chance to show it once more instead of sitting around the sterile office environment we'd been stuck in for months, just doing paperwork. Field work was really my forte. So why was I so upset at being sent out in the field?

"I'll tell you why I'm upset..." I mumbled aloud, stopped at a red light on my way home. "It's because I can hardly hold my eyes open and if I'm not damn careful..." I didn't finish the sentence out loud because the blue Escalade behind me was laying on its horn. The light had turned green without my noticing. To be honest, I had nearly drifted off to sleep. And that was my problem in a nutshell—falling asleep without being able to help myself.

I knew I had to stay awake during this entire road trip. I didn't know how vocal I got in my sleep, but it was at least loud enough that I was waking myself up several times a

night. And from the state the covers were usually in when I woke up—twisted around my legs and half off the bed mostly—I supposed that I thrashed quite a bit when I had the dream as well. This was going to be a long trip and I didn't want Phillip to see the dream in action. It was way too embarrassing and he would certainly ask too many questions. Questions I didn't want to answer.

Back at home I consulted my medicine cabinet with something akin to desperation. Despite the fact that I'm an M.D., I don't write myself a lot of scripts. I'm very sensitive to most medications so I prefer to get along without them. My hand hovered over an over-the-counter sleep aid, then dropped back to my side. Early on in this ordeal I had tried nearly every sleeping pill available, but quickly found out that a sleeping pill wouldn't prevent me from having the dream—it would only keep me from waking up and escaping it. I'd wake up just as tired as ever, even more if that was possible, than the nights I woke up over and over.

Despite the constant interruptions to my sleep cycle, it was infinitely more tiring to be trapped nonstop in the dream's endless loop. No, sleep aids were definitely not the way to go.

I squared my shoulders. I'd just have to go the other way, then. I put a small blister pack of caffeine pills on the sink beside my purse—just in case. I really would have to stay awake during the entire trip until we stopped for the night. This would be no easy task though, usually on these long car trips Phillip drove and I napped. Really, it was very relaxing and Phillip didn't seem to mind at all. Thinking of our usual mode of travel made me realize I didn't mind road trips so much after all. Although I had a feeling I was really going to hate this one. Sighing, I began to pack.

\* \* \* \*

## **Phillip**

I stole another sidelong glance at Kate, then shifted my eyes back to the road flowing along in front of the nondescript sedan the department had assigned us. I didn't think I'd ever seen her so wired. She looked about ready to jump out of her skin. And no wonder!

Fifteen minutes after we had gotten out on the highway and began to pick up speed, she had started nodding off. I was glad to see it. She looked like she could use about a week's unbroken sleep. I had been so worried about her the past few weeks. Her usually vibrant blue eyes had been bloodshot for days and her strong but delicate features had become blurred with fatigue. It was obvious she was really hurting. I still couldn't believe I had forced her to confess about her strange, recurring dream. I wanted to gather her into my arms and hold her, comfort her. But despite her diminutive size, Kate was tough. I liked to tease her that she was a Pit Bull in the body of a Chihuahua, and I knew she'd never allow me to comfort her that way.

Of course comforting her wasn't the only reason I wanted to take her in my arms. I was in love with Kate—hopelessly, helplessly in love, but I was damned if I could do anything about it. As close as we were, there was a wall between us—a line I just couldn't seem to cross. The most I could do was try to be her friend, and that meant looking out for her. Which was one reason I was so worried about her now.

The dream she would hardly tell me anything about was really taking its toll on her. Yet, as soon as her eyelids started to flutter, Kate began fumbling in her purse and

mumbling about some medicine she thought she'd brought it with her. Then she demanded that I take the next exit to the nearest town and find the closest Starbucks. Since Kate's not usually a raging coffee-holic, I was surprised. I was tempted to ask the reason behind the sudden craving, but Kate had that look on her face she gets when she's irritated with me.

"Don't ask, Paxton. Just drive," she had directed sternly. Lately she had been so preoccupied and sarcastic that I swore my hand itched to tan her backside. What stopped me was not our friendship, but our professional relationship—it stopped me from doing a lot of things I wanted to do. We had a close work relationship, but spanking was not included in it, as much as Kate might sometimes need it.

I drove where she asked me in silence and pulled into the Starbucks drive-thru. I couldn't believe my eyes when Kate ordered and completely consumed a quad tall cappuccino. Herbal tea is usually more her speed.

"Why'd ya do that, McKinely?" I had to ask her. "Now you'll never get to sleep and you know you always say the only thing that makes these road trips bearable is being able to sleep all the way there and back again."

She mumbled something that sounded like, "Maybe I'm tired of sleeping my life away, Paxton." Which didn't make any sense.

I couldn't understand why she was acting this way; it was almost self-destructive. I thought, not for the first time, that she needed someone to take her in hand and make her admit what was wrong. She looked like she hadn't slept in months.

I had to wonder if she was telling the truth about her dream, but I decided not to question her further. An irritated, sleep-deprived Kate was bad enough. But an irritated, sleep-deprived Kate hopped up on enough caffeine to kill a small horse was something to be avoided at all costs. If I wanted to avoid a confrontation with her I would have to keep my mouth shut. I'm not a complete idiot—I decided to just drive.

Kate stared straight ahead out the window, fidgeting nervously and endlessly. I swore I could almost hear her eyeballs chattering around in their sockets like a couple of ice cubes in a half empty glass. I kept quiet and she was, likewise, silent. This was shaping up to be the weirdest road trip we had been on together in a long time.

After an hour or two of uncomfortable silence I couldn't stand it anymore.

"Kate," I told her, laying one hand on her left thigh to get her attention and emphasize my point. "I can tell you're really upset about something. You know you can't hide it from me. Is it the dream you were telling me about?"

Kate shifted in her seat, visibly upset. She stared down at my hand on her thigh and shifted her hips nervously. She stared down at my hand on her thigh and crossed and uncrossed her legs anxiously. I could feel the nervous tension coursing through her as I had earlier at the office when I took her hand. We had been partners for a long time—six years—and we were long past the uncomfortable, touch-me-not stage that marks the beginning of a close work relationship like ours. In fact, in times of stress during a tough or emotional case we weren't above offering each other a hug or a hand to hold on to for support. So why, all of a sudden, was she acting like my hand on her leg was burning her?

"I'm fine, Paxton," she said, tensely, looking out the window at the scenery whizzing by and refusing to meet my eyes. "I told you as much as you're going to get from me in the office this morning so you might as well give it up."

Startled and a little offended by her icy tone, I removed my hand from her thigh and she almost sighed out loud with relief. What was going on with her? Since when did Kate resent me touching her in the friendly, nonsexual way, we had established, (without words between us) as safe?

I looked at her more closely. Her face and throat were flushed and she was panting just a little. It was as though she was going through some extremely taxing exercise instead of just sitting here in the car with me. Could her reaction be the result of the huge amount of caffeine she had dumped into her system? But she had seemed more agitated when I had touched her than when she had finished off the coffee over an hour before. Did caffeine have some kind of time release quality I had never heard of? Well, Kate would know that better than I would. After all, she was the M.D., not me.

Shaking my head in confusion, I let it go.

"Sorry, McKinley. I didn't mean to pry," I told her in a slightly more formal tone. Kate seemed to relax visibly at my return to work protocol and my use of her last name instead of her first. Not for the first time, I thought a little bitterly of how carefully she held me at an arms length. Why was it that we had to be in the middle of a really horrible case for her to open up and let me in just a little? She always snapped close afterwards, shutting me out as effectively as ever. The psychologist in me wondered how I could get her to release her emotions and discuss her problems. My hand itched again. How indeed...

"That's ... uh ... okay, Paxton." Kate sighed and leaned her head on the window beside her. "I'm sorry if I sounded rude," she apologized softly. "It's just that I can't talk about this with you. Why don't we talk about the case instead? I have the notes Murtaugh gave us right here."

The rest of the trip, until a late lunch at a convenient greasy spoon by the side of the highway, we talked shop, which seemed to ease Kate's mind. But despite her easy conversation, something was still not right. She often seemed preoccupied and I had to repeat myself more than once, causing me to wonder what was going on inside that that gorgeous, blonde head of hers.

Kate was usually sharp as a tack, not worn down and forgetful as she seemed now. I wished she felt comfortable enough to discuss her problem—was it the dream? Whatever it was that was eroding her concentration and making her lose sleep, I was sure she'd feel better if she'd only discuss it. I had a strong feeling I might have to take drastic steps if something didn't change soon.

After lunch we were making good time and Kate had calmed down a lot. Maybe the caffeine was finally starting to work its way out of her system. It was about time, we'd been driving for nearly eight hours straight with only a quick break for lunch and a few bathroom breaks in between and the sun was beginning to drift down into the west. Soon it would be time to stop for the night.

Kate didn't seem to realize how sleepy she was looking and I certainly wasn't going to say anything. I was sort of hoping she'd drift off and get a little rest before we got to a motel where we could stop for the night. Maybe if she went to sleep in the car, I'd be able to just tuck her into bed and she could sleep through the night. With a good night's sleep, she might even be her old self in the morning. That would certainly make for a more pleasant trip the next day.

"McKinley," I said softly, "There's a rest stop coming up and I'm going to pull off



and answer the call of nature. You need anything?"

"No, Paxton. 'S okay, you go ahead. I'm fine," she murmured drowsily. Her eyes were glassy with fatigue and her head was nodding softly to one side.

Good, she was almost asleep.

I pulled the sedan gently off the road and eased into the rest area's parking lot. I stole out of the car as softly as possible, my loafers crunching faintly on the gravel. With any luck, by the time I got back Kate would be sound asleep. I was sure that was exactly what she needed.

As predicted when I came back to the car, Kate was sleeping like a baby. I took a moment to admire the soft, rosy flush on her high cheekbones and dared to run my fingers through her silky, honey blonde curls before laying her seat back so she could rest more comfortably. I also draped my suit jacket over her since she was only wearing a short little skirt that went with her suit and a thin silk blouse and I was afraid she might get cold. She stirred for a moment as I covered her and her naturally red, cupid's bow mouth fell slightly open but she continued to sleep like an angel. I didn't often get to see Kate with her guard down like this, God, she was beautiful.

As I started the car and prepared to back out, still musing over Kate's sleeping beauty, something strange happened. She made a little noise that caused me to turn to her and as I watched, Kate slowly began to move, to murmur in her sleep. Could this be the infamous dream she was so reluctant to talk about? I put the sedan back into park and watched her with renewed interest.

"Mmmm..." The sound coming from Kate's throat was low and sensuous. She suddenly stretched out at full length in the leather bucket seat like a cat, her arms above her head and her toes pointed at the floor. For a moment I thought she was waking up. But no, her eyes were tightly closed and I could see their rapid movements under the heavily shadowed lids—bruised from lack of sleep. She must be deep into REM sleep to move so much without waking herself.

"Oh, ahhh..." she sighed and I saw with surprise that her hands had come up again and were gently, seemingly of their own accord, rubbing over her full, ripe breasts. My jacket was pushed off to the floor and Kate arched her back to accept her own caresses, moaning loudly. The top two buttons of her silk blouse had come undone, the creamy swells of her breasts visible, nestled snugly in the white lace cups of her bra.

I knew I ought to wake Kate up or at the very least look away. As much as I wanted this woman—and I had wanted her almost from day one when we first became partners—it was wrong to take advantage of her helpless state. She was my partner and I owed it to her to wake her up and confront her about this dream. I told myself all these things and yet I felt helpless to stop watching.

Kate's beautiful face with its delicate features and ripe, full mouth was twisted with passion. Her brow wrinkled and she licked her red lips seductively. I had never seen my partner look this way except in my wildest fantasies. She looked wild, wanton, free. A seductress ready for anything.

Kate slid further down in her seat, her short skirt hiking up in the process. She threw back her head, exposing the long column of her creamy throat and her beautiful, tousled blonde curls fanned out across the seat's head rest. Her wandering hands began to slide down from her full breasts, where her erect nipples showed clearly through the thin silk blouse, to her suddenly bared thighs. By the light shining from the dashboard, I saw she

was wearing thigh-high stockings. Their lacy tops molded to her rounded thighs beautifully.

I felt my erection, hard and heavy as a bar of lead, pressing urgently at the crotch of my pants. God! I had to stop watching—this was just wrong. So very wrong. But even as I lectured myself, I couldn't tear my eyes away.

Kate's small hands caressed her silky thighs restlessly and she began to moan again. Suddenly she began to talk more coherently.

"Yes..." she moaned. "There—lick me there. Taste me!" The car seemed suddenly filled with her wild scent as she spread her thighs even wider—the delicious fragrance of a woman in heat. I wished so badly to be in her dream right that second, doing everything to her she was dreaming about.

Her skirt moved further up with her restless thrashing and I could see that the crotch of her black silk panties was damp with moisture. God, she was so wet! I could almost taste her on my tongue. She would be salty and sweet and uniquely Kate. I longed to bury my face between her thighs, press my tongue into her tight cunt and taste her until she came for me. She rubbed her hand over the damp, silk panties and moaned again in frustrated longing. "Phillip..." she muttered. My heart stilled. *My* name. Not calling me by my last name, the way we always did at work, but my first name. Kate only did that when she was very serious or upset. It was strangely intimate to hear her call me that in her sleep, as though she thought of me that way inside her head.

"Phillip," she murmured again in a low, sultry tone. "Phillip ... take me." Her voice rose and her head whipped from side to side, a frustrated frown on her beautiful face. "Damn it, why don't you fuck me? Harder!" She was panting, her silky hair all in a tangled mess and her hands rubbing wantonly over the silky crotch of her panties. Her moans became louder and her movements more forceful.

Oh shit. Kate was waking herself up. I knew my partner would never forgive me for watching this—for seeing her in this intimate and vulnerable position.

"Phillip!" She was almost yelling, her tone extremely frustrated. Try as she might, she seemed to be unable to reach the orgasm her body so clearly craved and needed. Her eyelids were fluttering now. Oh, yeah, she was waking up.

Quickly, I jumped out of the car and slammed the door. Then I tried to walk nonchalantly to the men's room. Although in fact, I was nearly hobbling in pain from what had to be the fiercest erection I'd suffered since high school when Marissa Valence, the head cheerleader, had done a double flip and landed in my lap at a pep rally by accident.

Hopefully, my slamming the door would wake Kate and she would assume she'd dozed off just as I left the car for the bathroom. That would give her time to collect herself and I could pretend I'd seen and heard nothing when I got back. That, anyway, was the only plan I could come up with on such short notice.

In the meantime, I had to go jerk off. I didn't think I'd ever been so aroused in my life as just then in the car watching Kate touch herself and call out my name. That fact alone gave me pause. *My* name—she had been calling out for *me*. Was I always in this dream of hers and if so, did she realize that fact? Kate had been so sketchy about the details earlier—had flatly refused to discuss them in fact—and had vehemently denied that I was in her dream at all. Could she be unaware that I was playing a starring role? Even if her subconscious was hiding that fact from her, she must at least suspect

something...

As soon as I locked myself in a convenient stall, all speculation was swept out of my head, replaced with a throbbing desire. I leaned against the wall, my shaft in my hand. How many times had I jerked off, imagining it was Kate's delicate, soft hand or wet little mouth around my hardness? How many times had I looked across my desk at her and imagined pulling her into my lap and feeding on her soft, red lips, sucking her full breasts or sinking my cock deep into her sweet, wet snatch? Her hot little cunt... God! I was coming so hard... I could still hear her begging me to taste her—to *fuck* her harder. How I ached to do just that!

I was left panting with the aftermath of my ferocious orgasm, left hand braced against the stall wall and my right still wrapped around my slowly shrinking dick.

It hit me then. I tasted an ineffable sadness at the back of my throat, bitter, like unshed tears. It shouldn't be like this. I didn't just lust after my partner's beautiful body—I loved Kate McKinley with all my heart and I was reasonably certain she cared for me. Why couldn't we seem to get it together?

I found myself remembering that time in the hallway of my apartment building a few months before. For the barest second it had seemed that it would finally happen. We had just finished solving a complex and emotionally draining case that had taken us months. A serial killer that preyed on children. We had caught him in the end, but not before he claimed more than ten innocent victims. So even our victory tasted like defeat.

The case had especially affected Kate and she had taken the last victim, the one we couldn't save, hard...

"Hey, Kate, it's all right." I told her, patting her gently on the back as she slumped against the wall outside my apartment door. "We got him. He's not going to hurt anyone else."

"Tell that to Jamie Martinez and the other nine," she murmured. "It's too late for them."

I sighed and rubbed between her shoulder blades where I knew a knot of tension always formed when she was stressed. "You can't look at it like that," I told her. "You can't let it get to you that way."

"I can't help it." She looked at me, her blue eyes bright with unshed tears. "I'm sorry, Phillip. I guess ... I guess it's just always worse when the victims are children. What kind of a monster..." She broke off, shaking her head. "I hate it sometimes, you know? I feel like I'm trying to fight all the evil in the world and I can't do enough."

"You don't have to fight it all alone," I reminded her. "I'm here too, remember?"

Without really thinking about it, I pulled her to me, just wanting to hold her for a while.

She came to my arms willingly and she looked so vulnerable—so beaten and sad. My only thought was to comfort and protect her as she so rarely let me do. And when I found myself about to kiss her—well, it just seemed like the most natural thing in the world. I pulled her closer, our eyes meeting and I saw openness in her face that seemed like an invitation. She reached up and tangled one small hand in my hair, pulling me towards her. Her lips looked so red and full and I longed to taste them, just once...

Who knows what might have happened if her cell phone hadn't begun to ring just at that moment, startling us both back to reality?

"Yeah, who knows what it might have led to, Paxton," I said to myself bitterly.

Perhaps true love and happily ever after, but more likely, the end of our partnership and possibly even our friendship.

It had to be this one fear, the fear of losing everything that kept me from taking that final plunge. I'd never been much of a gambler and double or nothing just didn't appeal to me. I knew I'd rather have Kate McKinley in my life as a partner and a friend than not at all. I loved her so much—*needed* her so much that I was terrified to lose her.

"Coward," I muttered angrily as I pushed my now limp dick back into my pants. "Tell her how you feel. This dream she's having must mean something. Maybe she wants you too. Or maybe not." I murmured darkly.

The eternal question, should I or shouldn't I? I tried to shake off my dark mood as I stalked back to the sedan. I certainly hoped Kate had gotten herself together by now so we could make a few more miles before we turned in. I felt both emotionally and physically exhausted.

I put on my best blank face as I opened the door of the car and slid behind the wheel. I even smiled at Kate who was clutching her blouse closed and watching me in a very suspicious way.

"Well, hello, sleeping beauty," I said, forcing myself to give her my most charming grin. "Woke up from your nap already? You were just dozing off when I left for the men's room. You looked so tired I was sure you'd sleep through the night. I wasn't even going to wake you up when we got to the hotel—just tuck you in and let you sleep."

At my carefully chosen words, Kate's suspicious expression eased marginally. Good—maybe she was buying it.

"How long have you been in there, Paxton?" she demanded, one petite hand reaching up to smooth her tangled curls as she nodded in the direction of the rest area.

"Um ... quite a while, actually," I improvised. "I think something I ate for lunch didn't quite agree with me. Sorry if you've been waiting long."

"No." Kate turned away from me and settled more comfortably into her seat. She smoothed her skirt down her shapely thighs primly and stared straight ahead. "That's okay, Paxton. You can't help it if you had an upset stomach." Relief had crept into her voice and she even eyed me with some amusement. "Although if you had taken my advice and had the chef salad instead of that greasy cheeseburger... You sort of brought it on yourself, you know."

"Yeah, McKinley, I guess I did," I replied, trying to manufacture a self-deprecating little grin. "But one upset stomach is a small price to pay to the cheeseburger gods now and then."

Kate shrugged. "Suit yourself, Paxton. Now put this thing in gear and let's start looking for a motel, I can barely hold my eyes open."

I wanted to rant and rave. Wanted to confront her with what I'd just seen and declare my eternal, undying love for her. But I couldn't. The fear of losing her held me back.

Instead, I did as she asked. I put the car into drive and headed off down the dark, unspooling black top searching for some ubiquitous Holiday Inn where I would sleep in a lonely bed and dream of her. At least I knew she'd be dreaming of me too. I sighed and pushed the accelerator. Holiday Inn, here we come.

\* \* \* \*

That night, through the connecting door between our adjoining rooms, I heard Kate

calling my name over and over in frustration verging on pain as the dream took her again and again. I lay in my lonely bed clenching my fists until I heard my knuckles pop and my fingernails gouged bloody half moons into the meat of my palms. I knew I must not go to her but it was so hard—God! So very hard not to.

## Chapter 3

### The Road to Biloxi

#### Kate

The next morning I woke up feeling even more tired and strung out than the night before when I had finally collapsed into bed and given in to the damn dream. It must have woken me up at least a dozen times in the night and I was willing to bet I hadn't gotten more than three hours of sleep total as a result. Three cups of strong black coffee at the diner adjoining the motel we were staying at perked me up a little, but I was afraid I was reaching the end of my endurance. A person can only take so much sleep deprivation before they crack. And I was definitely feeling close to cracking.

Musing at the Formica table, the third cup of coffee still scalding the insides of my palms through the thick, china mug, and the dream images still ticking inside my head, I glanced out of the corner of my eye at Phillip.

My partner was sitting across from me and silently nursing a coffee of his own. He was looking pretty peaked himself this morning and I wondered if it was all the driving he had been doing that was wearing him out. I would have offered to take the wheel and spell him for a while, but I was still so exhausted I was afraid I'd drive the damn car straight into a ditch. And then where would we be? In a ditch of course. Ha-ha, Katie. Very funny. I frowned.

Adding a little more sugar to my coffee to make it marginally more palatable, I considered Phillip again. Why was I trying so hard to keep the details of my dream from him anyway? Because it was embarrassing? Or was there some deeper reason I couldn't even name to myself? He was the person I trusted the most and felt closest to in the world. On top of that, he held several degrees in psychology. Perhaps he could help me analyze my dream as he had offered to do. Maybe together we could make sense of it somehow.

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask for his help but somehow ... somehow I just couldn't do it. I've always been a rigidly controlled person. You don't get through medical school and work your way up in an intensely male-centric environment like the D.C. police force without a great deal of self-control and discipline. I found it terribly hard to let go of that control, even with Phillip—the one person in the world I trusted implicitly, although he would probably be surprised to know that. I just hated to let myself be vulnerable. Maybe it was foolish pride, but I decided to keep the dream to myself a little while longer. As long as I could anyway.

Phillip paid the tab for our black coffee breakfast and we ambled back to the car. I hoped the caffeine I'd consumed would last me the few hours more it would take to get us to our destination.

By going over our notes and talking about the impending case I managed to stay awake and push the increasingly disturbing dream images to the back of my brain. Shortly around one o'clock we finally rolled into Biloxi.

\* \* \* \*

One thing I had to give Phillip credit for was that he had an excellent sense of direction. No matter where we were, if he was driving, I could almost guarantee we weren't lost. It was a good thing too, because, like most males, he flatly refused to ask for directions. So it was with only a little delay and minimal bitching on my part that we found the home base of Biloxi's finest and went inside to offer a helping hand on what Phillip was already calling, "The Case of the Soggy Sex Fiend," since the perpetrator committing the murders always drowned the girls after he had assaulted them.

The report Murtaugh had given us indicated that there were no signs of a struggle, no skin under the fingernails of the victims, no torn clothing and no ligature marks on the wrists and ankles, so Phillip and I were reasonably certain the killer—or killers if it was more than one man working together—must be drugging the girls before the assault.

Unfortunately, the bodies that had been pulled out of the waters around Biloxi had been so badly decomposed that a reliable chemical analysis was impossible. Any traces of semen the killer had left behind had also been washed away. According to our file, however, the latest corpse—the seventh victim so far—had been found within 48 hours of her death and was still relatively fresh. We had high hopes that the lab work the Biloxi police department was already running would yield good results.

Phillip had already worked up a partial profile on the killer and was anxious to see if it matched when and if we caught the sick bastard. He would be a Caucasian male because all the victims were attractive, young white females and serial killers very rarely kill outside their own race. He would be between twenty and thirty-five and he probably had some kind of menial job on one of the riverboats. Phillip speculated that he was an employee and not just another passenger, because he obviously had admittance to some secluded spot on one of the boats. That way he could take as much time with the victims as he wanted to before dumping them.

Phillip also thought that the killer would be shy—almost painfully so. He probably felt socially inferior to the girls he was drugging and killing. He doubtless thought they wouldn't give him the time of day if he tried to meet them in the usual way, so he had given up on conventional dating and resorted to other methods to find sexual gratification. Phillip speculated that he might be disfigured in some way, which could explain his pathological introversion around the opposite sex and the resulting behavior.

It was a good profile and I would have been very surprised if it wasn't right on the money. Phillip had a definite gift for getting inside the mind of a killer, although it sometimes left him sad and sickened after a case was over. It wasn't easy for him to put himself inside the mind of a murderer, no matter how good at it he was.

On the whole, I considered that I had the easier job. Although I had to examine the bodies, often horribly and creatively mutilated, I didn't have to imagine doing the things that were done to the victims we saw. I just reported the facts—how the crime was committed—and tried not to think too much about *why* the killer had acted as he had. Phillip supplied the rest.

As it turned out, we got a chance to test Phillip's profile a lot sooner than we had expected. We walked into Biloxi's small but plush police department—probably due to taxes on the gambling revenue from the riverboats—and introduced ourselves as detectives from D.C. The officer we spoke to took us to the back of the department for an interview with Chief Jeremy Cox, who informed us that a suspect was already in custody.

“Already in custody?” Phillip asked, blankly. “But when we left yesterday morning, detective McKinley and I were under the impression that there were no solid leads whatsoever. I thought that was one of the reasons you requested our assistance. That and the fact that the body count was rising at an alarming rate.”

“Well, yes, that’s true.” Chief Jeremy ‘just call me Cox’ had the thick drawl of the Gulf coast and he had greeted us charmingly and welcomed us to his office and his home state in the same breath. He was sitting causally on the side of his desk, looking very relaxed for a man whose city had been ravaged by a serial killer as recently as the day before. He smiled at us gently before continuing.

“Yesterday the case just blew wide open,” he told us. “It happens sometimes, ya know. We got an anonymous tip from a help line we’d set up. Some guy who said he knew somebody who had access to illegal drugs—date rape drugs he called ‘em—and was probably usin’ ‘em to do these women and dump ‘em like so much trash in the gulf when he was done. We followed the lead and came up with a young fella, one of the janitors on board the *Exotic Princess*. It’s one of the more popular gamblin’ boats and one we know for sure that at least four of our victims were on. We’re not absolutely for sure he’s the guy, but it’s lookin’ about ninety-nine percent certain at this point.”

“Why is that, Chief Cox?” I asked, trying to stifle a sigh. We might as well verify everything as long as we had made the long trip down to this God-forsaken destination, even though it was beginning to look like our services were completely unnecessary.

“Just Cox, Ma’am. Cox’ll do just fine,” he corrected me gently. He had big, hound dog brown eyes and a gently drooping face that reminded me of someone, but I couldn’t quite place who.

“Well, we’re pretty certain he’s our man because he was on the work roster each and every time a murder was committed. Also, he has a set of keys to the entire ship—had his pick of places to take the young ladies and have his way until he got tired and dumped ‘em into the gulf. Probably our best evidence though was the pocket full of rufies we found on him. I got one of my best men questionin’ him right now and I wouldn’t be surprised if he spills the beans any second now. We picked him up around midnight and he’s a might wore down. Ya’ll wanna come watch through the one-way?” Chief Cox asked courteously.

Phillip and I looked at each other and shrugged our shoulders. Why not?

“Certainly, Chief ... uh, Cox. That’d be fine,” Phillip answered for both of us. We followed the slightly stoop-shouldered, balding chief to the room adjoining the interrogation room to watch the show.

I knew the man sitting on the opposite side of the one-way glass couldn’t see me and I was glad. He was young, only about twenty-two or three, I estimated, with pale, pock-marked skin and a shock of greasy, dishwater-blond hair that looked like it hadn’t seen the inside of a shower for quite a while. His face was scarred by an explosion of post adolescent acne and he wore a chillingly vague look on his lumpish features. The suspect’s large frame was stuffed into a too-small orange jumpsuit with the words, *Exotic Princess* sewn in turquoise, cursive script above the right breast pocket along with a small, green palm tree. His hands were playing with a Coke can, rolling it endlessly between his broad palms, back and forth, over and over again as he talked to the officer whose broad back and thinning red hair were all we could see.

“...dunno what you’re talkin’ about,” he told the officer, who was leaning in with an



air of frustration about him. It was as though he was trying to stare a hole in the hulking suspect. "I allus leave the lady guests alone like Mr. Gaster—that's my boss—says to."

"You were found with a pocket full of rufies, George. Do you know what those are? They're what we call date rape drugs. And you were on the work schedule every time a murder was committed." The interrogating officer had the air of a man who had said the same thing over and over without getting any results. Privately, I thought that Chief Cox's optimism about the suspect's inevitable break-down was pretty premature.

"Don't know what them pills in my pocket was. One of them rich guys on the boat gave 'em to me and said they was vitamins." The suspect had the sullen air of someone who had told the same story so often he almost believed it himself. No, I thought, he was definitely not going to "spill the beans" anytime soon. Phillip was watching the interrogation with interest and he now he turned to Chief Cox and asked,

"How long did you say this interrogation has been going on?"

"Since around midnight last night when we brought him in," answered Cox promptly. "I'da just booked him and been done with it, but the only thing we got right now is circumstantial evidence. A confession to go along with it surely would be nice."

"I see. And had this same officer been questioning him the whole time?" Phillip asked.

Cox wrinkled his brow thoughtfully. "Well, no. For a while there, Lieutenant Briggs was in there askin' questions and later on officer Bilberry took a crack at 'im. I was hopin' that Sergeant Patrick here would soften him up and maybe finish the job. He's the best we got in the department for this kind of thing."

"And were all of them, all the officers that questioned the suspect, male?" Phillip probed further.

Cox scratched his head and wrinkled his brow some more.

"Well, now that I come to think of it, yes. Yes they were. Not that we don't have some mighty fine female officers, but I believe most of 'em thought ole George here was kinda creepy so I left it to my men to shake 'im down."

'Kinda creepy' was definitely an understatement. I shivered as I looked into the suspect's muddy brown eyes through the one-way glass.

"Well, the profile I've worked up on this killer suggests that he will be intensely shy and uncomfortable with women, Cox. That's why he's knocking them out before sexually assaulting them," Phillip told him. "If you wouldn't mind trying something a little different, I'd like for my partner, agent McKinley and I to take a crack at him. It's possible that having an attractive female, like McKinley here, in the room will shake something loose. Would that be alright?"

He winked and gave me a little nudge in the ribs and I nudged him back. Nice of Phillip to call me 'attractive,' I thought, especially on a day when I felt like shit from having next to no sleep. Still, the show must go on and I thought his idea was a good one.

"Sure, why not?" Cox shrugged easily. "We've tried everything else short of torture and we can't do that, although if this *is* the son of a bitch that's been rapin' and killin' these innocent women he sure deserves to have his tits twisted a little. Pardon my French, agent McKinley," he added, inclining his head to me as an afterthought. Mustn't offend the ladies, after all, his manner plainly said.

I suddenly remembered who Chief Cox reminded me of—Deputy Dawg from the old Hanna Barbara cartoons I used to watch as a child. I tried very hard not to think about

this as I looked at his gently drooping features.

"Quite alright, Chief ... uh, Cox," I answered with a tiny smile. He smiled back, a southern gentleman in every respect and then turned to tap on the one-way glass. The officer questioning the lumpish, vacant-eyed suspect rose immediately and left the room, coming to stand next to us.

"Sergeant Patrick, this here is detective Paxton and detective McKinley, special investigators come all the way here to help us from the District of Colombia. It looks like ol' George there is bein' kinda stubborn. You get anything new outta him in the past hour?" Cox asked.

"Fraid not." Sergeant Patrick was a large, beefy man with a long, drooping mustache that wouldn't have looked out of place in an old Western. His thin, red hair showed patches of freckled scalp and he wore two gun holsters criss-crossed low on his hips. I stifled a giggle. All he needed was a big silver star with the word 'Sheriff' pinned on his shirt to complete the image. Who did he think he was, Wyatt Earp?

I looked at my partner who also seemed to be suppressing a laugh at this eccentric character. In contrast, Phillip looked neat and well put together in his dark suit and black dress shoes polished to a high shine. His usually unruly thick black hair was combed neatly into place for once and his broad, muscular shoulders were straight under his well tailored jacket. I felt a sudden surge of pride at working with him.

"We'd like to take over the interrogation for just a while, if you don't mind, Sergeant," Phillip said politely.

"Detective Paxton here thinks that seein' a pretty lady like detective McKinley here will rattle George's tree some." Cox explained succinctly to the red haired Sergeant. "Might shake somethin' lose."

"Hell, give it a try. I don't care," Patrick said. "Hope ya have better luck than I did. He's a tough nut to crack. You ask me, that boy ain't right in the head." He stood up a little straighter and hitched ineffectually at his uniform pants which were drooping a little under his considerable gut. Giving the pants up as a bad job, he hitched up the holsters instead and fingered the—was he for real here—matching set of pearl handled revolvers that he wore in the holsters. Patrick's pudgy fingers caressed them gently while we watched.

"We'll, ah, certainly try," I said, trying to keep a straight face. Really, this was not the place to give in to humor no matter how much like Deputy Dawg and/or desperados of the old west the locals turned out to look and sound. Sleep deprivation was no excuse for such unprofessional behavior. I pasted a grim, determined expression on my face and followed Phillip into the interrogation room.

"Hello, George." Phillip said politely. "I'm detective Paxton from the District of Columbia and this is detective McKinley, my partner." He pulled out a chair for me and we sat side by side at the table across from the suspect.

"Oh ... hi," George mumbled, looking up at Phillip. He didn't appear to notice me at all.

"We're here to investigate a series of murders, George. Seven women have been drugged and sexually assaulted and then dumped into the Gulf of Mexico to drown in the last month and a half," I said. "Do you know anything about that?"

At the sound of my voice, George's head jerked up suddenly, almost like a dog catching a scent, and he seemed to notice me for the first time.

“Women? I ... uh, I don’t know nothin’ ’bout no women. I don’t bother the ladies. Mr. Gaster said not to,” he muttered. His muddy brown eyes flickered briefly over my face and down to my breasts, which were modestly covered by my navy blue suit jacket, then back up to my face again. Phillip nudged me under the table and I knew he wanted me to continue.

“I’m sorry, George,” I said sweetly. “But we just don’t believe that. You were found with some fairly damning evidence on your person, you know.”

“I ... um ... what? Damn what? On my what?” George was clearly confused. His already pasty face grew even paler, causing the truly horrific acne to show up in angry red blotches across his forehead, cheeks and nose. His eyes kept roving across my body in a greedy, avid way I found distinctly disturbing.

Phillip nudged me under the table again and then inclined his head towards mine. I leaned over towards him, his arm brushing my elbow and his left thigh making contact with my right under the table. I never took my eyes off the stuttering suspect in front of us, but I did manage to hear what Phillip was trying to tell me.

“Unbutton your jacket and the top two buttons of your blouse,” he breathed, his voice so low and soft I could barely hear him.

I risked taking my eyes off of creepy George to give him an incredulous look but he simply nodded at me as if to say, “do it.” Well, Phillip was the profiler here, at this point in the game I was simply along for the ride. Besides, there was something about Phillip’s voice when he gave the order—so low and authoritative—despite the strange situation he gave it in, that compelled me to comply.

Fanning myself a little as though I were hot, I carefully unbuttoned my jacket. Then, though I had never wanted to do anything less in my entire life, I unbuttoned the top two buttons of my white silk shirt, exposing a generous portion of cleavage.

I thought our suspect’s eyes would pop right out of his head. It was as though the sight of my breasts had completely hypnotized him, an effect I’ve had on men before, although not quite as thoroughly. Phillip leaned over to me again.

“Play with your hair, and take some deep breaths.” He instructed very softly, his breath warm in my ear. Again his voice was deep and commanding, sending a shiver through me as I complied. Twirling one loose curl around my index finger I sighed deeply, causing my breasts to rise and fall dramatically.

“Now, George, tell us about the ladies,” Phillip instructed, as I continued to sigh and wiggle and fidget with my hair, effectively keeping the suspect’s attention glued to my breasts.

“The ladies...” George sounded almost drugged.

His eyes crawling all over me felt like fat spiders skittering over my skin. I hoped that Phillip could make his point quickly so I could button my blouse and leave this room. The details of the dream, pushed to the back of my brain while I concentrated on the case at hand were starting to insinuate themselves into my thoughts and I was beginning to feel very strange...

“Yes, the ladies. Tell me about the first one? How did you kill her, George? Was it an accident?” Phillip’s voice was low and persuasive, sliding up my spine like a velvet glove and suddenly the dream images came rushing back in full force, filling my brain and making me feel more exposed than ever.

.... *a hot mouth on mine...*

I knew Phillip was concentrating intently on the suspect. But was he also sneaking little peaks at my exposed cleavage? I couldn't make myself look over and see if he was or not. I tried to concentrate on the interrogation, but I suddenly felt as hypnotized by my erotic thoughts as George apparently was by my breasts.

*...tender, rough kisses...*

I crossed my legs tightly under the table, trying not to think.

"An accident..." George echoed Phillip's words again, his eyes fixed firmly on my breasts and I began to think the whole interrogation would be a bust—no pun intended. Then slowly, his eyes never blinking or moving off my cleavage, the suspect started to form coherent sentences of his own.

"It was an accident with that first lady," he said, slowly. "She was too good for me and besides, Mr. Gaster said leave 'em alone. I told my friend Rob—he's a good guy—one of the waiters on the Princess boat. I told him how all them ladies was too good for us and he said no. He said..."

"What did Rob say, George?" Phillip prompted in a deep, authoritative tone that made me squeeze my thighs tightly together under the table.

*...large, warm hands on my breasts ... flicking my nipples to attention...*

Unconsciously, I was sure, Phillip's hand had found my leg beneath the tabletop and he squeezed me fiercely in agitation. The case was about to break and it excited him.

I was also excited, but for a different, darker reason.

My panting sighs were no act now, my brain was so full of the dream images it was all I could do to sit still at all.

*...sucking my nipples into that hot, wet mouth ... suckling me mercilessly until I arch my back, begging for more...*

I could feel a deep, sexual flush creeping up my throat and into my face, but I tried desperately to ignore it and remain focused.

"Rob ... uh ... he said that we're just as good as those fancy ladies that come to gamble on the boat. He said, 'So what if they got money and we don't, that don't make 'em any better'n us.' He gave me ... gave me magic vitamins. Said I should put 'em in any pretty lady's drink I wanted to be with and after a while..." he trailed off.

"Yes? After a while what?" Phillip asked intensely, squeezing and massaging my upper thigh under the table in barely repressed excitement.

I could feel myself tensing under his strong, warm hand and I knew he had no idea what he was doing to me. The damn dream was playing right behind my eyelids whenever I closed my eyes so I tried to not even blink.

*...featherlight kisses across my belly ... he takes his time getting there...*

"After a while the pretty lady would go to sleep just like sleepin' beauty and you could do whatever you wanted to 'em and they wouldn't even care. So I saw a pretty lady I liked and she was way too good for me. But I put a magic vitamin in her drink and sure enough, she got all sleepy and asked me did I know a place to lay down. So I took her to a place I know 'cause I got all the keys, you know?"

*...that hot mouth, blowing cool air over my thighs, making me squirm with need ... making me beg him...*

George's eyes followed the rapid up and down motion of my breasts as I breathed in shallow breaths, almost panting with need, and he continued his monologue.

"But after I did all kinds of nice things with her that wide awake ladies won't let you

do, I kissed her to wake her up and it didn't work. It didn't work..." Suddenly, George burst into loud, braying sobs, startling me so much I was almost able to push the dream entirely out of my mind. Almost. But Phillip's warm hand on my thigh kept me from freeing myself from the dream's clutches completely.

*...kissing and licking my inner thighs ... his whiskers rough against my tender flesh...*

"What happened when she wouldn't wake up?" Phillip asked encouragingly. "What did you do next, George?" His hand caressed my thigh in an unconscious imitation of my dream lover's actions.

*...large, strong hands spreading me further ... "Open your legs wide for me, baby, and let me taste you. Good girl, Katie."*

With a supreme effort I sat up straighter and concentrated hard on what George was saying, pushing the dream as far from my mind as I could. He was about to confess to murder here whether he knew it or not.

"I ... uh ... pushed her out into the water. I thought it was so cold it would wake her up. Only it didn't, she just floated away like a mermaid instead. I figured she'd probably float out to the shore and maybe somebody else could kiss her there and wake her up later. I thought maybe I could wait and wake up the next lady after I did those things." George's sobs tapered off to sniffles, but his voice still sounded ineffably sad as he finished his fractured fairy tale.

"I tried and I tried, but no matter how many ladies I put to sleep, I couldn't wake up none of 'em. Not a one," he told Phillip and me sadly, still eyeing my breasts which were heaving a little less now that I had managed to regain some control of myself although snippets of the dreams images still plagued me.

*...spreading me open and kissing me softly just where I need him most ... God, I'm so wet...*

"When I finally went to Rob an' told him my problem, he made me promise not to do it no more. He said those ladies couldn't float and I shouldn't oughtta have pushed 'em into the water at all. He said he wasn't gonna give me any more magic vitamins 'cause I was bad. But I still had lots of vitamins left and I knew those ladies could float 'cause I seen 'em and Rob didn't." A stubborn look came over his face, the look of an angry child who doesn't want to obey a rule that makes no sense to him. 'Why not stick a fork in the toaster or play with matches?' that expression seemed to say. Phillip seemed to feel we had enough, more than enough and with one final squeeze, he let go of my thigh and stood up from the table in one fluid motion. I breathed a sigh of relief and followed his lead.

"Well, thank you, George. You've been most helpful," Phillip remarked, turning towards the door. I followed him, buttoning up my blouse and shaking off the dream as I went.

*... 'God, baby, you taste so good.' ...*

"I'm sure the nice officers from the police department here have a few other questions for you to answer, okay?"

"Okay," George answered slowly. As my blouse covered my cleavage, his eyes glazed over again and the animation that had so recently filled him seemed to drain away, like water leaking out of a cracked cup. Cracked, now there was a good word for this suspect. Although, mentally deficient was doubtless the more PC term. At least now that

Phillip was no longer touching me and making the dreams images worse, I could concentrate on work—mostly anyway.

“You got all that?” Phillip asked Cox, as he stepped out of the interrogation room and shut the door behind us.

“Shit fire and save matches, I surely did. Detective Paxton, I don’t know how you did it, but you broke this case wide open. I sure am glad we asked you to come down and lend us a hand.”

“Well, that’s what we’re here for,” Phillip answered modestly, smiling and grinning at the dumbfounded chief.

“But that was an amazing performance. How did you do that, get him to answer all your questions that way?” Cox asked.

I realized because of our positions in the room, with our backs to the one-way glass, he hadn’t been able to see me unbutton my blouse, and I had to admit to considerable relief at the realization. I hadn’t really wanted to put on a peep show for the entire Biloxi police department. It was bad enough to be ogled by George, especially with the perverted dream running through my head at the time and Phillip’s warm hand all over my thigh. I shivered involuntarily.

“Well, it was a combination of questioning techniques and my fellow agent’s considerable charms.” Phillip threw an affectionate and comradely arm around my shoulders and gave me a brief squeeze, his fingers caressing my upper arm gently.

“Well, whatever it was, it certainly worked. I think we need to get this Rob guy in here too. He sounds like an accessory for sure. Without his little ‘magic vitamins,’ ol’ George there would have been harmless.” Cox frowned and shook his head.

“Rob is probably the one who made your anonymous phone call too,” Phillip remarked. His arm was still looped over my shoulders as though he had forgotten to take it back, but his body heat and closeness were beginning to make me feel uncomfortable again.

*...his hot tongue inside me now, lapping softly, making me squirm and moan...*

“But why would he give up George there when he knew George could finger him?” Cox asked, puzzled.

Finger him? Oh, God, my brain did not need to go there right now.

*...Two long, strong fingers stroking into me ... pressing deep but not quite deep enough. “I need more, please.” “I know you do, Katie.” ...*

Cox didn’t appear to notice that Phillip was still hugging me any more than Phillip did. I wanted to extricate myself from my partner’s arm but it simply felt too good.

*... ‘Need to fuck you now Katie ... can’t wait to be inside your sweet, tight...’*

I leaned into him instead, almost purring with the contact and tried not to think about the dream that was playing full force behind my eyes again.

*...his hardness nudged my inner thigh ... his mouth on mine again; I can taste myself on his tongue...*

“He probably trained George what to say in case he ever got caught and felt pretty confident that George wouldn’t give him up. He’s not the sharpest knife in the drawer,” Phillip remarked dryly, nodding towards the vacant-eyed suspect who was now playing with his Coke can again.

“Well, if that’s the case then he was right on the money until you two came along,” Cox remarked. “I’ve got Sergeant Patrick out lookin’ for him now. There was only one

Robert on the employee roster of the Princess so we're pretty sure he's the one George is talking about. Why don't ya'll hang around and interview him too?"

"Certainly, Cox. We're here for as long as you need us. But I think..." Phillip looked down at me, nestled snugly in the crook of his arm as if realizing he was still touching me for the first time.

*...thrusting his thick cock inside me ... fucking me so deep and hard...*

I rubbed my cheek against his firm bicep.

"I think maybe we should get a little air before we continue."

"Of course. If you go down that hallway, there's a back door and a smoking area you can sit in if your partner's feelin' a mite ... sick." Cox looked at me quizzically.

I became suddenly aware that I was rubbing against Phillip like a cat begging to be stroked. I had been so deep into the dream's images I hadn't noticed what I was doing. I made myself stop, once again attempting to push the distracting thoughts from my mind.

"Okay. Come on, agent McKinley. Let's get you some air." Phillip spoke jokingly as he led me down the hall the way Cox had pointed. Once outside in a small, sunny spot that held two benches and a large cement ashtray he turned to face me, carefully not touching me in any way.

"Are you all right?" he demanded, leaning down to peer directly into my eyes.

I decided to play dumb.

"Of course I'm all right. What do you mean, Paxton?" I asked ingenuously, struggling to meet those concerned hazel eyes with my own blue ones and not give anything away.

"Well, I mean... Damn it, McKinley, you've just been acting strange lately. I mean, back in the interrogation room I thought you were just really into the part I was asking you to play. But just now in the hall ... I mean what *was* all that?"

"All what?" I asked innocently, still staring him directly in the face. Phillip was going to have to spell it out—I wouldn't help him a bit. I had decided that the best thing to do was play dumb and I would play it to the hilt. Yup, ol' George didn't have anything on me.

"All that..." he searched for a word. "All that *rubbing* up against me you were doing when I had my arm around you. Yesterday you acted like I burned you when I barely touched your leg, and today you're acting like a cat in heat when I give you a friendly hug. What gives, McKinley?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," I lied right to his face, stubbornly protecting my secret. "I was rubbing against you just now because ... um, my cheek itched. That's all."

Phillip looked at me unbelievably. "Your *cheek itched*?" he repeated in tones of complete disbelief.

"Yup. Sorry about that," I told him blandly. "Just a little itch. It's gone now though." In fact it was, our confrontation had driven the dream as far from my mind as it had been all day, which was a damn good thing considering how closely Phillip was watching me.

"I know there's more to it than that, Kate, and I will give you fair warning that I intend to get to the bottom of whatever has you acting like this, even if I have to turn you over my knee to do it," he announced, scowling at me in his most penetrating manner.

I blinked, that was the second time in as many days Phillip had threatened me with some form of corporal punishment. What was going on with him? Could he possibly be

serious? He was glaring at me again and rubbing his right hand against his pants leg almost convulsively.

"Paxton..." I started to say, but he cut me off.

"It's time to get back to work in there, McKinley, so try to concentrate and do your job. And in the meantime, try to remember that I'm not just a convenient way to scratch your itch." He turned on his heel and left me standing in the hot Biloxi sun, completely unaware of how damn ironic his words were.

We did a full day's work and by the time we were ready to leave around seven that night, the whole situation was practically wrapped up. Rarely, as Phillip pointed out, had we ever had less trouble in solving a case. It was true; every piece of the puzzle fell neatly into place.

When the reluctant Rob was finally rounded up in the late afternoon—he had been hiding in his sister's basement—he confessed to everything, although he insisted he only meant for George to have some 'fun' and never thought he would kill anyone. He was, as Phillip remarked, marginally smarter than George—which certainly didn't take much—but still about three tacos shy of a fiesta meal.

It was unfortunate that I was unable to enjoy our success because, once lodged in my brain, the dream showed no sign of ever letting up. I felt like I was watching a very hot porn movie loop over and over inside my head, starring myself and a tall, dark-haired man whose face I could never quite see... I wondered if I was now so tired that I had reached that twilight zone between waking and sleep where the dream could molest me uninterrupted forever.

I knew I was acting preoccupied and confused so I tried to stay out of the way and let Phillip do most of the talking. Still, he inadvertently touched me several times during the day, provoking my embarrassing 'cat in heat' reaction before I could stop myself. I was sure by the end of our time at the Biloxi police department, everyone who saw us interact probably thought we were having a torrid love affair. Phillip looked like he desperately wanted to get me alone to shake me down a little more to find out what the hell was wrong with me, but luckily we were kept too busy with paperwork and interrogating Rob when he was brought in for him to try it.

At last, all the loose ends had been tucked securely into place. The case against the two men was so airtight that Phillip and I planned on leaving for home the next day. There was literally nothing left that we could do. After a brief call to Assistant Director Murtaugh to appraise him of the situation, we found ourselves on the front steps of the police department at 7:15, the sun just beginning to set, shaking hands with a grateful Chief Cox.

"I just want to thank you again for all your help." He smiled, shaking our hands and grinning from ear to droopy ear. "Couldn't have done it without ya. Won't hesitate ta call ya back to testify if we need to. That okay?"

"Just fine, Cox," Phillip assured him.

I was standing right beside him and he was keeping one wary eye on me to make sure he didn't get too close and start me up again. "We're, ah ... always glad to help. Call us anytime."

"Yeah, well. I reckon you two wanna get back to your hotel room now. It's been a long day and you probably wanna ... *relax* together. Am I right?" He smiled at the two of us and I felt Phillip stiffen beside me.



“Actually we haven’t found a hotel yet, Chief Cox,” he said deliberately. “Maybe you could recommend a nice reasonable one where we could get a *couple* of nice *rooms* for the night?” He emphasized the plurals, staring directly at Cox who looked slightly confused.

“Oh, I’m sorry, detective Paxton. But you did say that you haven’t got a hotel yet?”

“Yes, that’s exactly what I said,” Phillip answered. “Why, is that going to be a problem?”

“A problem? Well, hell yes, it probably will be. Don’t you know that it’s on-season right now in Biloxi?”

“On-season? What does that mean to us?” I interrupted impatiently. All I wanted was to find a bed to collapse in for the night so I could give in to the damn dream that was threatening to take me by force if I didn’t surrender of my own volition soon.

“It means, detective McKinley, that everybody and his grandpa is here in town right now gamblin’ their asses off—pardon my French. So it may be a little more difficult to find accommodations than you think.” He frowned gently, his face drooping in thoughtful concentration. “Now maybe if I phone the missus and ask her real sweet she’d agree to make up the guest room at our house for you. It’s only for one night after all, although there’s only one bed...” he trailed off, looking confused.

“That’s a very kind offer but completely unnecessary, Cox,” Phillip broke in quickly, nodding at me to start towards our car. “I’m sure that agent McKinley and I will be able to find a hotel somewhere that has an opening.”

“Well, if you’re sure...”

We both nodded vigorously and thanked the chief again. As we slid into the car, Phillip shook his head and grinned at me.

“Well, that’s southern hospitality for you, McKinley.” He chuckled.

I felt so bone tired I couldn’t possibly join in his humor.

Phillip took a closer look at me and seeing the glazed expression on my face seemed to wipe the laughter off his own.

“McKinley, you’ve been acting very strange all day. Are you...” he started, but I cut him off ruthlessly.

“I’m fine, Paxton. So not a word—I mean it. Just get into gear and find us a place to spend the night. It doesn’t have to be fancy, but I would rather it didn’t involve Chief Deputy Dawg out there.” I nodded to Cox who was still smiling and waving in a friendly way as Phillip put the car into gear. “And it better have more than one bed.” I added as an afterthought.

“Oh, I think I can promise you that,” Phillip answered, turning onto a main street and navigating through the Biloxi traffic.

But that turned out to be a promise he had to break.

## Chapter 4

### A Room with a View

#### Kate

After rashly promising me he would find us a hotel with at least two beds to spare, it looked like Phillip wasn't even going to be able to find us a hotel with *one*. After the eighth place we tried that had no vacancies, I was beginning to panic. We couldn't possibly sleep in the car. Phillip would certainly guess some things I didn't want him knowing.

I was becoming desperate to get away from him for while. His nearness, his warm, masculine scent, and being cooped up with him for all these hours while searching for a hotel with only a brief break for a fast food dinner were making me crazy. The dream played over and over inside my head and plucked at my nerves like too-tight wires. The situation had gone rapidly from bad to maddening to almost painful, and just when I thought it couldn't get any worse Phillip laid one large, warm hand on my thigh and said in a low voice,

"God, McKinley. I really am so sorry. This is a nightmare. I had no idea it would be so hard to find some vacant rooms. Maybe we should have taken Cox up on his offer after all."

"It's okay, Paxton," I said through gritted teeth, carefully removing his hand and replacing it back on his own leg. "It's past eleven anyway, so Cox is no longer an option. Let's just keep trying to find some place with a vacancy. The thought of having to spend the night in this car makes me want to scream."

Phillip gave me a funny, sidelong glance. He had been looking at me strangely all day and no wonder, considering my erratic behavior, but still it made me wonder if he had seen more than he was letting on at the rest stop the other night. His explanation of how long he had been in the bathroom seemed awfully convenient and the more I thought of it, the more suspicious I got.

"Okay. Let's keep looking." And so we looked. And looked. And looked. At last, when I had nearly given up all hope, we found ourselves on the outskirts of town at a rundown old place called the Victoria Skylight hotel.

*Free continental breakfast*, a weary, flickering neon sign proclaimed, which I knew meant a half an English muffin and a tiny glass of orange juice. Not that I wanted to eat or drink anything served at a place like this. But as long as there was a room with a bed waiting for me, I didn't give a damn what they served for breakfast.

I was drooping with the strange combination of desire and exhaustion, the dream tormenting me ceaselessly. When Phillip pulled over and got out of the car, I jumped out as well, determined to get a room or die trying.

"I'm coming with you," I told him grimly. I marched into the lobby and rang the bell for the night clerk. A sleepy old man with a small, scraggly, pointed gray beard clinging to his chin—it made him look more than a little like a goat—ambled over in our general

direction, taking his time.

“Yes?” he asked, blinking stupidly and leaning against the faux wood counter where the plywood facade had begun to peel away from its plastic base. “What can I do for you folks?”

I whipped out my wallet and flashed my badge at him. “I’m special investigator Detective Kate McKinley and this is special investigator Detective Phillip Paxton on an assignment from the District of Colombia. We’ve been down here working with the Biloxi police on a local homicide. We’re going to need two single rooms for the night right now, please.” I said briskly and stood tapping my foot as the old party paused to wipe his glasses on his none-too-clean shirt.

He peered once more at my badge and then began pecking slowly with both index fingers at the ancient, boxy computer sitting in front of him on the peeling countertop. After what seemed like an hour I began to despair, but he finally cleared his throat and looked up. “Well, says here that we ain’t got but one room left,” he announced blearily.

I felt depression well up in my throat. “Well, does it at least have two beds?” I asked, pleadingly. “And are you sure you can’t find another room? We *are* with the police, you know.” But if I was hoping my authority and badge would get the desired results, I was sadly disappointed. I had only succeeded in offending the old clerk.

“Look, missy,” he told me sternly. “I don’t care if yer the Queen of England, you might as well get off’n your high horse ’cause my machine...” He patted the ancient green, glowing monitor covered in a fine layer of dust affectionately. “Says I ain’t got but one room and it ain’t got but one bed. Now do you want it or not?”

“We’ll take it.” Phillip said quietly, coming up behind me. “Do you at least have a cot we can use?”

“What’s the matter, mister? Did miss high pockets here kick ya outta bed?” The clerk leered suggestively.

Phillip didn’t answer but gave him a look that seem to subdue him at once.

If I hadn’t been so damn tired and wretched feeling, I’d have been impressed.

“Well no, we don’t got a cot,” said the old goat sullenly. “’Fraid I gave the only one to the folks in 202 for their little boy. So looks like it’s the floor for you mister.” He leered at Phillip again, but this time Phillip just ignored him.

“Fine, whatever, just give me the key please,” he said with pointed indifference. The old bastard shuffled off, muttering under his breath about “Goddamn Yankees” to get the key.

I sagged wearily against the faux wood counter, cradling my head in my arms.

“Sorry, McKinley,” Phillip said sympathetically. “But I think this is as good as it gets. We can’t keep looking all night, you know.”

“I know, Paxton.” Sighing inwardly, I realized that I would just have to wait until Phillip went to sleep to drift off myself. I would also have to hope that my thrashing around when the dream took me in the middle of the night wouldn’t wake him up. It wasn’t nearly good enough, but it was the best I could do. And I felt so tired I almost didn’t care anymore. Almost.

Inside the room I headed straight for the bathtub which turned out to be a genuine antique with claw feet and marvelously deep as well. Perfect. A bubble bath was just what I needed to unwind and maybe by the time I got out Phillip would already be asleep. I drew up the tub full of hot, sudsy water using the small bottle of complementary

shampoo for bubble bath since I had nothing else. Relaxing into the tub I sighed softly and felt some of my tension began to drain away. A soft knock at the door interrupted my bliss.

“McKinley?”

“What, Paxton, can’t it wait?” I asked irritably.

“I just wanted to tell you I’m going to sleep on the floor. You can have the bed,” he said, his voice muffled through the door.

I groaned. “Paxton, don’t be an idiot!” I protested. “You’ve been doing all the driving, it’s been a really long day and we’re both exhausted. Just pick a side and I’ll take the other. It doesn’t matter as long as you don’t plan to sleep in the buff.”

“Okay, if you’re sure...”

“Yes, I’m sure. Now just let me enjoy this bath, okay?”

“Fine.” His voice faded out and I heard the bed springs creak. ‘Hope he picked the left side.’ I thought drowsily. I always preferred to sleep on the right side of the bed myself.

The hot water felt so good lapping at my naked body. I spread my legs to let a tendril of wetness caress me. I let my hand hover over the curly blonde thatch between my thighs. If only I could stand to touch myself—just a little. Maybe this damn dream would leave me alone and I could get a good night’s sleep for once.

But as my fingers slipped silently down towards my warm, moist center, I heard the long ago snickering of my classmates and saw the big black letters of the sign Sister Mary Frances had hung around my neck. “Dirty Girl.” It echoed loudly in my head, 30 years had not changed that refrain. I just *couldn’t*. I withdrew my hand and sat up. Surely Phillip would be asleep by now...

I stood wearily, sloshing water over the sides of the claw foot bathtub and climbed out to dry myself off with one of the thin, inadequate motel towels. Surely I could go to bed now. The bath had relaxed me; maybe I would even be able to go to sleep and avoid the dream.

I dug around in my suitcase, which I had dragged into the bathroom with me, to see what I had left in the way of nightgowns. Damn. What had I been thinking when I packed? Everything I had was silky, sexy, sheer. I admit, I have a secret fetish for sexy underwear, but I have a few normal nightgowns and even a few granny flannel outfits that go from my chin to my ankles. Something like that would definitely have been my preference had I known I would be sleeping right beside my attractive partner. I looked again but no luck—not a scrap of flannel in sight.

I made the best of a bad situation and picked the one that was the least provocative. Still, it was a soft little black satin slip-like thing cut low in the front, lower in the back and only reaching to mid thigh. But at least it covered the salient parts of my anatomy and it wasn’t see-through anywhere. I picked out some black satin panties to go with my gown and slipped them on. Normally I slept without, but I didn’t think that would be appropriate with Phillip right in the bed beside me. I belted a thin black silk rope tightly around me and emerged from the bathroom as silently as possible.

The room was quiet and dark but for a little moonlight filtering in through the side of the window where the shade didn’t quite reach. Enough for me to see that the bed wasn’t even a queen—it was a full. And Phillip had picked the right side of the bed leaving me the left. Damn! The good news was that he appeared to be asleep so maybe I could just

creep into bed without waking him and try to get a little shut eye myself before the dream overtook me.

Quietly, I slipped around the left side of the bed. Phillip's broad back was facing me as he was lying on his right side. I noted the expanse of smooth skin showing from the vulnerable looking nape of his neck, where his thick, black hair curled softly, to the small of his back where the blanket was draped carelessly over his narrow hips. He was breathing deeply and evenly so I felt it was safe to lay my robe over the rickety night stand and scoot into bed next to him.

Lying on my back beside Phillip, I relaxed in stages. It was difficult to do because his body heat radiated across the very narrow strip of mattress between us and his warm, masculine scent invaded my senses every time I drew a breath.

I lay there and imagined how it would be if I didn't have to be so careful not to touch him. What if we were together? Would that really be so bad? Sure, professionally speaking, it's not the ideal thing to start sleeping with your partner—I knew that. But what if I could just roll over and cup his naked back in the curve of my body? I wanted to reach around him as far as I could and feel his strong, rhythmic heartbeat against my palm. I shivered a little with wanting, with longing, and Phillip stirred briefly in his sleep. I adjusted my pillow cautiously and tried to put both him and the dream out of my mind. My eyelids fluttered closed and sleep rolled over me like a silent, suffocating wave.

I was awakened an hour later by Phillip's voice and his hand on my shoulder, shaking me.

"Wake up, McKinley. Wake up! You're having some kind of a ... nightmare."

Even in the dreamlike state I was still in, I recognized the hesitation in his tone. Oh yeah, Phillip knew something. I wondered if he would be polite enough to pass it off and let us get back to sleep? Or would he insist on prying? He was still asking me if I was okay.

"Fine," I mumbled. "Sorry, Paxton. Just a bad dream is all. Sorry I woke you up. Think you can get back to sleep?"

"I guess so." He was still eyeing me skeptically.

I realized I must have kicked all the covers off in my agitation because I was completely bare except for the little black slip. Hastily, I reach down to grab the covers from the foot of the bed and pulled them quickly up to my chin, covering myself again.

"Night, Paxton," I muttered. "Sorry."

"Good night, McKinley." He sounded like he wanted to say something else, but at last he seemed content to let it go and get back to sleep. He rolled over on his right side again and began to breathe deeply.

I didn't know how to feel about that. A deep, stubborn part of me continued to want to keep my problems private, but the larger part of me wished he *would* pry so I could tell someone about the dream before I went completely insane. At this point, it would've been a short trip.

I lay back, fighting the effects of the dream—disturbing images crowding my brain and a deep, unfilled ache inside me. At last I dropped off to sleep again.

The next time Phillip woke me up he was done being polite.

"McKinley ... Kate ... wake up!" he said, shaking me roughly once more. He was leaning over me, looking into my face with concern and some darker emotion I couldn't name.

I opened my eyes and scooted away, sitting up to indicate that I was indeed awake.

He sighed and leaned back against the headboard, head thrown back and eyes closed, an expression of exhaustion on his sharp features.

“God, McKinley, is it going to happen every hour on the hour?”

I shivered and pulled the thin cotton sheet up around my neck so that I was covered again. “Sometimes it’s more frequent than that.” I muttered, hunching in on myself miserably.

“This is ridiculous. Obviously something is bothering you deeply and you won’t get past it until you get it out in the open. Could we please just talk about this so you can work through it? Then maybe we can go back to sleep.” Phillip’s voice was low and exhausted.

“There’s nothing to talk about.” I replied stubbornly. Despite my earlier wishes that he would pry, I still found myself unwilling to admit my problem.

“McKinley, come on. Please stop pretending. Look, you’re having an extremely erotic dream over and over again. Now there must be some reason for that. Can you help me out a little here—please?” Phillip ran a hand through his rumpled black hair and looked me hopefully.

“No, I can’t. And how do you know my dream is ‘extremely erotic’ as you put it, Paxton?” I asked suspiciously.

“Because I watched you last night at the rest stop,” he said shortly. “And I’ve been listening to you moaning and thrashing and begging someone to...” he hesitated. “To ... *help* you...” he ended rather lamely.

I felt horribly embarrassed, my worst fears confirmed. Apparently I *was* very vocal during the dream.

“To ‘help’ me? Paxton ... what have you heard? And what have you seen?”

“You just were ... writhing and ... panting and touching your ... hair.” He dodged the first question neatly, but his deep hazel eyes wouldn’t meet mine as he spoke.

“Paxton, I can tell you’re holding back.” I was trying to keep from getting too upset, but how much had he seen? How much had he heard? “Have I been making a spectacle of myself tonight?” I demanded at last.

“Yes, in a manner speaking. Although, not much more than you were at the police station today. I still don’t know what that was all about...”

“Kate, how long has it been since you’ve had an orgasm?” he blurted.

“A *what*?” My cheeks were burning with the question. “Paxton—how can you ask me that?” I couldn’t believe we were sitting half naked in a strange hotel bed together with Phillip asking me about my sex life—or lack thereof. A glance out of the corner of my eye showed him to be somewhat ashamed, but that look of dogged determination was on his face. Great, we were going to have this out here and now.

“An orgasm, McKinley. You’re not reaching one in the dream, are you?” The look he gave me was searching and his voice was calm and reasonable.

I felt ashamed for some reason and I answered almost inaudibly,

“I ... no, I don’t think so, Paxton. But what does that have to do with anything?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute if my hunch is right.”

Great, that was Phillip, always playing a hunch.

“So when *was* the last time you had an orgasm?” he asked me in that same, calm voice—the psychologist interviewing his patient.

His tone aggravated me all of a sudden almost as much as the question itself. How dare he condescend to me? Suddenly, I was just this side of furious.

"None of your goddamned business, Paxton." I snapped. "This line of questioning is getting a bit too personal, I think."

"McKinley..." There was some tension in his voice but he was striving to remain calm. "Kate," he tried again. "I'm not asking you to describe to me exactly how you touch yourself or ... or get yourself off." His ears were looking decidedly red but he pushed on, determined to finish his thought. "I'm just trying to figure out what's going on in your subconscious to cause this dream. Look, from what I've seen of your behavior while you dream, you are longing for, *striving* for, but never achieving a ... sexual release. An orgasm. So maybe your body is craving a release of tension and it's coming out in this dream. If you haven't had an orgasm for a long time that would make sense. Do you see?"

"No, I don't see." I replied stubbornly, although a small part of my brain was telling me that what Phillip said made perfect sense. In fact, he was saying the very things I had been thinking myself.

"You don't see because you *won't* see. Damn it, Kate. Stop being so pigheaded and listen to what I'm telling you. I'm trying to help you!" He snarled, sounding frustrated and plenty furious himself.

"All I see is your insufferable attitude and your nosey, personal questions." I snapped. I knew it was wrong to take my anger and frustration out on him, but I couldn't seem to help it. I got up in a huff, intending to leave the bed and go sulk in the bathroom. But to my great surprise, Phillip grabbed my arm and wouldn't let me go. I looked from his iron grip on my upper arm to his blazing hazel eyes in confusion and anger.

"You know, I understand that you're exhausted and sleep deprived, Kate," he said carefully, enunciating each word. "But I'm tired too and you've really been acting insufferable lately. I know it's hard for you to let go and admit to your emotions. I know it makes you feel weak, but this time I really think you have to. For your own peace of mind as well as mine."

"I don't have to do anything," I shot back, yanking on my arm, which he still refused to let go of. A look of grim determination settled over Phillip's sharp features.

"That's it," he muttered angrily under his breath. He yanked me until I was face down over his lap and held me immobile with one strong arm.

My face was pressed against the motel's cheap, nylon bedspread and my ass was up in the air. No matter how much I kicked and struggled, I couldn't get free of him.

"You've had this coming for a long time, Kate." He said grimly, pressing me down into his lap and speaking in a low, ominous voice.

"Had what coming? Phillip, what the hell are you doing?" I demanded as I felt a sudden breeze on my bare back. Phillip had yanked up the hem of my slinky, black night dress with no warning and I was even more shocked when I felt him pull down the matching black satin panties, baring my ass to his gaze.

"Phillip, what the hell? What are you doing?" I exclaimed, genuinely frightened now.

"Shut up, Kate," he said tersely, still holding me in place with ease despite my rising panic. "I'm not going to fuck you—I'm just going to spank you."

"You're going to *what*?" I exclaimed, not believing my ears. Surely this couldn't be

Phillip, my kind, sensitive, intelligent partner saying these things. And surely he couldn't mean what he said. Spank me? As though I were a little girl over his knee in need of punishment? I mean, I knew I had been behaving badly lately, but that was the dream, not me and besides...

*Smack.* Phillip's hand came down hard on my bare bottom.

"Ouch!" I yelled. "That really hurt!"

"Good." Phillip said grimly above me. "It was meant to hurt. And there's more where that came from, Katie."

*Smack.*

I couldn't believe it. Here I was a grown woman, a professional and an M.D. and I was over my partner's lap getting spanked. Was he for real? Could he possibly be serious?

*Smack.*

I began to feel a sharp sting on my bare buttocks. Phillip wasn't playing around here—those slaps were hard. Apparently he really was for real.

*Smack.*

I started to struggle again and reached a hand back to block the next blow.

Phillip grabbed it neatly and twisted it firmly, though not painfully, behind my back so I was even more helpless than before.

*Smack—smack—smack.*

The blows were becoming more frequent and more painful.

"Listen—ouch! Listen, Phillip." I tried to reason with him since he was far too strong for me to free myself. "You've made your point. I'm sorry I shut you out and refused to discuss my dream with you. OW!"

His hand connected with my bottom again.

"I'm ready to be reasonable now and talk this over like civilized—ouch!—adults."

*Smack.*

"You're not ready to talk about anything yet. Not if you can still speak so rationally. You have to give in to your emotions, Kate. Now be quiet and take what's coming to you," Phillip growled fiercely.

A volley of blows rained down on my bare backside causing me serious, stinging pain. What did he intend to do, whip me until I cried? Well, damn it, I wouldn't give him the satisfaction. Gritting my teeth, I braced myself to take the worst he could dish out.

*Smack-smack-smack-smack.*

Phillip seemed to sense my defiance and he doubled the cascade of slaps to my naked behind as a result.

My ass cheeks were feeling very warm now and I couldn't help struggling as much as I hated to let Phillip know he was getting to me. A tiny, wounded whimper escaped my lips.

"I'm tired of you shutting me out, Kate."

*Smack.*

"I'm tired of you denying your own emotions so much it affects your job performance."

*Smack.*

"I'm tired of getting mixed signals from you."

*Smack.*



“Your behavior lately had been bad—inexcusable. You have been a very—*smack*, very—*Smack*, bad—*SMACK*, girl!”

‘Bad girl,’ I thought. ‘Bad girl—*Dirty Girl*.’ It was as if something tore loose inside me and I felt a sob coming out of my throat. There was no way to stop it or the next one that followed, or the next or the next... I felt like I was ripping myself to pieces inside, crying not like an adult but like a hurt, little girl. These were no ladylike sniffles and polite tears that you shed at your best friend’s wedding or your great aunt’s funeral. No, these were painful, gut wrenching sobs. I was literally crying my heart out.

*Smack-smack-smack!*

I sobbed louder. The pain Phillip was inflicting on me had wakened some part of me, some hurt, lost little girl that had been buried for a long time who needed release.

Phillip’s blows stopped abruptly, but I barely noticed, I was crying so hard.

“All right, Katie. It’s alright—let it out,” he whispered, his voice low and comforting. He let go of my arm.

I was finally able to crawl out of his lap and lay with my back turned to him, curled in a small ball on the bed.

Phillip’s large, warm hand rubbed gently across my shoulder blades and down my back to caress my naked, burning bottom. Strangely, I had no urge to pull away from him or slap him, as the grown-up part of me was sure I ought to do. Instead, I leaned into his comforting touch and just let myself cry out all the frustration and weariness I had been feeling for weeks, ever since the dream came to haunt me. Finally, after ten minutes of weeping in earnest, my sobs began to taper off into sniffles and at last I was silent.

“Kate?” Phillip’s voice was soft and gentle, nothing like the hard, commanding tone he had used with me earlier.

“How ... how did you know I needed that?” I asked him, sitting up carefully and straightening my clothes until I felt decent and halfway adult again. I swiped the tears from my face and sniffled once more, looking searchingly into his hazel-brown eyes, now soft with compassion.

“I don’t know, Kate. It’s just seems that you have such a hard time releasing your emotions, and to tell the truth, you’ve been pissing me off for weeks, being so secretive and tortured. I thought if you had an emotional release—a catharsis—it might enable you to talk about your other problems, about your dream. Are you ready to talk now?” He still sounded a little stern.

“Yes,” I said, surprising myself a little. I didn’t know if I quite felt ready to tell him everything, but I was at least ready to acknowledge the fact that I had a problem. That was the first step, right?

“Okay.” Phillip sat back against the headboard and nodded for me to do the same. Wincing a little because my buttocks were still sore and tingling, I did as he indicated. Once I was settled, I looked at him to continue.

“Okay,” he said again, as though nothing strange had happened between us at all in the last half hour. It was odd, because Phillip had never touched me with anything but a partner’s deference or a friend’s comforting contact until tonight. I almost felt that his spanking me had opened up a whole new area of our relationship. I was relating differently to him now. It wasn’t bad, just ... different. I couldn’t think of another word to fit the situation, although I found his new, strict manner almost comforting. Why was that? I shook my head, baffled.

"Now where were we, Kate?" Phillip's eyes were deep, impenetrable. I looked quickly away.

"I ... um..." Phillip looked at me sternly until I continued. "You were asking me when the last time I had an orgasm was and I said I didn't see what difference it made and you told me that the dream might be happening because my body needed some kind of sexual release." I recited rapidly, not looking at him.

Phillip made a noise of approval. "That's right, Kate," he said softly.

"But, I mean, I still don't see how having an orgasm will make this dream go away." I said. True, I had thought that having an orgasm might solve my situation, but I wanted to hear Phillip explain it. I needed a reason to back up my gut feeling.

"Don't you see, Kate? This dream is demanding something of you. It demands you find sexual release, have an orgasm. When you have fulfilled the demands of the dream, it will leave you alone. Makes sense?" he asked.

"Makes perfect sense," I admitted. It was one of the things I most admired about Phillip, that he could analyze a situation and lay the facts out so clearly. He gave me clarity and distance from this situation I was so close to that I had no perspective.

"So go ahead and ... um ... have an orgasm, McKinley." Phillip was now looking a little red around the ears and I noted that he had reverted to my last name again. Apparently he could spank the tears out of me, but he still felt that sexual topics were a little out of bounds for us. I found myself appreciating his discretion in this matter. Still, Phillip's solution had a simple flaw in it.

"I'm sure that would solve the whole situation but I can't, Paxton," I said, flatly. "Give myself an orgasm, I mean."

"Oh, well, of course not. Not with me sitting right here. I'm just going to go into the bathroom now and take a shower while you ... um, take care of yourself. I'll keep the water running full blast so I won't be able to hear a thing. Okay?" Without waiting for an answer, he got up quickly and went into the bathroom. The door closed and I could hear the water beginning to run. Now he was being a typical man. He felt he had solved my problem and he could leave me to myself. Great.

Phillip was right, of course. I was badly, perhaps *desperately*, in need a sexual release. After all, I hadn't dated anyone pretty much since he and I had first become partners six years before. Though, I couldn't say why I had stopped dating when I started working with Phillip. Perhaps my work, always difficult and demanding, consumed me to the point where I had no time for a social life. And there was always Phillip, of course, he fulfilled my needs for friendship, if not for romance admirably. I just didn't feel like I *needed* anyone else.

I wondered if Phillip felt the same way, I knew he had gone out on the occasional blind date, although I hadn't heard him mention anyone for a few years at least, and he hadn't had any serious relationships that I knew of since we had been working together. Was I saving myself for him without admitting it to myself? Was I waiting for just the right time?

Whatever the reason, the fact remained that no dating equaled no sex which, for me, was equivalent to no orgasms. Because I could stand for someone else to touch me, I just couldn't touch myself. How screwed up was that?

"But I've been celibate before..." I muttered out loud to myself. "Why now?" Why was my body, or my subconscious, or whatever was causing this dream tormenting me

every night, demanding that I have an orgasm now? And was that all it was demanding?

Phillip's explanation sounded plausible but, the more I thought about it, a little *too* simplistic. If I were able to have an orgasm right that minute, would that turn off the dream, like turning off a light with a switch? I wasn't so sure. And more to the point, why was I sitting here analyzing the situation, when I knew perfectly well that it was all a moot point? I had tried often enough to know I couldn't make myself ... masturbate. Even if Phillip wanted me to. Remembering the new, stern tone in his voice made me shiver and I decided to lay back on the bed and at least try.

"Don't think about it," I commanded myself. "Don't think of Sister Mary Francis. Don't think about being a Dirty Girl." I struggled to clear my mind and tried like never before. I was trembling with the effort of just putting my hand down inside my panties and letting one, hesitant finger slip inside my sex. But it was farther than I got most times.

I could feel the gentle pressure I was exerting on my clitoris and as I stroked lightly over my tiny, swollen bud, a wave of pleasure hit me. But a wave of shame—a *tidal* wave followed it. It was a crushing blanket of guilt that smothered me for this small pleasure I had dared to give myself, and all I could think, lying in bed paralyzed by the evil I was committing was *Dirty Girl—oh, I am such a Dirty Girl...*

I took my hand away and the tears came again. Not a cathartic release this time, as when Phillip had spanked me, but hot and angry and hopeless. They collected in the corners of my eyes and ran down the sides of my face. God—I hated to cry and now I had done it twice in one night. What was I going to do?

If Phillip was right, and I thought he must be, at least partially, then I would never be free of this horrible dream. I would never get a good night's sleep again, and all because I couldn't help myself do this one thing. I suddenly hated myself and my stupidly strict Catholic upbringing.

"I am a medical doctor and I know that masturbation is perfectly normal and natural." I muttered fiercely to myself, but it was no use. I had told myself such things often enough before and it never helped. The adult logic just couldn't compete with the childhood guilt that overwhelmed me. I was trapped, completely unable to help myself. I couldn't remember ever feeling so helpless, and for the second time that night, I couldn't seem to stop crying. If only there was some way to overcome this ... someone who could help me...

## Chapter 5

### Release

#### Phillip

Once I had the water running full blast into the tub, I looked at the ancient, porcelain sink and the cracked mirror hanging above it, and regarded my reflection. Rumpled black hair and haggard hazel eyes stared back at me. I had been close to Kate for a long time professionally, and I couldn't begin to guess when I had started loving her. It seemed like forever. But no matter how my hand had itched to tan her backside and force her to admit her emotions, I had never truly considered that I might actually do it.

I had just spanked my longtime friend and partner—the woman I loved. Had actually turned her over my knee, pulled down her panties and *spanked* her. I looked down at my reddened palm. Hard. I had spanked her hard. And yet ... it had seemed like the right thing to do. I had been playing a hunch, something Kate often accused me of doing, a hunch that she needed to release her pent up emotions in order to be able to admit her problems. And it had paid off. Maybe now Kate would be able to ... resolve her situation.

Just thinking of that made me decide I'd better take a shower after all—a long cold one. I stepped into the tub and as the chilly water sluiced over my body I shivered and tried to forget the way Kate had looked in the grip of that damn dream. The way she had arched her back and cried out again and again. Cried out *my* name and begged me to taste her, to take her.

Rubbing a tiny bar of complimentary Ivory soap over my goose bump-covered skin, I tried not to imagine Kate lying in the bedroom behind me and touching herself. Tried not to see her small fingers spreading the soft, delicate lips of her pussy and stroking herself as she moaned and gasped... No. I pushed the image away, but it was very damn hard to do. I wanted her *so bad*.

After what seemed like an hour, but was probably more like 30 minutes under the freezing, needle spray of the shower, my stubborn erection finally wilted and I was able to turn off the water and climb out. I began to towel off, reasoning that thirty minutes should be ample time for anyone to get off. Surely Kate was done by now. I paused before opening the door to listen, although I wasn't sure what I expected to hear. I didn't have any idea if Kate was vocal when she had an orgasm, though judging from that dream... I shuddered with need just thinking about it.

I didn't expect to hear her soft, hopeless sobbing that drifted through the warped, wooden bathroom door. What could possibly be wrong? I could count on one hand the number of times I'd seen Kate cry, and one of them was tonight. I knew that crying made her feel vulnerable and weak and she hated that. Kate had a deep need to be in complete control of herself in all situations. To hear her let loose this way with no provocation ... well, something had to be very wrong.

I hurriedly slipped back on my pajama bottoms and went back into the dim bedroom. Kate was curled up on her side, her small shoulders heaving with almost silent sobs.

“Kate?” My voice hesitant, tentative. “Kate, can you tell me what’s wrong?”

“Can’t, Paxton. I can’t,” she managed between sobs. “So sorry. I tried but I just can’t. I ... I’ll never be able to.”

What could I do? I climbed into bed beside her. I wanted desperately to gather her into my arms and comfort her, but she was curled in on herself tightly. That body language told me she didn’t want to be held when she was feeling so vulnerable. Instead, I rubbed her shoulders and back firmly and soothingly. I was encouraged when she didn’t pull away from my touch.

After a time her sobs slowed down and then died away to silence and the occasional snuffle. I thought she must’ve cried herself to sleep, but Kate rolled over a few minutes later and looked at me through swollen, red rimmed eyes. She looked like she felt like shit. She looked beautiful.

“I’m sorry, Paxton,” she said, a calm sort of despair thick in her voice. “I am...” she fumbled to get the right words. “Unable to achieve satisfaction. So I’m going to sleep in the car where the dream won’t wake you up too when it hits me.” She started to climb out of the bed but I grabbed her slender arm and pulled her back to me for the second time that night.

“Oh no you don’t, Kate,” I told her firmly. “There’s a lot more to this and we’re going to get to the bottom of it. We’ve been friends and partners for too long for me to let you get away that easily. You’re hurting and I want to talk about it and try to understand why.” My tone was firm, almost stern.

Kate must have been able to tell by the look on my face or that tone in my voice that I meant business because she sighed and relaxed back on the bed.

“There *is* a lot more to this situation, Phillip, but it’s very difficult for me to talk about,” she admitted, her eyes downcast. I noticed we were back on a first name basis and it gave me hope that she would open up, really open up this time and we could get to the root of her problem.

“Kate, please...” I said, as gently as I could. “You need to talk about this now. I’m worried about you. Please talk to me, Kate, *please*.” She laughed a sad little laugh and looked up at me briefly before looking back down to pluck aimlessly at the cheap nylon bedspread we were sitting on.

“I counted three pleases there, Phillip. You must be really anxious to hear this whole ... stupid mess.”

“Damn straight,” I said seriously. “Kate, look—I just want to help you. At least let me listen.”

“All right.” She sighed deeply. “But it’s really hideously embarrassing.”

“Go on,” I told her.

“All right,” she said again. “So. Here goes. Well, remember you asked me when was the last time I had an orgasm? Before ... before you spanked me, I mean.” She blushed slightly and rubbed her bottom gingerly. I simply nodded. “Well, you asked me that and I ... I took offense. But, well ... the truth is that I haven’t ... haven’t *been* with a man that way since you and I first became partners.”

“That’s not so bad, Kate. Abstinence is nothing to be ashamed of,” I told her seriously. “I mean with all the STDs out there floating around it just makes sense if you’re not in a committed relationship. Hell, I haven’t had sex myself in...” How long *had* it been? Certainly not since I had realized my true feelings for Kate. I was trying to

calculate and feeling kind of sorry for myself when what Kate had said *really* sank in.

“God! Kate, when you said you haven’t had sex with a man in over six years... Are you telling me that you also haven’t had an orgasm in six years?”

She nodded, refusing to meet my eyes as I peered anxiously at her.

“But why?” I simply couldn’t understand denying yourself that simple release for so long. I masturbated a least once a day, sometimes more, and I imagined most men did. We do think about sex every nine seconds, after all. Why would Kate voluntarily put herself through a six-year dry spell?

“Well...” Her voice was soft, shamed and she hung her head.

“That’s actually the hideously embarrassing part, Phillip. You see...” She took a deep breath, as though nerving herself up for a terrible confession. “I can’t actually ... *touch* myself there.”

“You can’t?” I asked blankly, not getting it. “Why not?”

“It’s a long story.” Kate replied evasively, looking down at her hands picking at the bedspread.

“Kate,” I reached down and tilted her small chin up towards me so that she had no choice but to look into my face. “I’ve got all night,” I told her sternly, letting her know she needed to go on.

“All right,” she almost whispered, turning her face away from me. I let her. We were sitting upright, leaning back against the cheap, plywood headboard together as we talked.

Kate drew her knees up to her chin and leaned forward to wrap her slender arms around her blanket-covered legs and laid her head to one side on her knees. The posture was very juvenile, very little-girlish and it occurred to me that whatever this awful thing was that Kate was about to tell me, it must have happened to her at a very young age because she was practically regressing back to early childhood right before my eyes. In a broken, little girl voice she began.

“I couldn’t have been more than four or five, Phillip. And I really didn’t know any better. But I guess that’s no excuse...” She trailed off for a moment.

“I remember ... I remember a found a ... a spot. A place that felt good when I touched it. I didn’t know I shouldn’t touch it. I didn’t know it was wrong.”

For a moment I thought she would break down again and I had the strong urge to hold her and tell her, this childlike Kate, that it was okay. That whatever she had done was *not* wrong. But I was afraid to interrupt her and break the spell. Above all, I knew Kate needed to talk about this so I restrained myself with some difficulty and just kept listening.

After a moment of struggling with herself, Kate went on again, the emotion in her voice utterly raw. God, what it had to be costing her to dredge this up, to tell me this ancient hurt.

Kate told me everything. All about touching herself in the forbidden ‘spot’ and being caught by that evil nun.

“She dragged me outside to the middle of the play yard, Phillip. She ... she wouldn’t even let me pull up my panties.” Kate’s voice was full of pain ... broken. She told me how the nun, this Sister Mary Francis, made an object lesson on the evils of masturbation of her in front of her entire peer group. And how the other children had pointed and laughed.

“And she called me ... called me Dirty Girl, Phillip.” I could hear the capital letters

in her voice when she told me.

“She made a sign for me that said that—Dirty Girl, and made me wear it around my neck the rest of the day.” A small, hurt sob escaped her. “After that, she was always after me. I had to go to confession every day and admit my sin over and over. I felt so bad—so ashamed and evil and filthy. So *dirty*. And ever since then, whenever I try to touch myself...” Kate shrugged hopelessly. “I feel that ... that shame come over me again and I can’t. I just *can’t*. So you see, I’m never going to have an orgasm on my own and so I’m never going to be free of this horrible dream.” Kate hung her head, a picture of pure dejection and a sad little moan escaped her lips.

For a moment I was literally speechless. I could hardly be more horrified than if Kate had admitted to me that she had been sexually molested as a child, which was what I had more than halfway expected to hear. To have to endure such abject humiliation at such a young age ... no wonder the experience had marked her. No—scarred her. At last, I found my voice.

“Kate, I... That has got to be the worst case of emotional abuse I’ve ever heard of! How horrible for you to have to go through that at such a vulnerable, impressionable age. And that nun—what a bitch!”

I was wishing I could get my hands around the throat of that evil cunt who dared to put this sorrow into my Kate’s beautiful, deep blue eyes. As if reading my thoughts, she smiled wanly.

“Too late, Phillip. She died of a massive stroke years ago. I think her temper got the best of her. Besides, it’s not like you to get so violent.” I realized my hands were curled into fists and forced myself to relax.

“Sorry, Kate. It’s just that it makes me so *angry* to think of anyone treating you that way.”

“It was a long time ago, Phillip,” she said softly.

“Yes, but the passage of time obviously hasn’t lessened the effects that experience had on you, Kate,” I pointed out.

“...no...” She shook her head mournfully.

“But, Kate...” I did my best to put my anger behind me and get back to the problem at hand. “You have had an orgasm before at some point, right?”

“Yes...” Her voice was so low I had to bend my head towards her to hear it. “When I’m with someone, I can have an orgasm. When someone *helps me*.” She emphasized.

“Well, what about a vibrator? Have you tried ... um, one of those?” Somehow we had gotten way beyond embarrassment, although I still felt a little awkward asking her this question.

“I’ve tried that,” Kate admitted in a low voice. “The guilt is just the same ... just as bad. It’s so strange. I mean, when I try to touch myself that way I just can’t. I can’t give myself pleasure. But when I’m with someone ... having sex ... and I can just ... just give up control of my body, then I can leave the guilt behind for a while. Because I’m not in control of the situation while someone else is touching me. So the pleasure I experience...”

“Isn’t your fault,” I finished for her.

Kate nodded her head. “Exactly.”

“Okay. So,” I said, making sure I was getting it straight. “So you’re able to have an orgasm when you’re having sex or when someone else is touching you. But when you try

to pleasure yourself in any way, you're unable to because of the guilt you feel."

"Yes." Kate nodded again. "Because I feel like what she called me, Phillip. A Dirty Girl." She whispered brokenly.

My heart ached for her. She looked so lost and alone, curled up into herself on her side of the bed. Impulsively, I gave in to the urge I'd had earlier to comfort her and took her into my arms. She came willingly to me, flowing as softly and naturally as water running downhill. We ended up leaning against the headboard of the bed again with Kate's arms wrapped around my waist and her face buried in my chest.

"You're not a dirty girl, Kate," I told her gently but firmly. "And I know that cognitively you know that everything that evil nun said was a load of bullshit. You do, don't you?" Against my bare chest, I felt her nod. "But it can be terribly hard to overcome something like this that happened in early childhood. Kate, have you ever had counseling or seen a therapist to try and work through this?" Kate shook her head, 'no' this time.

"You're the only one I've ever told this to, Phillip. It's just ... it's too hard to talk about," she whispered. I felt hot tears against my chest and hugged her protectively tighter.

"I'm so sorry you had to go through something so traumatic. But at the same time, I'm glad you trusted me enough to tell me." Kate sat up and pulled away from me a little although my arm still encircled her slender shoulders.

"I do feel better for having told you. It's like this memory had been ... almost *fester*ing inside me. Poisoning me for a long time. But..." she trailed off.

"But what?" I prompted her.

"But as good as it felt to get this off my chest, well, this still doesn't really help me. I'm just as trapped as before. I can't have an orgasm so I can't escape this damn dream." She sighed wearily. "I'm just so tired. So utterly exhausted. If I could just lay down and get one, solid night's rest without interruption..." She looked at me appealingly.

God! I wanted to help her so much. But what could I do? I couldn't just offer to... I mean, I was afraid that Kate would almost certainly take any sort of offer I could make at this point the wrong way. We had a very delicate situation on our hands.

I was wracking my brain for any possible solution—besides the obvious one of course—when something occurred to me. A memory of an old case study I had read years and years before as an undergrad. But ... we didn't have enough time. "Never work..." I muttered under my breath, concentrating hard.

"What? What won't work?" I shook my head but she persisted. "Just tell me, Phillip. Do you have any ideas at all?" Looking at her face I strongly got the impression that she wanted me to offer to touch her. To take control and give her an orgasm any way I could. And God, I certainly wanted to. But there was no way I was going to offer her that for fear of being misunderstood. 'Sorry, Kate.' I thought. 'If you want that you'll have to ask for it outright.' Instead, I said carefully,

"Kate, you know I have degrees in psychology. To be honest, I concentrated mostly on criminal and abnormal psych. But I also was required to take my share of counseling classes to learn active listening, transference and all the little tricks you use in therapy. You can't get any psych degree without some of those classes thrown in. Well..." I paused for a moment, thinking, but Kate urged me to go on.

"Well," I continued, running one hand through my corkscrewed hair. "It seems like I



read a case study similar to what you've been telling me in one of those counseling courses I took. Only in this case, the woman in question had been sexually abused as a child by her uncle. He was a real monster, did unspeakable things to her and then told her it was all her fault, that she was to blame for his behavior. She became pretty much unable to enjoy any kind of sex at all as an adult. Masturbation or intercourse."

"Was she able to recover?" Kate asked me hopefully. "Was she able to overcome her childhood trauma?"

"Well, yes," I said reluctantly. "But only over a period of time—months actually—with the help and understanding of her husband. You see, Kate, as is the case with you, the child within her had been hurt—had been damaged," I clarified. "As I recall, she had to start over from scratch. She started with masturbation. Also like you, she was unable to touch herself without experiencing horrible guilt. So her husband held her and ... guided her hand with his own. When she started to panic or feel guilty he would whisper affirmation. Tell her she was beautiful—tell her that it was all right to make herself feel good. Basically she was regressing back to childhood and he was acting as an adult to give her permission to touch herself and feel good doing it."

"And it helped her—healed her?" Kate asked.

"I'm pretty sure she eventually had a normal sex life, but only after the part of her that was still a hurt child began to heal." I told her.

"That sounds reasonable, I guess," Kate admitted. "The only problem is that I don't have a loving husband to be the adult to my wounded child. I don't have anyone to help me heal..." she finished in a whisper, hanging her head. Suddenly, she looked up at me, a glint of determination in her eyes.

"Phillip, this is even worse than telling you about my past in the first place. But ... would you ever consider ... I mean... Do you think you could help me ... that way? I completely understand if you don't feel you can," she rushed on. "I mean, our professional relationship..."

"Is shot all to hell anyway," I finished for her. "I mean, hell, Kate—I *spanked* you earlier this evening. Look, I want to help you any way that I can, but I would never want you to think I was taking advantage of you in any way. So I feel like I have to tell you that I'm not sure if this particular strategy is going to work in your case. Remember I told you that it took the woman in the case study months to overcome her past. I don't know that one night of ... um, *therapy*, is going to do you much good."

"But we could try, Phillip." Kate sounded very determined. "And if there's even the smallest chance that it might help, might do me some good, then it's worth trying. Will you just help me try?" she was almost pleading with me, her deep blue eyes filled with yearning that I couldn't refuse.

"Yes, Kate. I'll help you." I told her. And then we both sat there in the dim room staring at each other without a clue how to start.

"Well," I thought at last. "I guess I'm the adult in this scenario so it's up to me to take the lead."

"Lie down on the bed with me, Kate." I whispered soothingly into her ear. Wordlessly, she obeyed. I settled her on the bed beside me, my left arm still around her shoulders and her cheek cradled against my shoulder. My right hand was free to take her right hand which I did, gently.

"Is this the hand you'd like to touch yourself with, Katie?" I asked, using what I

knew was her childhood name to help her regress. Kate's curly blonde head nodded against my chest.

"Answer me out loud, Kate," I instructed her firmly.

"Yes, this is the hand I would use to ... to touch myself. If I could," she told me, her voice barely above a whisper.

"I'm going to help you, Katie," I told her. "I'm going to guide your hand and help you help yourself feel good, all right?"

"Okay," she breathed.

She felt so warm and small and helpless cradled in my arms and I felt almost ready to burst, I wanted to help her so badly. I didn't think I had ever loved her more than right at that moment when she was showing me her most vulnerable, secret self and letting me help her in such an intimate way.

Gently, I took her small, well-formed hand in mine and guided it down to the soft vee between her legs. The covers had gotten pushed down again so I could see her French cut black satin bikini panties which barely covered the soft mound of curls at her crotch. Laying her hand over that sweet, shapely mound, I covered her hand with my own.

"Does this feel good?" I asked her, slightly massaging her hand with my palm.

"It feels ... warm, not bad. It's okay, I guess," Kate whispered back. I let her hand remain there, outside her panties for a while and then decided it was time to continue. Lifting her hand again, I guided it under the soft, silky material keeping my own hand on top of hers.

"Spread your legs a little, Katie," I told her softly. "Feel yourself begin to open up down there. What do you call this part of yourself?"

"My, well ... my sex, I guess," she whispered. "All the other words just seem so ... so *crude*."

"Of course," I murmured soothingly. I was trying to remain detached and apart from the situation at least a little. But there could be no denying that helping Kate touch herself was powerfully arousing. I reminded myself that we had to take this slowly.

"Can you feel the palm of your hand cupping your sex, Katie?" I asked her.

"Yes..." she said in a low, breathy tone.

"Describe it to me. What does it feel like?" I asked her. Kate closed her eyes in concentration and I felt her hand move ever so slightly under mine.

"It's warm and ... wet and small," she told me quietly. "My ... curls are soft and sort of fluffy, but in the center of my palm I can feel my ... my sex, open and almost ... almost hot. When I press my palm down a little I can feel the pressure against my, um, clitoris."

"And how does that feel?" I asked her softly.

"Good but ... wrong. I shouldn't be doing this." Kate was shaking now, just a little but I could feel her quiver with anxiety in my arms. I held her comfortingly close and tried to calm her down.

"Just let your hand stay there a moment, Katie," I told her gently. "It's all right to feel good. It's not wrong—not at all. Do you understand?"

"Uh-huh." She sounded hesitant, but at least her shaking had stopped. We lay there for a while, just letting things be until she calmed down completely.

"Katie," I instructed her softly when she was once more resting quietly in my arms. "I want you to try something for me. I want you to open you legs a little wider and use

your fingers to spread open the lips of your sex. Like spreading open the petals of a flower, all right?" Kate seemed doubtful at first and I tried to reassure her. "It's okay, Katie," I told her softly. "I'm giving you permission to do this. You are allowed to touch yourself."

Slowly, Kate did as I asked her to and I could feel the sweet, damp heat under my right hand as I helped her. The room seemed to fill with her beautiful, feminine scent, the scent of a woman in heat, and I had to forcefully remind myself of what we were trying to accomplish.

"Now, Katie," I told her, breathing a little harder despite myself. "I'm going to take your fingers and help you touch yourself. All right? Are you ready?"

"Yes ... I think so," she breathed.

Gently I grasped her index and middle fingers and began to rub them slowly over the swollen bud at her wet, hot center.

Kate began to moan a little, under her breath and her hips began thrusting upwards to meet her exploring fingers almost as though she couldn't help it.

"Phillip..." she gasped softly after a moment. "This feels ... oh, God, it feels so good. But..." Her voice was shaking again, filled with shame and guilt. "But I'm starting to feel bad—very, very bad. Dirty. I'm sorry, I just can't. I have to stop."

"You can stop if you really feel like you need to, Katie, but I want you to remember that it's perfectly natural for you to make yourself feel good this way." I told her, trying to soothe her fears. But it was too late, I had lost her.

"I know—I know in my head what you're saying is true and believe me, Phillip, this is the farthest I've ever gotten. It really is." Kate sighed. "I think you're right. With a few months of this—maybe even just a few weeks, I could overcome this problem. But one night just isn't enough time. I'm rushing it too much."

Reluctantly, she withdrew her hand from under mine. For a brief instant, I was left cupping her hot, naked sex in my hand, open and wet against my palm and the sensation was almost too much for me. I felt a surge in my groin as my erection, hard since the beginning of this little exercise, grew even more painfully rigid. 'I'm trying to help Kate, not take advantage of her,' I reminded myself forcibly, almost gritting my teeth.

"All right, Katie," I told her out loud. "It's okay. We'll let things be for now." I started to withdraw my hand from the confines of her smooth, satin panties, but the lightest touch on my wrist stopped me.

"Please ... please, Phillip." There was a depth of pleading in Kate's voice that I had never heard before. "Please." She said again. "I was close. I know I was. So close. Couldn't you just ... help me a little?"

"Do you want me to touch you, Kate?" I felt I needed clarification—permission—even though I had fantasized about touching her this way for years.

"Yes, please." Her voice was still soft, pleading.

"You're sure about this?" I asked, one more time. I could still hardly believe it. Whether she knew it or not, Kate was asking me to fulfill one of my own favorite fantasies.

"Please, Phillip..." She was almost begging now and I knew for certain that she needed me to do this.

Gently, I allowed my index and ring fingers to spread the velvety lips of her wet sex even further apart and then I used my middle finger to dip down into her hot, liquid

depths. Kate responded immediately, moaning aloud and arching her hips up to meet my stroking finger eagerly—hungrily.

“God, Phillip—yes!” she gasped. Her voice in my ear and the hot, silky feel of her against my fingertips sent my brain into overload. God, how I wanted her! Struggling to master myself and remain calm and in control for Kate’s sake, I continued to stroke along the side of her swollen bud.

She was writhing beneath my hand, drawing closer to her elusive goal. “Phillip...” she moaned. “Please ... in me ... inside me”

I met her need, pushing two fingers into her incredibly tight passage. ‘God,’ I couldn’t help thinking. ‘If only it was my cock instead of my fingers inside her.’ I began to thrust into her, starting a steady rhythm.

She cried out raggedly, writhing and moaning, raising her hips to meet each of my thrusts as I pushed deeply inside her.

“Phillip—oh, God—Phillip! That feels ... feels so good. Don’t stop, please, don’t stop...” Kate begged me, panting.

Damn! It made me so hard to hear her begging like that—to see the passion, the ecstasy on her exquisite face, to feel her soft, wet sex working against my hand and fingers.

“Work for it, Kate.” I told her fiercely. “You deserve it. You’ve earned it.”

“Oh, Phillip...” she moaned. “I’m almost there. I’m close—so close. Help me—talk to me. Tell me...”

I understood that Kate was asking me to talk dirty to her and I was only too glad to be able to tell her what I was thinking.

“Oh, Kate, you are so beautiful,” I whispered into her small ear, holding her tightly as I continued to thrust my fingers into her tight, slick heat. “I want to peel up this soft little nightgown you have on and suck and lick all over your hot, pink nipples.”

Kate gasped, tossing her head and writhing, begging for more. “Go on, Phillip. Tell me ... tell me more,” she panted beseechingly.

“I want to spread your beautiful legs and taste you,” I told her. “I want to put my mouth on you and put my tongue inside you where my fingers are now.” I gave a particularly deep thrust and Kate cried out, bucking to meet me. I could tell she was close. My cock was like a bar of iron, pressed against her hip as she rode my fingers hard.

“More...” she gasped.

“Kate,” I told her, my voice grating low in my throat with need. “I want to spread your gorgeous thighs wide open and *fuck* you. Fuck you in every imaginable position. I want to be on top of you and possess you completely while I ram my cock into you hard and deep. And I want you to straddle me and ride me so that I can suck your ripe nipples while I thrust up inside you and fill you up. I want to bend you over the bed and sink my cock into your hot, wet sex from behind and fuck you hard until I come inside you. I want to fill you up with my cum...”

Kate was crying out desperately, crying with passion and telling me she was almost there ... almost there. I stopped my steady thrusting just for a moment and rubbed my thumb almost roughly over her ripe little clit. With a last, aching cry, Kate bucked up to meet me, her fists clenched at her sides and her eyes squeezed shut. I knew she was finally coming. I could feel her throbbing, wet passage squeezing around my fingers and wished desperately that I could feel that same delicious pressure around my cock.

“Phillip! *Phillip!*” Kate was sobbing my name, as she had in her dream, squeezing her thighs tightly around my hand and fingers with the force of her orgasm. “Oh ... so good. Oh, *God!*” she moaned, still riding the aftershocks.

At last she shuddered against me and was still. I felt the tension drain out of her and she allowed herself to go limp against me. The only sound in the room was her soft panting and my own ragged breathing. I knew that the moment was over, but I couldn’t help telling her softly,

“Oh, Kate, you are so beautiful when you come. So absolutely fucking *gorgeous...*” Reluctantly, I slid my fingers from insider her wet heat, removing my hand from her silky panties. I couldn’t help trailing my fingers over her hot little clit just once more as I withdrew causing her to moan and jump a little as I did.

“Mmmm, Phillip...” she murmured.

“I’m sorry, Kate, but I’ll be back in a minute.” I told her abruptly. I wanted to hold her longer and let her bask in the afterglow, but making her come had made me so unbearably hot that I felt like I had to jerk off or die. I was literally shaking with the need to spread her thighs once more and thrust inside her—this time with my cock instead of my fingers. I had to get away.

“You okay, Phillip ?” she asked me drowsily, sleep already thick in her voice.

“Fine. I’ll be back...” I muttered, feeling my hard-on pushing for freedom against my too-tight pajama bottoms. “Scuse me.” I crawled out of bed awkwardly and headed for the bathroom for some much needed relief.

Once there, I ripped down my pants and had my shaft in my left hand almost before the door closed. I raised my right hand to my face and breathed deeply, inhaling Kate’s musky essence, wishing I could bury my face between her sweetly spread thighs and taste her.

Slowly, prolonging the exquisite torture, I slipped my first two fingers into my mouth while I pumped at my shaft, panting raggedly. Oh, God! Salty and sweet and delicious—uniquely Kate. How I wanted to taste that delicious flavor right from the source of her wet, tight pussy. I longed to eat her until she cried out and bucked against me, wanted to hear her beg for it ... beg for my cock inside her...

Groaning, I spilled into my left hand and stood gasping raggedly for a long time before I could master myself enough to clean up and go back out to the bedroom where Kate was already turned onto her side, blankets pulled up to her chin sleeping peacefully. I slipped into bed beside her and she rolled over instinctively and cuddled close to me, her head resting on my chest.

“Maybe she’ll finally be able to rest now and get a good night’s sleep,” I thought tiredly.

## Chapter 6

### The Day After

#### Kate

I woke up thrashing and moaning again, crying out a name—*Phillip's* name. My own voice shattered the dream and I sat up, confused and groggy.

"What...?" I mumbled, still half asleep. Looking over, I saw Phillip sitting propped against the headboard to my left staring at me with a hungry look on his face I couldn't interpret. "Sorry, did I wake you up again?" I asked him.

"Yeah, but it's okay, Kate. You don't have to be sorry, I'm the one whose theory didn't pan out."

"Theory...?" I shook my head groggily, what was he talking about?

"My theory that by having an orgasm you could short-circuit your dream. I think it must have helped some, but obviously it didn't completely banish your dream."

"What are you talking about..." I began and then suddenly, the events of the night before flooded back in a rush of sensual memories. Phillip cradling me in his strong arms ... his warm, sweet breath in my ear as he urged me to let go, to give in to what my body needed ... his long fingers stroking my hot, slick flesh ... spreading my legs wide for him so that he could caress my wet, open sex until I shattered to pieces in his arms.

The memories were so much like my dream and I was still so woozy from sleep that it seemed very hard to separate the two.

"Oh my God, Phillip ... did I ask you to ... to ... touch me?" I could barely get the words out a throat constricted with embarrassment. He simply nodded. "And you did and I had..." Words finally failed me; I simply could not go on.

"An orgasm," Phillip supplied calmly. "And a very overdue one at that, Kate. But unfortunately it doesn't seem to have helped as much as I had hoped..." He trailed off, looking closely at me, registering for the first time the horrified and embarrassed look on my face. "Um, Kate, I'm really sorry. I hope you don't feel like I took advantage of you. I never would have dreamed of ... I mean, if you hadn't asked me to..."

I could feel my cheeks burning and I had a dim memory of begging Phillip to help me ... to touch me. But what else had happened? Part of me didn't want to know so badly I could scarcely remember anything. And the parts I could remember seemed to meld into the dream images running through my mind. I felt ashamed of myself and so confused.

Phillip reached out to touch my cheek in a soothing gesture.

I pulled abruptly away.

Quickly, he withdrew his hand.

"Kate, I'm so sorry..." he said again.

"No, it's okay, Paxton," I said, struggling to regain control of both the situation and myself while trying to sort fact from fiction, dream from reality. "I'm sure you would never take advantage of me but..." My voice ran out. How could I ask this? "But I'm feeling very uncertain—what *exactly* did we do?" I finally blurted out.

Phillip's ears got very red. "Well, you wanted me to help you to ... to touch yourself and I tried to but you just seemed to feel you couldn't. So then you asked me if ... if I would touch you and I did," he said in a rush. "And Kate, I'm so sorry about that. I shouldn't have touched you that way with or without your permission. I don't know what I was thinking."

"No, Paxton, you can't take all the blame. I mean, I asked you to do it," I protested, feeling bad that I was making him feel bad. So far I remembered everything he had described, but I had a feeling that something else had happened, or was that the dream whispering unspeakable things in my mind? I looked away and cleared my throat.

"But ... um, what else did we do? I, uh, seem to have some very confusing memories. It seems like you told me some things..." Things one coworker should never, ever say to another. Things that could ruin a perfectly good working relationship and perhaps the best friendship I'd ever had in my life.

Phillip actually blushed, his naturally tan skin turning a shade darker.

"Yeah, Kate, I said some pretty inappropriate things to you last night. I'm just really sorry ... so sorry..."

I hated to keep grilling him and I wished I could just explain that the details of whatever we had done the night before were getting all mixed up with the details of the dream running nonstop behind my eyelids, but I was still reluctant to discuss the dream's embarrassing contents with him.

"Phillip," I forced myself to ask. "I seem to remember something you said about ... tasting, I mean ... did you actually lick...?"

"No, no..." he hastily interrupted, blushing harder than ever. "No, I swear, Kate, that was just something I said I *wanted* to do. But I never actually..." he trailed off, unable to finish, but I got the idea well enough. I felt enormously relieved, but also somewhat ... what? Disappointed? Surely not.

"I'm sorry, Phillip," I said, trying to remain calm and failing miserably. At least I felt comfortable enough to use his first name again. The thought kept running through my head that Phillip actually wanted to do that ... actually wanted to taste me ... *there*. It just wasn't something I had ever had done to me before, and I was feeling all hot and embarrassed just thinking about it. I tried to push the idea along with the dream images it brought to the forefront of my mind away. There was just one more thing I had to know though—one more thing I had to get straight in my mind.

"Um, Phillip ... did we, you know..."

"Make love? No, Kate, we didn't." He was through being embarrassed and his skin tone was back to normal. The tone of his voice was calm and slightly bitter.

I wished I could guess what he was thinking.

"I didn't put my tongue between your thighs and taste you, and I didn't spread your legs and fuck you."

I recoiled slightly from the savagely repressed emotion in his voice and the crude things he said. If Phillip noticed my flinch, he didn't let it stop him from continuing.

"I only did what you asked me to do. I touched you ... stroked you and helped you have an orgasm. That's all, on my word of honor. And," his voice became suddenly softer and the fierce light went out of his hazel eyes. "And I'm so sorry if you feel taken advantage of. I never, ever meant to hurt you, Kate." His voice was slightly hoarse with emotion.

“You haven’t hurt me, Phillip,” I assured him. Tentatively, I put out a hand to pat his knee, but withdrew it before I touched him as shame swept over me at my wanton behavior. “I...” I flushed with embarrassment. “I just hate to think of what you must think of me now...”

Images flashed through my head again, me with my little black nightgown pushed up around my hips and Phillip’s strong hand and long fingers inside my panties ... inside *me*. A wave of intense desire suddenly broke over me, almost stronger than the shame. God, if only he had fucked me... What was I thinking? I studied my hands intently as I plucked at the worn nylon bedspread.

“Kate, no.” Strong, warm fingers gripped my chin and forced my eyes even with Phillip’s. His hazel-brown eyes were drowning deep and dark with emotion. “Kate, don’t ever think that I would think less of you for *any* reason,” Phillip said fiercely, holding my eyes with his own. “I think you are strong and intelligent,” his voice softened, “and beautiful, so beautiful...” he murmured. “I think you are a wholly admirable person, Kate, even if you are pigheaded and stubborn sometimes.”

That made me smile, just a little.

Phillip grinned back at me briefly. “Please,” he continued before getting serious again. “Please don’t be ashamed that you asked me for help. I *want* to help you. I’m your partner, your...” he stumbled, looking for the right word. “Your best friend,” he ended rather weakly.

I had the strangest feeling that friend was not the word he had been searching for.

Phillip released my chin and turned to me in bed, both of us still in our night clothes which made me feel naked and vulnerable. He turned fully to me and took both of my shoulders firmly in his large hands, forcing me to face him fully as well. I found that in this intimate position I couldn’t meet his eyes and found myself focusing on his broad, bare chest with its small patch of curly dark hair in the center between his flat, copper-colored nipples.

“I’ll help you anyway I can—if only you’ll let me. Please, Kate, tell me about the dream. Who’s the other person that’s with you? Who’s touching you ... who’s making love to you?” I felt him tense as he waited for my answer. We were on the edge of something huge, I could feel it. Some new phase in our relationship and Phillip trusted me to get us there. But somehow, I just couldn’t...

“I ... I don’t know. I can’t remember,” I faltered, still unable to meet his eyes as I lied, unwilling to say out loud what Phillip needed me to say.

He stared at me steadily for a moment.

I could almost taste his disappointment. We both knew it was *his* name I’d been calling out every night. It was Phillip that I begged to take me—to taste me—to *fuck* me, while I writhed in the grip of that damned dream. ‘Phillip, always and only you.’ I thought, but I just couldn’t make myself say it out loud—couldn’t admit the truth.

Phillip sat staring at me for a while in silence.

I felt awful. The quiet between us was thick with frustration and I felt a little afraid of my partner. Would he spank me again and force me to admit to my emotions and the details of my dream? Part of me almost hoped he would. His fingers tightened on my shoulders for a bare instant and I braced myself to be jerked across his knee once more, but it didn’t happen.

Phillip’s hands dropped to his sides and he said quietly, “All right, Kate. I can’t help



you if you won't help yourself." He climbed out of the bed.

I heard the bathroom door snick shut and the steady drumming of water on porcelain as he turned on the shower, shutting me and my refusal to talk out.

I pounded my fists on my knees in frustration and self-loathing. Damn it! I had screwed up—ruined any chance I'd ever had. What was wrong with me? I loved Phillip Paxton, I suddenly realized. It was the first time I had let myself admit it but it was undeniably true. Phillip was more than my partner and best friend. He was the man of my dreams—*literally*. So why couldn't I just admit it? Was it because I was so afraid of losing him, afraid of risking the good thing we had for something else, something so much better and more satisfying that I didn't dare name it, even to myself?

I sighed and got out of bed, swiping angrily at the wetness in my eyes. It was a closed subject now so I might as well get ready to go. At least we would be leaving this wretched motel. I got dressed feeling worse than I had during the whole awful trip.

\* \* \* \*

We drove all day in silence, unspoken words thick in the air between us. Several times I opened my mouth, determined to come clean and clear the air between us, but somehow I just couldn't. It was too embarrassing—too risky. Lunch was eaten with scarcely a word exchanged between us and I was beginning to think Phillip and I were never going to speak again. Was I willing to ruin our friendship over my unwillingness to take a risk? The whole situation was becoming ridiculous.

We were driving down the road, the sun sinking into the west when I decided that something had to give and finally got up the nerve to speak.

"Phillip..." I began.

The exact same moment that he said, "Kate, I..."

"Phillip, just listen," I told him, wanting desperately to get the words out before my courage deserted me and I changed my mind. "It's you. You're the other person in my dream. You're the man who's..." I felt my cheeks color and I couldn't meet his eyes, but I forced myself to go on. "Who's making love to me." I finished quickly.

Abruptly, he pulled the sedan off of the highway and into the parking lot of a conveniently placed rest area.

He turned to me, facing me fully and gripped both my hands in his. "God, Kate—you don't know what it means to me to hear you admit that," he said in a low, intense voice.

I felt my hands trembling in his as I shook my head.

"No, I don't," I told him, finally meeting his deep, hazel eyes. "I don't know. What *does* it mean to you, Phillip? Why is it so important for me to admit this to you?"

"It's important because it gives me hope, Kate," he told me quietly. He squeezed my shaking hands. "Hope that maybe, just maybe deep down in your subconscious you feel the same way about me that I feel about you. God!" he exploded suddenly, causing me to jump.

He stared intently into my eyes. "I know I shouldn't say this—I know it will probably ruin everything, but Kate, you mean so much to me. I can't imagine my life without you. You're a part of me. I trust you with my life, my hopes, my dreams and even my fears—everything. I guess I've just been hoping that someday you could let down your guard and trust me too. That you could want me the way I want you. The

dream ... *your* dream made me hope that might be possible.”

Hearing Phillip admit this, I felt like I had walked from a pitch black closet suddenly into a brilliant flood of sunshine. I was literally blinded by the intense outpouring of emotion I heard in his voice. It was a very disorienting feeling.

“It is possible, Phillip.” I heard myself telling him. “I mean ... I *do* feel the same way about you that you feel about me. I trust you and I want you. I can’t imagine what I’d do without you. I’d be completely lost”

I couldn’t believe that after working together for six years, six years of partnership and a very careful friendship we were finally admitting these things to each other. Wasn’t it terribly dangerous? Weren’t we risking everything, playing with fire and asking to get burned? Wouldn’t these admissions damage our working relationship beyond all repair?

I was feeling confused and scared and even a little dizzy until Phillip pulled me closer and took me into his arms as well as he could with the gear shift between us. As my head came to rest against his broad chest and I heard the strong, reassuring thump of his heart in my ears, I felt, at long last, contentment, safety and a strange sense of freedom. *Finally*, was the word in my mind as I allowed him to hold me. It had been a long time coming, but finally we were right where we belonged.

We held each other a long time in silence and the “L” word was never really mentioned, but that was okay. We seemed to have gotten beyond it somehow—had been beyond it for years, I realized. After a while we pulled silently apart and Phillip started the car again without comment. We drove a few more hours in comfortable silence, not talking, not needing to analyze what had happened between us, just content to be together.

I didn’t know when or how, but I must have drifted off because I woke up to find Phillip shaking me gently and calling my name. I opened my eyes in the darkness of the car to see Phillip’s face, lit by the dashboard lights, looking down at me with concern.

“The dream again?” I asked blearily, shaking my head to clear it of pornographic images.

“Mmhm.” Phillip looked at me silently for a moment. “You ready to tell me about it yet?” he asked quietly.

I bit my lip in embarrassment and apprehension.

“Almost, Phillip. Just ... give me a little more time. All right?”

“All right. Think about it a while,” he said. “But can I ask you one more thing?”

“You can ask, I can’t guarantee I’ll answer,” I joked shakily, which got a small grin from him.

“Okay, it’s just this. Are the details of your dream the same every time? Do you do the same thing at the same time in the same order? Think hard, it may be important,” he urged.

I didn’t need to think, I knew.

“Always,” I told him. “It’s always the same every time. There’s a definite sequence of events.” I should know, the damn dream had been playing nonstop behind my eyes for nearly a month now.

“Hmmm...” Phillip stared broodingly out the windshield, obviously thinking hard.

“What? What is it? Phillip, you have a theory, don’t you?” I accused him.

“Well ... sort of.” Now it seemed to be Phillip’s turn to be reluctant.

“So? Spill it!” I demanded, getting impatient.

"I'm really not sure I should, Kate. It may be a bit far-fetched."

"But it's a theory about my dream? To help me stop having it once and for all?" I asked.

"Yes..." Phillip confirmed reluctantly. "But look how my other theory turned out, it was a bust."

"Not true, Phillip." I shook my head. "It didn't work completely, no, but it did help *a lot*. At least I'm not having the dream every hour on the hour now. I think you were definitely on the right track."

"Yes but..."

"No buts, Phillip. I ... I'll tell you the details of my dream if you'll tell me your theory." It felt frightening, but somehow exhilarating to say that—to offer to finally bare myself completely to him and let him know all the embarrassing details of my erotic dream. And somehow, once the words were out of my mouth, I knew there was no going back. I challenged Phillip with a look, but to my surprise he was looking very unhappy.

"I don't know, Kate. It's kind of a long shot and besides, it doesn't sound ... nice."

"Nice? To hell with nice and just tell me what you're thinking."

"All right ... all right. You asked for it." He took a deep breath and sighed, keeping his eyes fixed firmly on the road as he drove. "Well, you're having a very specific dream about a very specific person..." His ears got a little red at that point but I didn't comment. "And," he cleared his throat. "The dream has very specific demands. That is—it demands that you do, um, certain things in a certain order, right?"

"Right," I said. Just thinking about what the dream demanded I must do was enough to make me blush and look down at my hands.

"So, if you acted on what the dream was telling you. I mean ... actually *acted out* the whole scenario..."

"You mean go through the dream detail by detail and actually *do* what I've been, well, dreaming about?" I asked him, in a low voice. Images swam in my brain, causing me to break out in a sweat and nearly shake with desire. To act out my dream ... with Phillip's help. To finally give my body what it had been begging for.

"Yeah." Phillip looked miserable. "See? That's why I didn't want to tell you, Kate. This theory makes me look like an opportunistic bastard."

"Phillip, no! Please stop talking like you're the big bad wolf and I'm little red riding hood about to be eaten up." Then a specific part of my dream occurred to me and I felt myself blushing a dull red. "Anyway," I continued doggedly. "I think it's a good idea. I ... I'm ready to ask for help now, and we admitted some things earlier that changed the situation entirely. I don't feel like you're being opportunistic to suggest acting out my dream. In fact, I ... I think we should try it," I finished as bravely as I could, hoping he couldn't hear the slight tremble in my voice.

"Really?" Phillip sounded genuinely surprised. He took his eyes from the road for a moment to study me carefully by the dim, green lights of the dash. I stared back at him in what I hoped was a calm manner.

"Really," I told him firmly. "It's almost time to stop for the night, you know. No ... there's no time like the present," I heard myself say. "That is..." I felt suddenly shy and terribly nervous all at once. "That is if you don't *mind*, Phillip."

"Mind? Of course not, how could I mind?" Phillip gave me a look that managed to be both incredulous and tender at the same time.

“I don’t know...” I trailed off. “It’s just so ... so intimate and embarrassing.” My skin was so hot I almost felt like I had a sunburn at that point.

“It will be intimate.” Phillip’s voice was low and calm. “But it’s going to be you and me, Kate, so it’ll be all right. We’re going to beat this dream together. I’m here for you, okay?” His large, warm hand found my thigh and squeezed reassuringly.

“Okay.” I barely whispered, loving him for being strong and unafraid—for just being Phillip.

“Good, then it’s settled. We’ll find a place to stop for the night and act out your dream to the last detail.” Phillip’s voice was firm and uncompromising, full of purpose. But it was also warm and full of something else—the promise of spending the night in each other’s arms and satiating six years of craving at long, long last.

I lay back in my seat, feeling his hand on my thigh and burning up inside with desire. Dream images flashed across the forefront of my brain and I couldn’t help wondering what his hands would feel like all over my body—naked and vulnerable and hot.

## Chapter 7

### The Dream's Demands

#### Kate

The first hotel Phillip came across was an Embassy Suites. He pulled into the parking lot and parked, sitting in silence for a minute before he turned off the car.

"You unload the car, I'll get a room," he said.

Room, not rooms. A small shiver of anticipation and dread shot down my spine. We were really going to do this. After six years of being careful to only touch each other in a friendly and professional manner, we were going to go to bed and act out my relentless dream to the last, erotic detail. The thought actually made me feel a little weak in the knees.

Phillip was back before I had even gotten both our bags out of the car.

"Here, let me get that," he said, grabbing my heavier suitcase and dangling a key card in front of my nose. "I was pretty lucky, got the last room they had available. Apparently there's some kind of convention in town. You ready?"

"Lead on, MacDuff." My mouth was suddenly dry. Am I *really* going to do this? I followed Phillip into the brightly lit lobby feeling strangely conspicuous. I almost expected the adolescent desk clerk and the three portly, balding businessmen who were standing around to start pointing in my direction and whispering. *There she goes*, I could almost hear them saying. *The woman who's going to have wild, passionate, unbridled sex with her partner*. I shook my head to rid myself of such ridiculous thoughts and concentrated on calming the butterflies in my stomach as we rode the silent elevator to the top floor.

I was both frightened and excited as we walked down the plushly carpeted hallway to our room. Just imagining what might happen if we acted out even the first part of the dream caused me to flush deeply—a slow, twitching heat that crept up my entire body from the soft vee between my thighs. My sex was already hot and wet with anticipation even as my mind swirled with contradictory thoughts and images. I couldn't help staring at Phillip's broad back as I walked behind him and remembering how good he looked without a shirt.

My thoughts were broken when we came to a sudden stop outside a solid wooden door, which looked both heavy and substantial and much too elegant to belong to a chain hotel.

"What did you do, Phillip, rent the presidential suite?" I asked, grinning nervously as he swiped the key card and turned the handle.

"Close." He grinned back at me as he threw open the door with a flourish. "I got us the bridal suite," he explained. "But I didn't lie, it *was* the last room available. Just dumb luck, I guess."

I declined to comment both on the irony of our room and the general bad luck we seemed to be having with our overnight accommodations on this trip. Instead, I stepped

into the luxurious suit and admired the view.

The thick door opened into a sitting room with an overstuffed sofa and a love seat facing us as we walked in. The room was done in warm tan and sandstone colors and the furniture looked both new and expensive. Two doors to our right were obviously the bedroom and bathroom respectively, and a carved mahogany table to one side of the suite's main door held a large basket of fresh fruit and a bottle of chilled champagne on ice.

"Nice touch, Phillip," I murmured, eyeing the contents of the basket. The grapes and strawberries looked especially plump and juicy, but my stomach was doing so many flip-flops that I didn't feel the least bit hungry.

"Comes with the room," he said dismissively. Clearly the contents of the basket were the last thing on his mind as well. "Hey, Kate, come look at this." He had walked over to the closest door and opened it revealing an opulent bathroom decorated in gray marble. A large Jacuzzi tub dominated the room and a bouquet of a dozen long stemmed red roses sat in a crystal vase on the marble countertop to one side.

Despite my nervousness, I couldn't help grinning again. Phillip couldn't have planned this better if he had tried.

"They're beautiful, Phillip," I said, walking into the bathroom to admire the roses. I leaned down and inhaled briefly, filling my lungs with their sweet scent as the velvety rose petals brushed my face. "Everything is just ... perfect."

"Perfect," Phillip echoed and smiled at me gently. He reached out and caressed my cheek with one warm hand, cupping my chin and tilting my face to look deeply into my eyes. His hand on me was tender yet firm. Perfect—everything was perfect. Now all I had to do was actually tell my partner all the specific and embarrassing details of my dream so that we could get naked and act it out.

Suddenly I felt my courage crumbling. How could I possibly do this? My stomach twisted into a horrible knot of tension and my palms began sweating furiously.

"Phillip..." I said, hesitantly, feeling more unsure of myself by the minute. "I'm not ... sure I can go through with this."

"What do you mean, Kate?" He looked at me anxiously.

"I mean just what I said," I told him, feeling myself closing up, becoming stubborn and defensive. I knew I was shutting him out as I had done so many times in the past, but I couldn't seem to stop it. "I can't do this right now," I told him. "It's too damn personal and embarrassing."

"Kate," Phillip took my arm and steered me back into the sitting room to the deep, seal brown overstuffed sofa. He sat me firmly down and sat down himself beside me.

I refused to look at him.

"Kate, listen to me," he said, taking my chin and forcing me to look into his deep hazel eyes. "You told me you wanted to be free of this dream, isn't that right?"

"Well ... yes." I admitted grudgingly.

"And I thought we agreed that this form of therapy, this reenactment of the dream itself was your best shot at that." It was a statement, not a question.

"Yes." I admitted in a smaller voice.

"I'm not going to force you to do that, though," Phillip continued. "I would never force you to do anything physical that you didn't feel comfortable with, Kate. But I know for certain that you promised to tell me the details of your dream and that I will hold you

to.”

“But, Phillip...” I protested.

He shook his head firmly, an uncompromising look in his impenetrable hazel-brown eyes.

“You *are* going to tell this dream from start to finish whether we act it out or not. That is non-negotiable. Do you understand?” His voice was low and his tone stern and commanding.

Reluctantly, I nodded my head.

“No, Kate. I want to hear you tell me out loud that you understand,” Phillip insisted.

“I... Yes, I understand,” I murmured almost inaudibly.

“Good. Now, Kate,” he continued in the same, stern tone. “I don’t want to have to spank you again to get you to do as you’re told, but I will if I have to. Do you understand? Answer me.”

“Yes.” I whispered again, looking down although his grip on my chin kept me from looking away entirely. Suddenly, something clicked in my head and I understood what Phillip was doing. As he had the night before, he was tapping into the part of me that was still a child by playing the stern adult. He was helping me find that younger place inside myself so that I could relax and let him take over the whole situation.

Understanding his actions didn’t lessen their effectiveness a bit. I desperately wanted to be able to let go and give control of myself and my circumstances completely to Phillip. I wanted to give up my embarrassment and my tension and my adult mindset entirely and just let him do whatever he thought was best. I knew he would never hurt me.

I looked up at him, into his stern but loving hazel eyes, loving him for understanding me so well.

His eyes softened somewhat and he drew me a little closer to him, putting one strong arm around my shoulders.

“Katie,” he said softly. “I want so much to help you, but in order to do that I need for you to trust me. Do you think you can do that?”

“I ... I’ll try,” I whispered softly, my body leaned in to his without any conscious effort from my mind. He was no longer just Phillip, my longtime best friend and partner. He was a stern but loving authority figure that I could let myself rely on and trust implicitly. I felt the change in myself, the shift in the dynamic of our relationship as I had the night before and I didn’t even try to fight it. I knew that Phillip would do whatever he felt was necessary to drive away my dream and help me heal. He would take good care of me.

“Good, Katie. You’re such a good girl,” Phillip whispered tenderly into my hair, making me shiver.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, the dream echoed.

*...Spread your legs for me Katie. Good girl—you’re so wet...*

My nipples suddenly ached and the place between my legs felt swollen and achy with desire as Phillip’s soft words and the dream images intertwined.

“Now I want you to sit quietly here on the couch for a moment. I’ll be right back,” Phillip instructed.

Dumbly, I nodded.

He went back into the bathroom and I heard the musical gurgle of water running into

the huge marble tub.

I sat nervously crossing and uncrossing my legs while I waited for him. I had an idea of what was going to happen, but what *exactly* did he have in mind?

After about fifteen minutes, Phillip came back into the sitting room and stood over me where I sat on the couch, trying to be small and inconspicuous. He pulled me to my feet and into his arms for a warm, reassuring hug.

"Trust me, Katie," he murmured quietly, his low voice rumbling deep in his chest.

"I do," I told him, meaning it utterly and completely with every fiber of my being. "It's just ... well, it's hard."

"I know. It's hard to give up control of your heart and your body to someone else but I promise you now Kate, that I will never knowingly hurt you." He pulled away for a moment, looking down into my eyes.

"I believe you. And Phillip ... I *do* trust you, I really do." I looked back into his eyes, willing him to see the utter confidence I was placing in him.

"I think it's time to get you undressed," he said softly.

"I ... what?" I asked stupidly.

Phillip was already taking off my jacket and turning me around so that he could unzip my skirt and help me step out of it.

"I know how much you like baths, Katie. They help you relax and feel more at ease after a hard day and when you're feeling tense," he told me, his voice firm and low as he began to unbutton my blouse. "So it's bath time now, and later we're going to talk."

He undressed me slowly, gently, as if to avoid frightening me, baring my body completely to him for the first time.

Though Phillip had touched me so intimately the night before, I still couldn't resist trying to cover myself, overcome with embarrassment as he unclipped and removed my lacy bra and matching panties.

"No, Katie," he said firmly, moving my hands away from my breasts and sex. "You need to trust me. I want you to understand something." He held both my hands in one of his and tilted my chin up so that our eyes met—a gesture which seemed to melt a little more of my control every time he did it. "I'm not going to touch you in a sexual way tonight unless you ask me to. But I *am* going to touch you. Do you understand?"

"I understand," I whispered.

"Good girl, Katie," he said again.

I flushed with desire as the dream's images again swirled inside my head, prompted by his words.

He took off his jacket and unbuttoned and rolled up his sleeves with deliberate motions as I stood waiting, naked by his side. Then, instead of leading me into the bathroom, he stooped and picked me up in his arms as though I were a small child, surprising me.

"Phillip..." I started to protest, but he silenced me with a stern, uncompromising look.

"Hush, Katie. We'll talk after you take your bath. Right now I just want you to relax and let me help you." He carried me into the bathroom and placed me gently into the full tub.

I sighed blissfully and relaxed back into the hot water. Phillip was in charge now and he would take care of everything.



He started by wetting my hair and shampooing it thoroughly, using the complimentary hotel shampoo which smelled much nicer than the kind I'd used for bubble bath the night before.

"Mmmm ... smells like bubble gum." I mumbled as Phillip worked the lather into my hair.

"Be still now, Katie," he instructed gently, his voice low and soft in my ear.

His large, capable hands massaging the shampoo into my scalp was intensely sensuous and I was content to lean back, the warm water lapping rhythmically against my naked body, and let him work on me.

Phillip rinsed my hair, carefully getting all the soap out, then he took a thin, hotel washcloth and worked the small bar of soap into a lather.

"Sit up now, Katie and let me wash you." His tone brooked no discussion.

I sat up obediently.

Phillip glided the washcloth over my wet skin, gently and thoroughly washing me, paying attention to every part of my body in turn. I shivered with desire as his large, warm hand cupped my breasts with only the thin washcloth between us, my nipples peaking helplessly in the palm of his hand.

But true to his word, Phillip's touch on my body was sensual but not sexual. He didn't linger unnecessarily on any one part, not even the tender vee between my legs. Although I couldn't help arching my back a little, and moaned out loud when he touched me there, pressing inward slightly to wash me thoroughly.

I saw a flicker of emotion cross Phillip's face when that happened and realized how very hard it must be for him to hold himself back this way. I wondered briefly if he wanted me half as bad as I wanted him. The dream's images flickered steadily behind my eyelids as I arched under his gentle touch and I felt my desire rising steadily. He was making me hot for him—making me wet. So wet...

"Time to rinse you off now, Katie." Phillip's voice was a little hoarse as he finished washing me. He helped me stand up in the slippery marble tub and began pouring warm water in streams down my back and front, the slippery rivulets rinsing the soap from my body. Heavy droplets of water clung to my nipples, hardened by the cool air. I held onto Phillip's broad shoulders for balance, leaving wet handprints on his starched cotton shirt as he instructed me to spread my legs so that he could rinse me everywhere.

Spreading the tender lips of my sex, now swollen with desire, Phillip trickled a thin rivulet of warm water over my belly and between my thighs, rinsing my sex and the aching bud of my clitoris as I panted and clutched at his back. The water tickled and tortured me, reminding me of the dreams images and what Phillip had said he wanted to do to me—to taste me there, where he was carefully rinsing. Oh God, I didn't know how much more I could take.

Wordlessly, Phillip let the water out of the tub and dried me completely from head to toe. The towel he used, though soft, felt like sandpaper to my sensitized nipples and when Phillip returned to the vee between my legs to dry me there, I nearly cried out in frustrated desire.

"I'm trying to dry you off, Katie, but you're still so wet," he murmured, patting the towel between my legs gently. I looked down and realized he was right. The soft, pouting lips of my sex were still glistening with moisture—mute evidence of my need.

I think ... think I'm ready to talk now, Phillip. About the dream, I mean," I told him,

my voice shaking only a little.

“All right, Katie,” he said simply. He lifted me into his arms again and carried me into the bedroom.

A more different bedroom, than the one in the Victoria Skylight Motel where we had spent the previous night, could scarcely be imagined. The room was decorated in warm tones with thick, sand-colored carpet and pale peach walls. The bed was a huge, king sized four poster with a plush, quilted peach and cream comforter and fluffy pillows which felt deliciously soft to my naked skin when Phillip laid me down on them.

Making sure I was comfortable, Phillip positioned himself on my right side with his left arm under my shoulders so that my head rested on his broad chest. He was still fully dressed which made me feel even more naked and vulnerable. Strangely, this didn't disturb me in the least. It came to me suddenly, that this was how it was in my dream—this was how it started out and I shivered against him.

“Cold?” he asked with concern, rubbing one large, warm hand up and down my bare back and hip as I turned towards him.

I shook my head mutely. How could I tell him that I was trembling for a different, deeper reason?

But he seemed to understand me even without words for he pulled me closer and continued to stroke my body in that tender, comforting way.

“Katie,” he said, in that low, commanding tone I was beginning to love. “I want you to close your eyes for me now.”

I did as he commanded, obediently shutting my eyes and concentrating on the feel of his hand on my body. How I wished he would touch my aching nipples or the slippery wetness of my needy sex. But Phillip maddeningly confined his touch to the nonsexual areas of my body only.

“Now tell me your dream,” he said. “Start at the beginning and don't leave anything out.” His voice was low and uncompromising and I knew he wouldn't be denied.

My mouth went suddenly dry and I found I couldn't speak at all for a moment. Finally, I licked my lips nervously and whispered,

“All right, Phillip. I'll tell you. Just ... just don't stop touching me, okay?”

He chuckled deep in his throat, squeezing me a little tighter. “I couldn't even if you wanted me to. You're too damn beautiful.” His comment made me flush with pleasure and renewed confidence and I found I was at last able to speak. Closing my eyes tightly, I began to tell him.

## Chapter 8

### Telling

#### Phillip

"I'll tell you," Kate said, her voice soft and childlike and utterly seductive.

I pulled her a little closer, still rubbing her back and sides and waited, almost holding my breath with anticipation. God, how I loved this woman. How I wanted to help her. After months of worry and doubt, fearing for her health, both mental and physical, she was finally going to admit the contents of the dream that had been literally tearing her psyche apart. I was more than anxious to hear it even if we didn't act it out. Knowing that the dream was intensely erotic, and that I had a starring role in it, didn't hurt my anticipation either.

"Tell me, Katie," I whispered. "Take your time, but tell it all." I buried my face in the soft halo of damp blonde curls of her hair and breathed in her beautiful scent, never stopping the motion of my hand on her naked skin. I wanted to tilt her chin up and kiss her, but that would be confusing the issue and besides, she needed her mouth for talking.

"Actually, it starts out quite a bit like this. Like we are now," she said. Her voice was tight but determined. I knew she had to be feeling apprehension about telling me the dream in detail. Kate has always been an intensely private person and it had taken me literally years to gain her trust. I didn't want to destroy that now by saying the wrong thing.

"Tell me," I repeated softly.

"We ... we're on a bed. A big bed." Her small hand gestured, indicating the vast expanse of mattress where we lay curled in the middle, her beautiful naked body cradled in my arms. "I'm naked," she said, looking up at me for the first time. "And he ... I mean *you're* dressed." She blushed, her pale cheeks getting warm and pink with embarrassment, but her big blue eyes never left my face. "You're holding me, Phillip. Touching me the way you are now and I feel..." She swallowed and closed her eyes briefly. "I feel so safe and protected. Like nothing will ever be able to hurt me again."

"Oh, Kate," I whispered. I thought my heart would burst from her words, so soft and full of emotion. She was trusting me as she never had before, letting me inside in a way I would never have believed possible. I wanted to tell her I loved her, but we hadn't said that yet ... hadn't gotten around to the big confession and I wasn't sure how she'd react. The moment was very fragile. "Go on," I whispered instead.

"You're touching me ... petting me, my skin, my back, my face."

I cupped her flushed cheek tenderly in my palm as she spoke, unable to help myself. "You..." Her voice almost broke.

"You're kissing me. So softly, all over my face. My eyelids, my cheeks, my mouth."

As she spoke, I realized we hadn't done that yet. Hadn't really kissed despite the intimate situation we'd been going through lately and I wanted to taste her lips more than ever. The wish must have showed in my eyes because she whispered, "You can if you

want to. Kiss me, I mean.” Her voice faltered a little, as though she wasn’t quite sure how I would take her invitation.

“Kate ... Katie,” I murmured. How could she ever doubt that I wanted her? That I wanted to kiss her sweet face and every inch of her body? Her cheek was still cradled in my hand and I leaned over her, being careful not to crush her. Her eyes first—she closed them for me obediently as I brushed featherlight kisses over her delicate lids. The dark blonde lashes lay over her high cheekbones like fans and she trembled ever so slightly as I kissed her.

I thought I tasted a faint, salty moisture on my lips when I pulled back and I took a moment to savor it before pressing my lips to her flushed cheeks and forehead and even the tip of her nose.

She opened her eyes and smiled.

I took the opportunity to look long and deep into the gorgeous blue depths of her eyes. They were dilated with need and desire, the irises a thin, vivid ring around the drowning black of her pupils and the look I saw there was more than I could resist.

I took her mouth, gently at first, but then I couldn’t help myself. I needed so much more. Her lips were soft and pliant under mine, giving—submissive. I parted them easily and plundered her mouth, reaching inside to taste her and caress her tongue with my own. She tasted like some rare and delicious fruit that was forbidden and utterly irresistible at the same time.

She moved against me, moaning and arching her back, thrusting her breasts, her nipples as hard as little pebbles against my chest. It was all I could do to keep myself from rolling her under me and taking her right then and there. But this was Kate’s dream, her problem we were trying to work out. If she was ever going to achieve closure with her past and defeat the dream once and for all we had to go slowly.

Acknowledging that we were getting carried away, I pulled back from her, panting a little. I knew she had to feel my cock rubbing hard against her leg, but she didn’t pull away, she just lay there in my arms looking almost drugged from the kiss. I knew how she felt. The passion between us had been electric. I had always suspected that if Kate and I ever came together, the intensity of our joining would be like nothing either one of us had ever experienced before, and our first kiss had confirmed that.

“Katie?” I whispered, when I could speak again. “Go on, sweetheart. Tell me more about your dream. What happens after I kiss you?”

“Mmm?” Her face had a softer, more relaxed look and I hoped that her rising passion would enable her to open up more easily and tell the dream’s details. Lower inhibitions could really help in a case like this.

“The dream,” I prompted.

“Oh,” she sighed, coming back to herself a little. “Sorry, Phillip. Umm...” She shifted a little in my arms, getting more comfortable and her thigh rubbed in silky slow motion along the length of my throbbing cock. I stifled a groan. “After you kiss me like ... like you just did.” She blushed. “You tell me ... you say, ‘Katie, I want you to be a good girl and touch yourself now. I want,’” Her voice faltered a little with embarrassment and she dropped her eyes self-consciously and stared at my chest. “‘I want to watch you touch yourself between your legs,’” She finished in a rush. “That’s what you tell me, Phillip,” she said, looking up at me briefly before dropping her eyes again.

“And what do you do?” I asked, trying to keep my own voice steady and reassuring.

I stroked her shoulders soothingly, making sure she wasn't getting too cold.

"I say, 'I can't do that. I can't because it's bad. Because it makes me a Dirty Girl,'" she whispered. "Phillip, in the dream I want to do what you tell me. Want to do it so bad because I'm afraid of disappointing you, but I can't. Just like in real life, I just *can't*."

Her voice was getting tighter again and her big blue eyes were suspiciously shiny.

"Shh." I kissed her lightly on her eyelids, tasting more salty tears this time. "That's okay, Katie. I know you want to. Know you want to do your best. Tell me what happens next."

"You say..." She swallowed hard and then looked at me again. "You say, 'It's all right, Katie; it doesn't matter. I'll touch you.' And Phillip," She looked at me, her gaze naked and vulnerable. "That's when I know that you can do it."

"Do what, Kate?" I asked. I was so intrigued by the dream I'd forgotten to use her childhood name.

"I know," she swallowed again. "I know that you can turn me into a Good Girl again. That when you touch me I'll stop being dirty. And I want that so much—want you to touch me."

"Do I touch you, Katie?" I asked gently, touched by her profound faith in me, even in a dream.

"Yes." She nodded her head, causing the blonde curls to whisper in silky profusion along my arm. "You touch me, Phillip. You touch my breasts, cup them, caress them. You..." She blushed. "You pinch my nipples and it feels... God it feels so good. Then you..."

"Go on," I encouraged, making sure my hands were still firmly on her shoulders and back, although I itched to follow the dream.

"You suck them, my nipples, I mean. You suck hard and your mouth feels so hot and right on me," Kate whispered. She trembled against me. "Phillip ... would you...?"

I understood what she was asking. "Is this what you want, Katie?" I asked, my voice low and rough in my throat. I cupped one full breast in my hand, loving the sweet way the curve of it fit and filled my palm. It seemed so natural to be doing this, to be touching her this way.

"Yes..." she breathed, in a low, breathy moan that made my cock throb.

I stroked her creamy skin, circling in slow spirals from the outer perimeter up to her wide, dusky pink aureoles and pinched the tight nipples that jutted up in needful peaks. I twisted gently at first and then more forcefully as she arched her back, mewling softly as the slight pain heightened her pleasure.

"Phillip ... your mouth..." She didn't have to ask me twice.

I bent and captured one rigid pink peak between my lips, tonguing it tenderly before sucking hard, drawing as much of her breast into my mouth at once as I could.

Kate gasped and arched against me. Her slender fingers buried themselves in my hair and pull me down, begging for more.

God, it was a dream come true to do this to her, to bring her this much pleasure, to feel her tremble beneath me as I sucked her ripe nipples into my mouth.

I spent fifteen minutes, licking, sucking, nursing at her hard pink buds. I left love marks all over the beautiful creamy slopes of her breasts and I didn't give a damn. In fact, I did it on purpose. No matter what else happened, I wanted Kate to look in the mirror the next day and see my marks on her body—marks of possession, marks of love.

At last I had to draw back; I was losing it. We both were. Kate was panting beneath me and her hips were rotating in small, needful motions against my thigh. I knew what she needed, but I didn't know if she would let me give it to her or not. I thought we had better get back to the dream while we still could. "Katie," I whispered, my voice no longer even or steady. "Katie, tell me what happens next."

"You touch me like you did last night." Her voice was breathy, almost drugged with passion and she twisted her hips so that she was lying on her back and spread her thighs. The little patch of silky blonde curls that decorated her sex and the pouting pink lips were wet with need, swollen with desire. "You touch me, Phillip, but you don't make me come. Not yet."

Kate arched her hips softly in a mute invitation.

I didn't even try to resist. She was slick and hot, hotter than I remembered as I parted her delicate folds and stroked gently along the aching bud of her clit.

Kate moaned out loud, a sound that was far past desire and almost into desperation.

I plunged my fingers into her, relishing the tight, slippery heat as her flesh closed around me. "Is this what you need, Katie?" I asked her, thrusting my fingers deep, wishing she was riding my cock instead.

"Yes, Phillip. God, yes! But I need..." she was panting, trying to get enough air to speak. "I need so much more."

"Tell me what you need, Katie. Tell me how to make you come," I said raggedly, stilling the motion of my hand until I was just barely caressing the side of her swollen pink bud.

"I ... I can't, Phillip." Her voice was breathy, but with a hint of tears in it as well. "I'm ashamed." She squeezed her eyes tightly shut and tried to close her thighs as well, but I wouldn't let her.

"No, Katie. Look at me," I commanded, keeping up the light, teasing motion between her legs.

Reluctantly she opened her eyes and did as I said.

"You don't have to be ashamed of anything with me, Katie. Nothing we could do together would be shameful or wrong. Now tell me," I directed.

She looked away and I continued to pet her, building the sensations between her thighs and hoping that the climbing pleasure would help her overcome her inhibitions. Finally she sighed. "Phillip, do you remember last night when you were ... were touching me? Like you are now?"

"Of course. It's not something I'm likely to forget," I told her. Gently I eased two fingers into her tight, wet sex again and she gasped and rotated her hips slightly. 'Good,' I thought. 'Work with me, Kate. Let your guard down and let me in.'

"Well," she was still reluctant. "Do you remember when you said all those things you wanted to do to me?"

I nodded for her to go on.

"Well," she dropped her eyes and bit her lip, her cheeks flushed with embarrassment and passion. "There was one thing in particular. You said ... said you wanted to ... to *taste* me."

Was this what all her fear and confusion was about? Needing to reassure her I ducked my head to look into her eyes. "Kate, for as long as I've known you one of my favorite fantasies has been to lay you back on the bed, spread your beautiful thighs and

eat your sweet little cunt.” I used the crude word deliberately, to shock her—to arouse her. She gasped and I felt her sex throb under my hand.

Her eyes were wide and startled. “Phillip,” she began carefully. “I’ve never ... no one’s ever ... You really *want* to?”

Obviously words weren’t going to convince her. I withdrew the hand I had been stroking her with and, just as I had the night before in the privacy of the bathroom, I slid the two fingers that had been inside her tight wetness into my mouth. “Mmm...” I couldn’t help making the noise; her taste on my tongue was so sweet and salty and utterly delicious.

I closed my eyes for a moment, savoring her flavor and when I opened them she was staring at me, wide-eyed with shock. “You taste delicious, Kate,” I assured her, withdrawing my fingers after I had sucked the last of her essence off them. “I love your sweet flavor. I’d love to taste it straight from the source.”

“Phillip,” she began, but I cut her off.

“Try it for yourself,” I whispered. Dipping into her hot, tight well again I coated my fingers once more with her honey and painted it gently over her slightly parted, panting red lips. Then I leaned in and took her mouth again, sharing the rich taste with her, delving deep with my tongue to show her exactly how I wanted to taste her, how I wanted to eat her hot little cunt. At last I pulled back. “Is that what I do in the dream, Katie?” I asked her hoarsely. “Do I taste you there? Do I lick your sweet little cunt? Do you want me to do it now?”

“Oh ... Oh, Phillip ... please!” She couldn’t finish the sentence, but her small hands were in my hair, urging me downwards.

I went willingly—eagerly—wanting to give her this and take it for myself as well.

“So sweet,” I muttered, past knowing what I was saying as I spread her silky thighs even wider to get better access. “That’s a good girl, Katie. Spread your legs for me and let me in. Such a good girl...” I whispered, hoping it was what she needed to hear.

Apparently, it was. She moaned and relaxed against me. I knew then that she had given her body over to me completely, trusting me without reservation. Despite the lust and need that surged inside me the gesture still managed to squeeze my heart. Kate was one of the most rigidly self-controlled people I knew and now she was giving everything up to me, trusting me to please her, to make her come. I was determined that her trust in me wasn’t going to be misplaced.

Determined to take it slow, I first rubbed my scratchy cheeks against her tender inner thighs, drawing a gasp from her and a largely incoherent plea. Kate had needed this kind of attention for a long, long time, I realized. I hoped that tonight wouldn’t be the last time I could please her like this. I would gladly taste her every night if only she’d let me.

I licked the soft junction where her right thigh joined her body and then her left, taking my time and ignoring, for the present, the wet pink slit in the center so swollen with need that her folds were beginning to open of their own accord, like a flower searching for the sun.

“Phillip, *please!*” Her plea moved me and at last I began kissing her where she needed me. Using my thumbs to part her sweet lips even more I dipped my head and laid a hot, open mouthed kiss on her wet pussy, kissing her there as I had kissed her mouth.

She gasped and jerked under me, thrusting her pelvis up to meet my mouth.

My senses were flooded with her, with her hot, beautiful scent, with her rich, salty-

sweet taste. The feel of her slender fingers clutching tight in my hair and the steady moans and gasps she was uttering urged me on. The pink bud of her clitoris called me and I kissed it gently, aware of how sensitive the tight little kernel of desire must be. I licked along one side, probing carefully with my tongue before sucking it into my mouth and tracing leisurely figure eights around and around the swollen bud until Kate was nearly sobbing with need.

“Phillip ... inside!” she begged.

I gathered her full buttocks into my hands and lifted her pelvis to me, wanting to get a better angle for the deepest penetration. She cried and met me halfway as I brought her up and plunged my tongue as deeply into her tight cunt as I could. I felt her silky flesh quiver and contract around me as I pushed even harder, wanting to taste all of her, wanting to reach so deep inside her I could taste her sweet red heart.

My neglected cock throbbed in my pants, impatient for its own sample of Kate. This was the most erotic moment of my life, tasting her this way. Having my partner, Kate McKinley, the woman I loved more than anyone else in the world riding my tongue, pressing her hot, wet sex against my mouth and trusting me utterly to take her where she needed to go... It was almost too much; I thought I was going to explode.

But before I could, Kate did. “Phillip ! Oh, God, that feels so *good*! Taste me, lick me! Don’t stop!” She was sobbing with pleasure and her hands tightened almost painfully in my hair.

I didn’t give a damn. The only thing I cared about were the rhythmic contractions I could feel around my tongue and the fresh, salty-sweet wetness I tasted as she came hard and long. I kissed her fiercely and then softly, withdrawing my tongue to lap gently along the side of her sensitized clit until she hissed faintly and then relaxed, her hands falling away from my head.

Reluctantly, I returned to the head of the bed and took her now limp body in my arms. “Kate,” I whispered and bent down to take her panting red lips and share her taste with her once more.

“Mmm,” she moaned, licking at my lips like a hungry cat. “I like that,” she confessed shyly when I pulled back. “Like the taste of me ... on you. Phillip, that was ... amazing. Even better than last night. Thank you, I never knew you wanted to...” she dropped her eyes for a moment. “Did you, do you really fantasize about that?”

“Nearly every time we in the same room together,” I admitted recklessly, hoping that knowledge wouldn’t make her feel uncomfortable after we had come down off the sexual high we were currently riding. “I’ve always wanted to taste you, Kate. Wanted to make you feel good, make you come...”

“Well you certainly got your wish,” she said lightly. “I ... Phillip, I’ve thought about it too. How it might be for us, between us if we ever ... you know. Maybe thoughts like that are what brought on the dream in the first place.” She looked guilty, as though she could be to blame for what went on in her own subconscious mind. As though she had coerced me into this.

“Kate, please,” I raised her chin with one hand, tilting her eyes up to mine. “I love doing this with you. I loved tasting you. It was a fantasy I never thought I’d ever get to act out. So don’t go feeling guilty about any of this. The kind of subconscious phenomena that bring on something like your dream isn’t anything you can control or subvert. It is what it is—your body needed release—hell, *you* needed release and you



needed me to give it to you. Which I was more than happy to do, all right?"

"All right," she murmured, dropping her eyes again. "But, Phillip ... I don't know how to tell you but that's not all. Of the dream, I mean." Her body grew tense in my arms and her pale creamy skin was marked all over with a sexual flush.

God how I wanted her! My cock gave a strong throb in the prison of my pants and I struggled for control. It seemed like I had been hard for hours.

"I know that, Kate," I said as evenly as I could. "I know the dream doesn't end with me tasting you. I've heard you crying out in your sleep, in the depths of the dream. I've heard what you beg for—what you need."

"What have you heard?" she whispered, her voice so low and soft I wouldn't have heard it if we hadn't been so close.

"I heard you begging me to take you—to *fuck* you, Kate," I told her, a little roughly. My need was getting the better of me and I still wasn't sure if she wanted to go this far or not. It was a big step—huge. It would change our relationship forever in the most fundamental way. We would no longer be just friends and partners—we would be lovers. And once I started making love to Kate, I wasn't sure I could stop.

"Why did you say it like that?" she asked. I could feel her trembling against me with fear and need as she spoke. "Why did you use that word?"

"Because that's the word you use in your dream. God Kate," I nearly exploded. "Do you know how hard it's been to lay beside you night after night and hear you begging for that? To hear you begging me to fuck you and not being able to do anything about it when it was so damn obvious you were in need?" I shook her a little for emphasis and she gasped. The small, hurt sound calmed me down a little and I pulled her close, stroking her soft blonde curls and petting the smooth skin of her back and sides.

"Phillip," she whispered brokenly and I felt hot tears against my chest. "I'm so sorry I put you through that. God..."

"Shh, Katie. Don't be silly, it was nothing you could control," I reminded her, angry at myself for getting upset and excited, when she needed me to be the calm, patient adult in this scenario. The feelings surging between us were so strong. I had been nearly overcome by the intensity of the emotion between us, but now I took some deep, deliberate breaths and calmed down.

"We don't have to do that if you don't want to, Katie," I told her gently. "No matter what's in the dream it's a big step. It will change us, you know it will."

"I know." Her voice was muffled against my chest and then she looked up, a calm despair in her eyes. "I know that, Phillip. I know that it will change our relationship, our partnership, might even ruin everything. But the fact is, I can't help it. I want it anyway. I *need* it. Need to feel you inside me, taking me, making me..."

"A good girl," I finished for her, stroking her cheek gently. I laid a soft kiss on her forehead, needing her so much, wanting to be sure. "Kate, I won't lie, I want you. Want to do this with you," 'Want to possess you, to *own* you' my mind whispered, but I didn't say it out loud for fear of scaring her.

"Kate," I continued, "it's entirely up to you. I want to help you, want to show you how I feel about you even if it's only once. Only for tonight. And if by taking you, if by making love to you tonight I can accomplish all that, then any collateral damage we sustain, any lingering awkwardness between us at work will be worth it."

I looked at her earnestly. If Kate was so worried about lasting damage to our

partnership then let her think this was a one time thing. There would be plenty of time to tell her differently afterwards, when her fears had proven false. No matter what happened I knew nothing could ever make me stop loving her and I was eager and anxious to take us to the next level.

She dropped her eyes and traced an aimless pattern across the front of my shirt. "Only for tonight," she whispered, her voice breaking just a little.

"If that's what you want," I said, feeling my heart twist painfully at the words. Once I had her, how could I ever let her go? But if it was what she needed to believe...

"I want it, Phillip," she said, looking up at me suddenly. Her voice was firm and she lifted her chin almost defiantly. "Even if ... even if we have to go back to normal tomorrow and for the rest of our lives. It may be selfish, but I want this tonight. Want you to make love to me." Her voice hardened, just a little. "Want you to *fuck* me," she said.

I wondered if it was the first time that word has passed her lips while she was awake. I thought it very probable.

"Anything you want, Kate," I told her, trying to put my whole heart into the words. "Anything you need."

## Chapter 9

### Consummation

#### Kate

The way Phillip held me, the way he touched me and made love to me with his tongue and then kissed me, letting me taste myself in his mouth was so sweet and gentle and intense that I was unprepared for the words, ‘Only for tonight’ when he said them. I knew we were both worried about the damage this would do to our friendship and to our working relationship but I still wasn’t quite ready to hear him say this was a one time thing. And yet, how could I reasonably expect more of him?

Phillip, while he admitted to fantasizing about me, about us together, was still doing this primarily to help *me*. To get me over this dream and help me go back to a normal existence. Except what could ever be normal again after tonight? I knew, I *knew* that if I let him completely into my body I would have to let him completely into my heart too. I’m not the kind of person who can separate physical and emotional intimacy that easily. Despite our hesitant, stilted declarations in the car when I had admitted he was the man in my dream, love and a lasting commitment hadn’t been mentioned and I knew now that they probably wouldn’t be. Phillip was giving me the option to get out before things got too deep, but I already felt like I was drowning.

“Anything you want,” he said again.

I knew what my answer would be. Even if this was only for tonight, even if it was something I could never have again, I couldn’t help myself. I wanted it—wanted *him*.

“I need you inside me,” I told him. “Need to feel you taking me *hard*, Phillip. Do you understand?” If I could only have him for one night, then I wanted it to be a night to remember. Wanted him to leave marks on my body that wouldn’t soon fade to match the scars on my heart that were already permanent.

“I understand,” he said. His voice was low as he bent over me and there was an intense fire in his changeable hazel eyes that made me catch my breath. He knew what I was asking for and he was more than prepared to give it to me. “But do *you* understand why you need this, Katie? What you’re asking me to do and why you need me to do it?”

I thought about it for a moment, why *did* I need Phillip to fuck me roughly rather than making soft, tender love to me as I knew he would be happy to do? Why did I feel the deep certainty that I needed this to be hard and forceful? There was the obvious answer, the one I had been telling myself about needing him to mark me so I could remember. But this was about more than sexual souvenirs to commemorate our one night together.

“I don’t know,” I said at last, trying to think, to analyze the dream as well as I could. “Maybe because I’ve felt so bad for so long ... felt like such a Dirty Girl...” I heard the slight catch in my own voice and then Phillip was pulling me close and kissing me gently, rubbing his hands reassuringly over my back and sides. I clung to him for a moment, clung to his warmth and support.

"I understand," he said again. "But Katie, you don't need to be punished to make you clean. You don't need me to hurt you to make you a good girl."

"Yes I do," I insisted, feeling the certainty of my words welling up from some deep, underground spring of emotion that was buried inside my psyche. "I don't know why exactly but I *need* this, Phillip, and you said I could have anything I needed from you tonight."

I looked at him, letting the need fill my eyes. "I need this," I told him again, choosing my words deliberately to incite him, to push him over the edge. "I need you to hold me down and take me hard. Need you to pin me to the mattress and *fuck* me until I can't see straight. Even if it hurts, I need it. Will you do that for me?" I reached up and caressed his cheek lightly, feeling the roughness of his five o'clock shadow drag against my palm.

"God, Kate!" His voice was low, almost a growl as he pulled me in for a bruising kiss. "Are you sure about this?"

"Goddamnit, Phillip," I spat, running out of patience at last. "Will you just shut up and *fuck* me?"

He growled again and the look in his eyes was wild—feral. For the first time since we had met I found myself afraid of him. Phillip is a big man and he's extremely powerful. I hoped I could take what he was about to dish out. And yet, despite my fear, some deep part of me wanted this, needed it. I needed him to take me hard, to burn the bad memories and hurt to ashes with the heat of his passion for me. To make me good, to make me clean so that I could leave the Dirty Girl behind me forever. "I want you inside me," I told him. "But you've got too many clothes on, Phillip. Strip."

I didn't need to ask him twice. He'd been laying on the bed with me fully clothed while I was naked. Now he was removing his clothes, not tearing them off, but taking them off with a deliberated precision that sent a cold chill to the pit of my stomach and a surge of wet heat to my sex.

Phillip kept his eyes on me while he undressed; baring the muscular chest and his narrow, lean hips, his tight ass and long legs. For the first time I saw his cock, long and thick, pulsing angrily against his belly. I had never spared much thought before as to what my partner's cock might look like, but now that I saw it I realized it was big ... almost huge, in fact. Certainly much bigger than anything I had ever had to accommodate before and it had been six years for me. I was practically a virgin all over again. I hoped again that I wouldn't regret my request.

"Phillip," I sat up in bed and looked at him appealingly.

He still loomed over me, almost threatening in his demeanor, in the tightly controlled violence I sensed right below the surface of his deliberate calm. Phillip had been waiting a long time for this, I realized.

"Changed your mind, Kate?" he asked, moving closer so that I could smell his masculine spice and feel the heat of his naked body over my own. I wondered what he would do if I said yes and called the whole thing off. It was a moot point—there was no way I was backing out now. I felt a fresh surge of heat between my legs and knew that I wanted him badly despite the fear. Maybe even because of it.

"No," I said. "But before you ... do it..."

"Before I fuck you, you mean?" he asked roughly.

I winced slightly and wondered for the first time how this must be affecting him. I

knew Phillip well enough to know that he wasn't into anything kinky or violent in the bedroom. I wondered if my request for him to take me roughly bothered him, but it was too late to worry about it now. We were both committed to the act. Full speed ahead and damn the consequences.

"Yes," I said evenly. "Before you fuck me, Phillip. I just want to ... I want to touch you the way you touched me. Is that... Would that be okay?" I asked hesitantly. He had explored my body so thoroughly and I had the urge to explore his as well. To hold that heavy, thick shaft that would shortly be forcing its way inside me in the palm of my hand, to feel his heat and desire throbbing for me.

His eyes lost a little of their wild light and he shifted to get closer to me, to get down to my level so he was no longer looming menacingly over me. "Of course, Kate," he said softly. "Anything you want."

"I want to touch you," I murmured softly, lifting my hand to press gently against the well-defined planes of his chest. He sank onto the bed gradually at my urging and I found myself caressing his flat, muscular abdomen, following the silky trail of dark hair that led to his thick shaft.

When I came to it, I wasn't sure exactly what to do. I had been here before with other men, but it has been so long ago and Phillip was different, special to me in a way that no one else I had ever been with was special. I wanted so much to give him pleasure, the way he had given me.

I circled his thickness with my hand, feeling the silky skin of his cock come alive under my touch. He was so thick I could barely get my fingers all the way around him. I rubbed up and down, loving the groan I drew out of him, loving the feel of the pulsing rod of flesh that filled my hand, so hot and needful. The head of his cock was plum shaped and it throbbed an angry purple. There was a clear fluid leaking from the slit and I suddenly wanted to taste him the same way he had tasted me. Lowering my head, I let my tongue dart out hesitantly at first and then more strongly to lap at his flesh, loving the strong, bitter taste of him.

"God, Kate, stop!" He jerked me up to face him, holding me tightly by the shoulders. It hurt but I didn't protest. "I can't take that right now; I'm right on the edge," he told me and his voice was ragged. "I need to be inside you *now*."

Without giving me a chance to answer, he rolled me under him and pressed me hard into the mattress, taking my mouth in another bruising kiss. I could feel his weight, heavy and welcome on my body like a living blanket as he covered me completely. His cock ground into my belly and he tasted himself on my mouth as I had tasted myself on his earlier. His actions were quick, almost violent, and though I had asked for it, I couldn't help trembling at the exquisite sensation of being utterly helpless beneath the man I loved.

He must have felt me shiver because his voice grew gentle and he became less wild and more the Phillip I knew. "It's okay, Katie," he whispered, stopping for a moment to pet my cheek with one large hand. "I'm going to fuck you hard tonight the way you seem to need me too, but if you need me to ease up just let me know. Do you understand?" He searched my eyes with his own. The hazel looked nearly black in the dim lighting of the bedroom. I nodded, speechless, trusting him utterly.

"That's good," he whispered gently and then his voice grew low and commanding again. "Spread you legs for me, Katie. Spread your legs and let me in so I can fuck you."

So I can make you a good girl.”

Phillip’s words and his weight on top of me made me so hot and needful that I thought I might go out of my mind. “Yes,” I gasped, parting my thighs to give him what he could have easily taken by force. I felt the huge, solid head of his cock nuzzle against my inner thighs, seeking my entrance and then he found it and was pressing inside my tight sex, carefully feeding himself inch by agonizing inch into my wetness.

“God, Phillip!” I moaned, wondering if he would ever end. How could he possibly fit so much into me? And yet he kept on pushing, relentlessly breaching my defenses as I lay beneath him, helpless and wet and open for his assault.

He didn’t answer my cry with words, but he stopped for a moment and looked into my eyes, asking me mutely if I could take it or if I needed him to stop.

I shook my head, needing to feel him completely inside me despite the stretching pain that accompanied the act.

He grunted and gave a final short, sharp thrust his hips fully connecting with my thighs. The broad, plum-shaped head kissed the mouth of my womb and I knew that he was finally fully seated inside me, that he could go no deeper.

He rested for a moment, giving me a chance to get used to his thickness buried in my sex. I could feel him throbbing, stretching me even when he wasn’t moving at all. He was so deep in me I could almost taste him on my tongue and I knew I had been waiting for this moment for years, maybe since the first time I had ever seen him.

“Phillip,” I begged him breathlessly, twisting my hips as well as I could beneath his weight. “Fuck me *now!*”

He didn’t need to be asked twice. With a low groan, he pulled back and pushed into me again, pressing deep into my channel.

I saw stars behind my eyelids as I gasped and writhed.

He did it again, hard, and then set up a steady, deliberate rhythm designed to drive me wild. His thrusts into my body were deep and punishing, painful and pleasurable at once. He kept his eyes on my face to gage my reaction as he pushed inside me. What he saw must have satisfied him because he sped up his tempo, using harder, shorter stokes as I cried out beneath him.

“Deep ... God, Phillip ... you’re in me so *deep!*” I gasped, loving the sweet sensation of him filling me to the limit and beyond.

“I’ll show you deep, Katie,” he growled. Suddenly, he shifted positions so that he could lock my legs over his shoulders, pressing me wide open and vulnerable in a whole new way.

I gasped as I realized this gave him a completely different angle for penetration and then he was fucking me again, so hard and deep that I thought I would die from the intensely pleasurable sensations. It was agony to be so open, to be so thoroughly filled and fucked by him, but it was sweet too. Sweet because I could feel my orgasm growing, and I knew that the rush of painful pleasure Phillip was building in my body would burn away the bad memories. Would help me and heal me in a way that nothing else could.

“Phillip!” I was screaming, gasping, begging. I didn’t care anymore how I sounded. Didn’t care about embarrassing myself with unladylike conduct or bad language. Didn’t care about anything as long as he would never stop, as long as his cock in me would never stop thrusting, filling me up with pleasure and need. “Fuck me! Do it, Phillip! Don’t stop! Fuck me... *Fuck me!*” I begged shamelessly, trying to lift my hips to meet his

thrusts. "Give it to me hard!" I cried, feeling myself lose control under his big body pounding me relentlessly into the bed.

He roared, there was no other word for it, and grasped my hips to do what I had thought impossible. He spread my thighs even wider and then he was bending over me, thrusting like a jackhammer against me, into me, getting even deeper as he prepared to fill me with his seed. I only knew I was agonizingly close to the edge and I wanted him to push me over. I wanted to feel him pulsing into me, to feel his hot come flooding me, bathing my womb.

"Come inside me," I gasped, knowing he was close too when his strokes speeded up. He was losing his rhythm, losing his self-control and I wanted to feel it when he did. "I want to feel you come inside me," I begged again, loving the thrust and push of his huge cock stretching me to the limit.

"Kate!" he shouted and shifted again, thrusting harder. The broad head of his cock battered the mouth of my womb as though seeking entrance there.

The feeling of utter helplessness coupled with the intense sensations finally pushed me over the edge and I went, moaning and crying and writhing like a wild thing under him, unable to help my reactions and completely out of control as the most intense orgasm I had ever had in my life took me and shook me like a rag doll in a hurricane.

I felt him come then, as my orgasm triggered his own and he was filling me with heat, pumping into me and flooding my sex in a wet rush that felt so good, so *right*.

"Good girl, Kate," he gasped, holding me close, keeping the deep connection between us as he bathed my womb with his seed. "You're such a *good girl*!"

The words echoed in my soul and then I was crying, feeling the tears rush down my cheeks. Reaching the ultimate catharsis on the wings of the orgasm he had fucked me to so sweetly and so deeply. "Phillip," I whispered, unable to say anything else. "Oh, Phillip..."

"Katie," he said anxiously, shifting positions so that he could pull me close. He was still buried deep in my body, but now he was cradling me in his arms, kissing my hair and my wet cheeks.

I couldn't seem to stop the tears.

"Oh, Kate, I'm so sorry," he whispered. "I didn't want it to be like this. Didn't want to hurt you..."

"Don't," I whispered, kissing him back although I was still crying. "Don't be upset, Phillip. I wanted it; I needed it. You gave me exactly what I asked for and it was exactly right."

"Then why...?" He touched my face briefly, indicating the tears that were finally slowing down.

"I don't know," I told him. "But it doesn't hurt any more, Phillip. For the first time in a long time I don't feel like a Dirty Girl."

"Kate ... Katie..." he whispered my name over and over again, rocking me against him. I didn't notice when he slipped from my body, but it didn't matter anyway. Phillip tucked us under the covers and turned us both on our sides, cupping my smaller body with his larger one and sheltering me with his warmth. It was with a feeling of complete peace that I finally drifted off.

\* \* \* \*

A gentle motion behind me woke me and a glance at the glowing red numbers of the bedside clock showed that it was around three o'clock in the morning. The darkest, most lonely hour of the night, but tonight I wasn't lonely or alone.

Phillip shifted behind me again his face, buried in my hair and sniffed at the sensitive skin of my neck.

I stirred and stretched, letting him know I was awake.

"You smell so good, Kate," he whispered into my hair. "Like wildflowers and hot, beautiful woman. I've waited so long to talk to you this way, to show you how I feel."

It seemed impossible that there should be any passion left in my body after the intense sex we had engaged in hours earlier. But the feel of Phillip's big body pressed against my own, the length of his cock stirring against my hip and his sweet words combined to prove me still capable of wanting him ... of needing him.

"Mmm, Phillip," I whispered sleepily, arching my back to rub my ass against his growing erection. "What exactly are you suggesting?"

He chuckled, a rich deep sound that was intimate in the total blackness of the unfamiliar bedroom and shifted against me again, obviously appreciating my wordless invitation. "I was just thinking that our night isn't up yet," he whispered back.

Oh. A little stab of pain went through my heart at his mention of 'our night,' reminding me that we would never do this again after we left this hotel and the discoveries we had made here behind. But his mouth on my neck, hot and wanting drove the sad thoughts out of my mind.

He reached around me to cup my breasts and fondle the nipples until they hardened against his palm and I was panting in need.

"You're right," I said a little breathlessly. "So what did you have in mind?"

"Just this," he murmured. He kicked the covers aside and raised my top leg. Then the broad head of his cock was sliding against me, over my hot, slippery sex to nudge and caress the tight bud of my clit. "You're so wet," he whispered in my ear, sliding against me.

I moaned and pressed back, wanting him inside me again.

"Wet for you," I told him. "Please, Phillip, I want you."

"Want you too," he breathed. "Gently this time." His hands caressed me in firm, tender strokes, trying to convey the emotion.

"Okay," I agreed. Our earlier bout with rough sex had left me feeling a little sore and bruised, and I was glad he wanted to go slow.

"I want to show you how I feel." Phillip nudged the head of his cock into my tight entrance.

I took him more easily this time, my body opening readily for the loving invader as he pressed slowly inside. I groaned with the delicious sensation of him filling me again.

He held me close and kissed my cheek and the back of my neck, his hands still busy with my breasts.

"Feels good," I told him. "Feels so right to have you inside me, Phillip." I tilted my pelvis, searching for deeper penetration.

He obliged me by thrusting more strongly into my wet, sucking sex.

"Feels right to me too, Kate," he whispered. "Like I belong here. Like I never want to leave."

'But you will leave,' I thought. 'We'll both leave this room and we'll never have this



closeness again.' I squashed the thought and tried to just give in the beautiful sensations Phillip was building inside my body with the slow, steady strokes of his cock.

"Oh, Phillip," I sighed. My eyes were open in the dark, but I saw nothing. I was completely focused on the man behind me, on my friend, my partner, my *lover*, filling my body, filling my sex with himself.

He slid nearly all the way out and then thrust up again in a smooth, clean motion that took my breath away. "Give me your hand," he said in my ear.

I reached up to where I felt his hand on my breasts and pressed my fingers into his palm.

"Good," he said and then he was directing my hand with his own, pressing it down to the spot between my legs where we were joined.

Phillip stilled his thrusting for a moment, brushing my questing fingers along the junction where his thick shaft pierced my sex.

I moaned feeling his warm, strong cock move under my fingertips as he slid deeper inside me.

"Feel that, Kate?" he whispered in my ear, encouraging me with his hand to stroke my own flesh as well as his. "That's me inside you, sweetheart. Inside your sweet, hot cunt. Can you feel my cock filling you up, Kate? Can you feel me making love to you?" His breath was hot in my ear.

"Yes," I groaned, feeling myself melt at the hot, erotic images he was pouring into my ears and the feel of his cock sliding into me from behind, so thick and hot and hard under my fingertips and inside my sex. "Yes, I can feel you, Phillip. Feels so *good*..."

"I want you to touch yourself while I take you, Kate. Touch your sex while I slide inside you. Can you do that for me?"

His words frightened me at first, but then I remembered the intense relief and release I had experience earlier. "I ... I can try," I whispered cautiously.

"That's fine, Katie. Try for me. Touch yourself while I make love to you," he urged. I felt his hand cupped lightly over my own, ready to help me if I needed it. If I found myself unable to do this, I knew Phillip would be right there for me to make everything all right. That knowledge gave me the confidence to do as he said and while he stroked slowly and patiently inside me, just moving enough to keep himself erect.

I did what I had been unable to do for nearly thirty years.

Parting the wet lips of my sex, I rubbed my fingertips tentatively over the swollen bud of my clit. Sensations washed over me: pleasure at my own touch, delight at rediscovering the part of my body that had been a near stranger to me for so long, and gratitude to Phillip for helping me do this. But no guilt. I was a Dirty Girl no longer.

"Feels all right?" he asked a little anxiously after a moment as I explored my body and stroked my sex.

"Better than all right," I assured him. "Feels so good to be able to do this for myself. To be able to touch myself again." I rubbed gently at first and then more firmly, finding what I wanted, what I *needed*, more easily than I would have supposed possible. Suddenly, I knew my orgasm was near. "Phillip," I gasped. "Close, I'm so close..."

"Kate," he murmured, speeding up his thrusting inside me.

I could feel his shaft, slippery with my own juices gliding along my fingertips as I caressed my hot flesh.

"Come for me, Kate," he urged me. "Want to feel you come around me. Around my

cock. Make yourself come and take me with you.”

His hot breath on my neck and the soft, commanding words brought me almost as much as my fingertips against my clit. “Phillip!” I gasped, feeling myself begin to tremble and shake, feeling the inner muscles of my sex grasp greedily at the thick shaft invading me. “I’m coming...” I moaned. “I’m making myself come. Oh, Phillip...”

“Oh, God, Kate ... love to hear you come. Love to feel you come around me,” he groaned in my ear and then he was coming too, spurting hotly inside my milking sex, thrusting deep with the instinctual need to plant his seed as far inside me as he could.

I spread my legs as wide as possible to accommodate him and he held me pinned against him, rock solid and steady for a long moment as he filled me completely with his cum. I felt him pulsing steadily and then he let out a long, deep sigh and his hands, that had been gripping me so strongly to him, relaxed. We both concentrated on getting enough breath for a while, just trying to breathe around the intense pleasure that was ebbing slowly away.

“Phillip, thank you,” I whispered softly into the darkness. He was still inside me, but I could tell it wouldn’t be long before he would slip from my body, never to return again. “That was beautiful,” I told him. “So beautiful ... so right.”

“Wanted to make sure,” he whispered into my hair. “Wanted to know you were really okay, Kate.”

Unspoken in the space between us were his reasons for ‘making sure.’ I knew he wanted to be sure I was really able to touch myself, to help myself in the future. Because Phillip would return to being my platonic friend and partner and he wouldn’t be there for me in that way any more.

“I’m okay,” I whispered. Tears burned my eyes and tried to let them drop silently, but he must have heard me sniffing in the dark because he turned me gently so that I was facing him and cuddled me close, petting my hair. ‘Poor Phillip,’ I thought. ‘He must think that every time I have sex I cry.’ It wasn’t true, of course.

Before when I had cried it had been an emotional release, a healing. Now the tears that dropped from my eyes were bitter with regret. Regret that this would be our only night together, that things would go back to the way they had been before. From now on when I woke up in the middle of the night I would have no one to hold me close and love me tenderly or fiercely however the mood might strike us. No, I would be in my bed alone forever. Because how could I ever learn to love another man after giving myself body and soul to my partner as I had tonight?

“Shh, Katie.” Phillip held me against him and just let the tears flow. He didn’t try to say anything, just ran his hand soothingly through my hair and over my back until I quieted enough to go back to sleep.

As I finally drifted off with my face pressed into his chest I thought I heard him say, “God, Kate ... love you so much.”

I wanted to wake up and ask him about it, but sleep was dragging me down to a bottomless depth and I couldn’t manage it.

When I woke up in the morning, I knew it must have been a dream.

## Chapter 10

### The Day After

#### Phillip

When I woke up the next day Kate was already out of the bed and into the shower. I lay in the rumpled covers and listened to the rush of water behind the bathroom door wishing she had woken me as well. I wouldn't have minded sharing the shower with her and the thought of her ripe, beautiful body with streams of water sluicing down her creamy skin was enough to make me hard all over again. I remembered bathing her the night before, fucking her and then, in the middle of the night, making love to her the way I had always wanted to.

It had bothered me somewhat that our first sexual encounter had been so rough but it had seemed to be what Kate needed and if you could consider it therapy then I guessed it had been successful. The second time had been better though, sweeter and more loving. I remembered the feeling of her small hand exploring herself as I entered her from behind and smiled. She had come so *hard*. I had almost thought she was going to squeeze me to death, but it felt so good. So good to make love to her. So good to help her and to feel her help herself.

Just thinking about it was causing a definite tent to form under the peaches and cream bed spread. If she came out of the shower naked I was going to lay her on the bed and spend a long, leisurely time having her sweet pussy for breakfast. Oh no, I hadn't had nearly enough of her yet. I realized now that I had been in love with Kate almost from day one. I had been waiting nearly six years to show her how I felt and one night of passion wasn't enough to express my love.

I thought about all the things I wanted to do with her. We would have to hide our new relationship at work, of course. Partners who became romantically involved weren't allowed to stay together and I would rather cut off my right arm than lose Kate as a partner. But outside of work ... I wanted to take long walks on the beach, bring her roses, make her breakfast in bed. I wanted to play footsie under the desk at work where no one could see and write her little love notes and celebrate anniversaries. In short I wanted to live the rest of my life with her and I wanted to start it by making up for lost time. The minute she got out of the shower I planned to pounce on her.

The bathroom door snicked open and I sat up in bed eagerly, anticipating a warm, wet, naked Kate. I could already taste her on my lips, salty and sweet and utterly delicious. I wanted to make her come over and over and then fill her with my cock again. I wanted to make love to her until I was branded on her heart forever the way she was branded on mine.

"Kate, I..." But the words died on my lips. She came out of the bathroom fully dressed down to her sensible low-heeled pumps. Her hair was pinned in a tight twist at the back of her head and the cut of her navy suit could only be described as severe. Her face was devoid of any makeup and she looked young and pale in the morning sunshine

streaming in through the motel room's heavy drapes.

"Morning, Paxton," she said briskly. I thought her voice trembled just a little but I couldn't be sure.

"Morning, McKinley," I said automatically falling into our old formal speech pattern.

"Better get a move on. Murtaugh will be expecting us bright and early tomorrow and we've got to make a lot of miles to make up for stopping early last night," she remarked, giving me a disapproving glance.

I realized I was still naked under the covers and I suddenly felt self-conscious. It was ridiculous because she had seen me naked last night as I had seen her. I had held her naked in my arms for hours, kissing her, petting her, touching her. My cock surged again, but the look on her face was enough to quell any amorous thoughts I might be entertaining.

"Uh, Kate?" I ventured carefully. "Are you all right?"

She had her back turned to me now and she was packing industriously, making sure every piece of clothing was neatly folded and properly placed. "Couldn't be better," she said with what might have been forced cheerfulness. "Why do you ask?"

"You just seem ... different," I said, unable to think of another way to put it. "Different from last night, I mean."

"Well," She turned around and her face was very pale, her usually full red lips compressed into a tight, colorless line. "Last night was last night and today is today," she said as though that answered everything.

I just sat in the bed and stared at her, unable to come up with anything intelligent to say. I remembered briefly that we had spoken of last night being a one time deal, but I had fully intended to change that assumption in the light of day. Now Kate was acting like she wanted to forget anything had ever happened between us. Could it be that she was serious, that she only wanted us to be together for that one time? From the cool look on her beautiful features that was exactly what she wanted.

I wanted to take her by the shoulders and shake her. Wanted to say, 'We made love last night! I was inside your body, touching you, taking you, making you *mine*. How can you want to forget what we shared?' I wanted to kiss her until she couldn't breathe, until she couldn't deny what had happened between us. Instead I gathered the sheet around me and stumbled out of bed.

"Better get a shower," I think I mumbled. She turned her back again to give me privacy and I found myself in the bathroom. I dropped the sheet and stared at myself, looking in the mirror that covered one wall. A PhD in psychology and several advanced degrees in Behavioral Science and all I could think of to say had been, 'Better get a shower.' What was wrong with me? But if she wanted to forget everything that had happened between us and go back to a strictly professional relationship what could I do? I shook my head.

One thing was certain—with Kate there was no rushing anything. She was a very deliberate person who almost never did anything impulsive which was one reason I had been surprised she had been willing to take our relationship to the next level the night before. Now it seemed that we were back to square one. Would I ever be able to get back to where we had been last night?

Only time would tell.

\* \* \* \*

The trip back home was one of the most tension-filled experiences in my life. I drove, my shoulders hunched painfully tight under the lapels of my suit jacket. Kate and I made polite conversation like we were two strangers who had just met instead of partners and best friends that had been together six years.

Nothing I said seemed to come out right and several times I found myself reaching for her, wanting that reassuring contact that was so much a part of our friendship—the squeeze of her hand or just to touch her shoulder—but every time I drew back, uncertain of how she would take it. I did forget once and rested my hand on her thigh while making a point, but the nervous tension I felt in her leg reminded me of our awkward situation and I pulled my hand back immediately, as though I had been burned.

This was what I had always been afraid of—that if I risked declaring my love or if we took the relationship to the next level, that it would ruin everything we had together. Now it looked like all my fears were justified. Our casual working relationship, our wonderful partnership and the most important and significant friendship in my life had all been burned to ashes in one night of fiery passion.

I remembered the touch of Kate's skin beneath my hands, the way she had arched her back and cried out under me and the salty-sweet taste of her sex and thought, 'It wasn't worth it.' As wonderful as the sex was and as satisfying as it was to know that I had helped Kate overcome her sexual dysfunction, none of it had been worth it if I was going to lose her as a friend.

I kept thinking that I had to say something, but every time I tried nothing came out. She called me Paxton and I called her McKinley, but there was a coolness in the use of our last names that had never been there before. I spent the whole trip agonizing about it, feeling like there was a wall of solid ice between Kate and I that I was powerless to melt.

After what seemed like hours of polite small talk and rehashing every case we could think of to avoid talking about anything personal, I at last found myself driving up the street where Kate lived to drop her off at home. When I pulled the car into her driveway and she was about to get out of the car I felt like my last hope was evaporating. 'Now or never,' I thought. Her hand was on the door handle and she was saying something about thanks for the ride and what a pleasant trip it had been—total polite impersonal bullshit and it made me mad.

"Kate," I said, reaching over to grab her by the elbow and stop her from leaving the car.

She looked at me impassively.

"Wait," I said. "We ... Kate, we have to talk."

"What is there to talk about, Paxton?" she said coolly. Kate at her frostiest can make the North Pole look warm and she was doing her best 'ice queen' impression on me now.

"Don't be like that, Kate," I said desperately. "Don't act like nothing happened between us."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I'm acting the way I always do." Her eyes were as cold as an iceberg and she looked at my hand on her arm as though it was a large bug.

I let the offending hand drop.

"Kate," I said. "McKinley, can't we just consider it a one night fling that got out of hand? Do we have to let it ruin everything between us? Our partnership ... our

friendship..." But I couldn't go on.

Kate's eyes were huge and suspiciously shiny as though she were holding back tears. She slumped in the seat for a moment, going limp with emotional exhaustion.

"I never should have told you anything," she whispered so low I had to bend down to catch the words. "Now everything's ruined ... everything. I'm sorry, Phillip." She looked at me and her eyes were filled with so much pain I caught my breath. "But I think we'd be better off if we never talked about this again."

Now it was my turn to slump in the seat. Never again? Her message to me was clear—I had better lay off or I would lose her completely, as a friend and a partner, let alone a lover. I knew Kate. If she thought our personal relationship was affecting our effectiveness on the job, she was perfectly capable of requesting a transfer to another department. And then I would never see her again except for a frosty hello now and again as we passed in the halls of the station. The thought was unbearable.

I had gambled everything and lost, just as I had feared. I didn't dare express my true feelings now. I wasn't prepared to see her walk out of my life completely.

"Okay, Kate. Sorry ... I mean, McKinley," I said, feeling utterly defeated. "We won't talk about it. But can you just ... will you promise me I won't lose your friendship? What we have ... what we had..." I couldn't think of how to say what I was feeling. "We're good together, McKinley," I said at last, feeling stupid and tongue-tied. "I just ... I don't want to lose that."

Her face got softer and she looked at me like she was seeing me for the last time. "I can't promise anything, Paxton, but I'll try. I really will," she said at last. She straightened up reluctantly and took a deep breath and I saw a look of sheer determination cross her delicate features as her back straightened. "I'd better get going," she said, her tone brisk and businesslike. "I have a lot to get done before tomorrow. See you at work, Paxton." She opened the door and got out of the car.

What else could I do? I let her go.

\* \* \* \*

## **Kate**

I admit it, the minute I got in the door and heard Phillip's car pull away I sat on the couch and cried my eyes out. Not very mature of me, but I couldn't help it. I felt like someone had ripped out my heart and stomped all over it. I had been holding back the tears all day by sheer force of will. The second I was alone the flood came and my pain was so intense I thought it just might drown me.

The night before Phillip kept saying that it was just for one night, but I couldn't help thinking he might change his mind in the light of day. But when I had emerged from the bathroom that morning he had been quiet and uncommunicative. It was true that I had been quiet and withdrawn myself, but I was just being wary, trying to feel him out and play things his way. And apparently his way was to pretend nothing had ever happened. Until, of course, he pulled into my driveway and was almost rid of me. *Then* he had wanted to talk. By that time I was convinced there was nothing to talk about. Last night was in the past and we would both be better off if we just buried it.

The look on Phillip's face when he had asked for reassurance about our continued friendship crossed my mind and I felt like crying all over again. Really, it wasn't his fault

that I had fallen for him and he hadn't fallen for me. It was wrong to punish him when he had only made love to me in the first place to try and help me—to cure me of the effects of the dream.

Well, I was betting I wouldn't be plagued with the dream tonight. I had a whole slew of new nightmares waiting to take its place. Nightmares that involved working the rest of my professional life with a man I was desperately in love with and could never have.

It was done and over with and there was no use mourning over it now. As my Grandma used to say, 'You can't saw sawdust.' Nothing I could do would change the past and in time Phillip and I would both get back to normal—I hoped.

I sat up on the couch and wiped my eyes and gave myself a very stern lecture on being weak enough to fall for my partner—the one person in the world I should have avoided sleeping with and falling for. It was too late to do anything about either, but I would do my best to act professional and pretend nothing had ever happened as Phillip seemed to want us to do.

The only thing to do now was just forge straight ahead and hope the awkwardness between Phillip and myself would fade in time.

Yeah, right.

\* \* \* \*

## **Phillip**

The next morning at work Kate was pleasant and friendly if a little subdued. Her soft blue eyes looked hollow and tired and I wondered if she had been having trouble sleeping. I hoped the dream wasn't bothering her any more, but there was no way I could possibly ask when the emotional distance between us seemed to be growing by the hour. Kate was completely professional and I tried to follow her lead, but it was damn difficult when I kept wanting to take her in my arms and kiss her until she came to her senses and admitted we belonged together in every sense of the word.

The day passed quietly as we wrote up the Biloxi case. We split the work load evenly as always and I turned in our expense report while Kate made a report to Murtaugh. He was pleased with our quick work and commended us for our efficiency and speed, Kate told me. She and I stayed at opposite ends of our office and ate lunch separately because when I asked if she wanted to come out with me, she replied quietly that she had packed a lunch.

In the past, in what I was already beginning to think of as PSR or our pre-sex relationship, I would have badgered her good-naturedly until she gave in and came with me. Kate knows how I hate eating alone if I can help it. But this time I just nodded and left the office like an idiot. I ended up at a bar on the corner and had a liquid lunch, something I hadn't done since my father died of a massive heart attack five and a half years before.

Sitting in the bar, nursing a whiskey I shouldn't have been drinking, I couldn't help remembering the way Kate had taken care of me that horrible cold January day when my brother called to give me the news of my father.

My family lives in Ludlow, Massachusetts and it was in the dead of winter. The roads were too slick with ice to drive and a raging blizzard that was covering the whole of New England was keeping the planes grounded. There was literally no way to get

home and even if I could have, I hadn't been close to my family in years. Still, my father's death hit me hard, especially since we had said some things to each other that weren't very nice the last time I had talked to him.

My father was a very successful lawyer with his own family law practice and he always expected me to follow in his footsteps. When I became interested in criminal psychology instead, he was angry and derisive. I think right up until the day he died he was expecting me to drop my low-paying career as a profiler and go back to law school to join him in his practice. That was what our last talk, or I suppose I should say fight, had been about. I had ended the conversation by telling him that I was never going to be what he wanted so we might just as well agree not to talk or see each other. That was a year before his death.

Despite my mother's attempts to reconcile us, I hadn't spoken to him since and I was awash with remorse following my brother Robert's phone call to tell me the news. I had missed the whole last year of my father's life and now, due to weather conditions, I was going to miss his funeral too. It was too much.

Kate and I had been partners for barely six months at the time and we were still new to each other—still feeling each other out. I had a feeling that she thought I was too impulsive, too quick to trust my instincts and follow a hunch. My impression of her, at the time, had been that she was too uptight and by-the-book. Still, I liked her well enough and found her immensely attractive, although I wasn't yet sure if I could trust the diminutive blonde with the razor sharp mind.

The day Robert called to tell me dad was gone was a turning point in my relationship with Kate. It was the day when our partnership truly became a friendship, I think. Maybe the day when I first started to love her.

I had taken the call that morning before coming to work and I spent most of my morning and early afternoon trying to find some way to get back to Ludlow. When I finally acknowledged that it was going to be impossible for me to attend my father's funeral, I took a late lunch break and ended up in a bar, maybe even the same one I was at now. By the time I got back to the office I was in pretty bad shape.

Kate took one look at me and called Murtaugh to let him know that I was sick with the flu and she wasn't feeling too good herself. She managed to wrangle two days of sick leave for us both and she took me to her house and took care of me.

I slept the alcohol off on her couch and when I woke up around midnight, feeling like a pile of dog shit someone had stepped in, Kate was there, waiting.

"Want to talk about it?" she asked me and to my amazement, I found that I did. I poured the whole sorry story into her lap, keeping my eyes down and my head low, feeling like I wanted to break something or cry. After I finished she was quiet for a minute and then I felt her small hand rubbing lightly and comfortingly over my back.

"All the seminars on sexual harassment we've been attending at work say I'm not supposed to hug you right now," she joked lightly, kneading the back of my neck to release the tension. "But I think I'm going to risk it." She reached for me and I buried my face in her hair, inhaling the scent that was uniquely Kate for the first time and nothing had ever been the same since.

It was always like that between us, I thought as I sipped my whiskey carefully, trying not to get too drunk to return to the office. In times of great emotional stress, a difficult case or the death of a loved one, Kate and I drew closer together and every time I thought



it was finally going to happen—she was finally going to let me all the way in. And every time after the stress was over or the disaster had been cleaned up or diverted she snapped shut again and we went back to being partners and best friends and nothing more.

I couldn't remember a time when I hadn't longed to have Kate as more than a friend, hadn't longed for her love and the consummation of our feelings. And now it had finally happened and what was the result? I was sitting in a bar drinking my lunch while she was back at the office eating alone and both of us were doing our damndest to pretend like nothing had ever happened.

"Paxton, you really screwed up this time," I muttered to myself as I paid the tab and trudged back to the station.

\* \* \* \*

## Kate

A week passed and then more than a month and I kept telling myself that things were back to normal. In time Phillip and I were able to go back to our usual camaraderie, although the jokes often fell flat and our laughter sounded forced. We never got back to our previous level of casual touching and I found that I missed that more than almost anything else.

Phillip is normally a very touchy person and I missed having his hand on my arm or thigh when he made a point. Missed being enveloped in one of his wonderful bear hugs when I was feeling down or blue, which was a lot of the time lately. I berated myself almost daily for screwing up our friendship and ruining for myself the only source of comfort and consolation I had. How could I let Phillip hug and comfort me when every touch between us still sent a rush of fire through my veins? We jumped as though we had burned each other whenever we accidentally made contact and I wondered if he felt it too, but of course there was no way to ask him.

The dream no longer bothered me, but I sometimes looked back on the weeks when it had been a nightly occurrence with something like nostalgia. At least then, though I had been sleep deprived and feeling awful, I still had the emotional support of my friend and partner. Now Phillip and I were little more than friendly strangers and I missed him more than I could say. I wondered if he felt the way I did, even a little bit, but Phillip can be as stoic as the next guy when it comes to hiding his emotions so I had no idea. Sometimes I would turn around and catch him looking at me with an expression I couldn't interpret, but he always turned away so fast it was impossible to catch more than a glimpse.

I blamed myself for the lingering discomfort between us, but it seemed to be something I couldn't help. I had thought that the resolution of the dreams would solve my sexual problems but instead, everything got worse. Now, more than ever, I wanted him. I tried to deny it to myself, but I couldn't get the night we had spent together out of my mind. The memory of his hands and mouth on me, of his thickness spreading me, filling me, *fucking* me, it just wouldn't fade. It got to be where I felt like I had a low grade fever the entire time I was anywhere near him.

When the awkwardness began to affect our work, I knew something had to be done. When we were out in the field investigating a new case I found myself fumbling and bumbling whenever Phillip was near. It was like his physical presence in my general vicinity caused some sort of mental and emotional static that screwed up my thinking

process.

I was forgetting things I had known since medical school and making mistakes the greenest agent wouldn't have made. Phillip wasn't much better and I knew the lingering strangeness between us was affecting him as well. Gone were the days of our near telepathic communication. We never seemed to be in the right place at the right time for each other and I couldn't tell at any given time what was going on in his head.

Though it just about killed me, I began to reluctantly consider requesting a transfer. Phillip and I were no longer an effective team. If I didn't have his love and friendship to sustain me then my professional career would have to be my only source of self-actualization and gratification. I had always been committed to my work anyway, and I told myself that in time I would get used to working with someone else.

Besides, being around Phillip day after day and not being able to have him was a constant drain on my mental and emotional reserves. Phillip and I weren't doing each other any good the way we were. It was time to end things.

I was trying to think of a way to tell him one late Monday afternoon, nearly a month and a half after our fateful trip to Biloxi. It shouldn't be so hard, I told myself. In fact, it would probably be a relief to him. I obviously made him as uncomfortable as he made me. We were past due for the dissolution of our partnership.

So why did it make me feel like crying whenever I thought of the neatly typed request I had laid on AD Murtaugh's desk where he would be sure to find it first thing in the morning an hour before? Why couldn't I forget the way it felt to be held in Phillip's arms, to be loved by him tenderly and roughly and feel so safe...

I shook my head angrily. Time to stop thinking like that. It was weak and self-indulgent and I had to grow up and get my head out of the clouds. Phillip and I were never going to be together that way again.

"Hey, you look like you're thinking awfully hard about something." Phillip's soft voice in my ear startled me.

"Oh!" I jumped a little and pressed my hand to my chest.

"Sorry," he backed off immediately. "Didn't mean to startle you."

"That's okay. I was just getting ready to go anyway," I said brightly, gathering up the paperwork I had been browsing through and putting it neatly away. "Almost quitting time, you know," I said with forced cheerfulness.

"Yeah." He frowned at me, obviously wondering at my bright, nervous smile. It felt fake and wrong on my face, but everything I did around my partner felt wrong.

"Look," he said. "I was wondering..."

"McKinley, what is the meaning of this?" We both turned towards the door and my heart sank when I saw AD Murtaugh holding out a piece of white paper I recognized as the transfer form I had filled out earlier and left on his desk.

"Sir," I said, trying to keep my voice level. "I thought you had already gone for the day. I was intending to discuss that with you tomorrow."

"Well, we'll discuss it now," he said, waving the paper in my face. He was clearly agitated. "Sit down, McKinley. You too, Paxton," he added when it looked like Phillip was going to duck out of the room and give us some privacy.

"Yes, sir." Phillip pulled his rolling office chair around our desks to sit beside me, backing me up with his presence as he had so often before in confrontational situations. I wished I could melt through the chair and disappear. This was not a conversation I

wanted to have right now.

"Now, McKinley, can you give me a reason for this?" He waved the offending paper again. "Can you tell me why I should break up the best pair of agents I have?"

"Break us up?" Phillip's voice was incredulous.

"Sir, I can explain," I said quickly, although I had no idea of what I was going to say.

"Explain what?" Phillip demanded. The little white crease that he gets between his eyebrows when he's angry or upset was beginning to show and I knew I was in for a rough time.

"Agent McKinley has requested a transfer to another department," Murtaugh said bluntly, displeasure evident in his voice. "I just wanted to know why."

"I'd like to know why too." Phillip looked at me as though I'd stabbed him in the back.

I cringed inwardly. What a way for him to find out. I felt like the lowest form of life on the planet.

"You mean you two haven't even discussed this?" Murtaugh demanded, looking from one to the other of us, a grim frown on his face.

"No, sir," I spoke up at last, trying to ignore the glare that Phillip was aiming in my direction. "I had intended to discuss this with Agent Paxton later and make him aware of my decision."

"*Decision* being the operative word," Phillip snarled. "If it's a decision involving our partnership don't you think I should at least have a say in it, McKinley?"

"Paxton, I didn't mean for you to find out like this," I pleaded. I tried to keep my face impassive, but I could feel a dull red blush staining my cheeks.

"And just when were you going to tell me?" he asked. "Around the time you were cleaning out your desk to make the move?"

"I..." I began, but Murtaugh interrupted our heated debate.

"It's clear you two need to discuss this before any decision is made," he said. "In the meantime, I came back to the office to let you know I received a call from a Chief Cox in Biloxi and he'll need you back there on Wednesday to testify. That means you'll have to be on the road tomorrow to get there in time."

"But, sir..." I protested.

Murtaugh held up one hand. "Stop right there, McKinley. I don't know what kind of problems you and Paxton are having, but at least until you finish in Biloxi, you're *still* partners. We can discuss this when you get back. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," I murmured.

Phillip just nodded, apparently so angry that he couldn't talk.

"Good." Murtaugh straightened his tie and headed for the door. "Oh, and agents," he threw over his shoulder as he left. "You may drive down separately if you wish, but please be advised that the department will reimburse you for the gasoline for only one vehicle. You can split the remaining cost between you if you want." And he was gone, leaving me alone with a very hurt and angry partner.

"Paxton." I turned to him as soon as Murtaugh had left the room. "I don't know what to say. I've been meaning to talk to you about this..."

He turned away from me and began shuffling papers on his desk with merciless precision. "Do you want to take separate cars like Murtaugh said?" he demanded abruptly, not addressing my previous statement.

“No,” I said in a low voice that threatened to tremble. “Not really.”

“Because I thought that maybe being cooped up with me for the whole road trip might be too much for you, McKinley.” I couldn’t see his face, but under his crisp cotton shirt the heavy muscles in his broad back were knotted and tense.

“Phillip ... please,” I said, trying desperately to keep my voice steady. I lay a tentative hand on his back and he jerked as though I’d stabbed him and whirled around to face me.

“Oh, are we back on a first name basis now, *Kate*?” he asked, sarcasm heavy in his voice. “Or is that something we save just for fucking?”

I slapped his face. “You son of a bitch,” I said, breathing hard, the anger overcoming my pain. How dare he, how *dare* he take our one night together and throw it in my face? I felt my eyes filling and blinked savagely, trying to ignore the tears that made me feel so weak and vulnerable.

Phillip took a step towards me, one hand coming up to rub his face where a red handprint was already forming. He loomed over me, but I held my ground. I had never struck him before but then, he had never said anything so insensitive either. He opened his mouth and then closed it again, shaking his head.

“Fine,” he said at last. “I’ll pick you up at eight,” he gathered his jacket and briefcase and left the room without another word.

## Chapter 11

### Second Chances

#### Phillip

I had known there was a possibility that Kate might dissolve our partnership, but I was sure she would at least talk to me about it first—had counted on it, in fact. Counted on having a chance to talk her out of such a rash decision, but now it was too late. Kate had asked for a transfer without saying a word to me. She was removing herself from my life in the coldest, most efficient way possible and it hurt like hell.

I had to admit my comment to her the day before was harsh, but I had been feeling so utterly betrayed that I lashed out without thinking. I had deserved the slap she gave me but after she delivered it, all I could think of was how hurt I felt and how much I still wanted her. I had to literally leave the room to keep from grabbing her and throwing her across the desk like a cave man.

I kept having the completely irrational feeling that if I could just push up her skirt and sink my cock into her one more time, she would be forced to acknowledge that what had happened between us wasn't going away no matter how matter what she did. To acknowledge that we belonged together.

They have a name for that kind of behavior—it's called rape. I had pushed the thought out of my mind and left Kate standing in the office with tears of pain and frustration in her eyes. I went home and jerked off, thinking of the look on her face when I had taken her the first time, thinking of the way she had screamed and writhed under me, called my name and begged me to fuck her harder. Then I lay on the bed and surrendered to depression for a while.

Maybe Kate was right to dissolve our partnership, I thought. The last month and a half just being near her was pure torture. Wanting her so badly and knowing there was no way I could ever have her again was agony and it was definitely affecting my work performance.

But no matter how awkward things had gotten between us I just wasn't ready to give up yet. I had said to Kate that we were good together and Murtaugh had acknowledged that as well. We were one of the best teams of our kind and that was because we had always put professional success second to personal commitment. When you work well with your partner and put him or her first, success seems to follow.

Our partnership, our *friendship* had always been more important to us than anything else. It was the purest and most profound relationship I had ever had in my life and I couldn't stand to just walk away from it. Still, it takes two to make a partnership and if Kate wanted out, what could I do? Losing her didn't feel so much like a divorce as a kind of death. The death of the deepest and most important part of me.

When I drove up to her house the next morning for the trip back to Biloxi I wasn't even sure she would still be willing to ride with me. But when I honked the horn, she came out and climbed in the car.

“Morning, Paxton,” she said, tersely.

“Morning, McKinley,” I returned in the same tone of voice. That brief exchange set the mood for the entire trip down to Biloxi. Glacial was the word that best described it and the wall of ice that had been growing between us for the last month and a half seemed to have reached iceberg proportions.

I wanted in the worst way to talk to Kate about the situation, but her continued silence kept me from saying a word. When we were about halfway to our stopping point for the night, she informed me that she had taken the liberty of booking us *rooms*—emphasis on the plural—for the entire trip both to and from Biloxi so there would be no confusion about our accommodations.

“Fine,” I said shortly. “That was very thoughtful of you, McKinley. We certainly wouldn’t want to have a mix up the way we did on our last trip to Biloxi.” I thought she would blast me with a stinging retort, but she only turned away and looked out the window, biting her bottom lip the way she does when she’s really upset and trying not to show it.

I felt like a jerk and all of my anger suddenly evaporated. “Hey, I’m sorry,” I said quietly. “That was uncalled for. And ... and what I said yesterday was too.”

“Apology accepted,” she said after a while a little stiffly. “I’m sorry too.”

We rode in silence that was a little less bitter after that, but she still didn’t offer to explain her decision to dissolve our partnership and I didn’t ask either. That night we slept in separate hotel rooms and the next day when we reached Biloxi we went straight to the trial.

The trial was pretty much an open and shut case and they only needed our testimony for one day so after one night—again in separate rooms—we were on our way again for what promised to be a long trip home. The silence between us was still so thick you could cut it with a knife and I was becoming desperate. I knew that this was my last chance to talk to Kate because when we got back home, she would go to AD Murtaugh and make her transfer final. We were almost to our halfway point and I didn’t want to eat another meal in frosty silence before retiring to separate bedrooms for the night. Somehow, something had to give.

“McKinley,” I said. She had been staring pensively out the car window at the scenery rushing past but now she turned to me silently, indicating that I had her attention. “We can’t keep going like this.” Without thinking about it, I put my right hand on her thigh, squeezing slightly to emphasize my point.

“It’s too late to talk about it, Paxton,” she said shortly, crossing her arms protectively across her chest. “What’s done is done.” Her tone was so final that I felt all hope leaving me. Kate was determined to end our partnership and there was nothing I could do or say that would change her mind. I felt a tremor run through her and realized that she was reacting to my unwanted touch.

Reluctantly I removed my hand and turned my attention back to the road.

While we drove on into the deepening twilight, I thought of her reaction to my touch—to any casual touching between us lately, which had been very little. In the past month and a half I only touched her when I forgot how the status quo between us had changed so drastically and I pulled back immediately when I remembered. Touching my partner used to be the most normal thing in the world and now it was next to impossible.

I remembered our first trip to Biloxi—the way Kate had tensed up when I touched

her. But that had been because of the dream and her unfulfilled sexual desires. Now she just didn't want my hands on her.

Or did she?

I took a closer look at her—the set of her shoulders, the tension in her forehead, the dark circles around her eyes. She looked almost exactly the same way she had when the dream was at its worst. Could she possibly be having it again? I didn't consider it likely—she had seemed so much improved after we made love I would have bet it wouldn't be a problem for her in the future. So then, why was she acting this way? Jumping every time I touched her, being so distant and cold? I decided to try an experiment.

“Kate,” I said, pitching my voice low and gentle, deliberately using her first name. “I'm sorry about how things have been between us lately.” I put my hand on her thigh again, this time not removing it when I felt her tense. She turned to me, her eyes wide and wounded. Her breathing was becoming quick and shallow as I continued to touch her. She looked at my hand on her thigh, but I kept it where it was. She would have to ask me if she wanted me to move it.

“Yeah,” she said vaguely and crossed her legs nervously without dislodging my hand. “It's been ... rough.”

“Rough is an understatement,” I told her, beginning to squeeze her thigh gently, letting my hand move just a little higher up her leg.

She shifted in the seat again.

“Kate,” I said. “Are you having the dream again?”

“What?” She jerked away from me and slid as far over to the right side of her seat as she could. “No, Paxton, not that it's any of your business.”

“It was my business last time we were driving down this road,” I pointed out. “Your welfare has always been my business. That's what a partnership is all about.”

She looked away and I thought I saw her wiping at her cheeks. Was she crying? I was encouraged by her reaction to my touch. If she could still want me physically as much as I wanted her then maybe, just maybe all was not lost. I felt a small spark of hope ignite inside my chest for the first time in ages and decided I wasn't going down without a fight.

“Look, that's our motel.” Kate was pointing across the highway.

I saw with disbelief that it was the same Embassy Suits where we had stayed and made love for the first and last time. She had made the hotel accommodations, was she trying to tell me something? I looked at her sharply as I pulled into the parking lot, but she was still staring intently out the window and refusing to meet my eyes. It was going to be an interesting night.

\* \* \* \*

## **Kate**

“I'm sorry sir, but we don't show any record of your reservations. Are you quite sure you're not mistaken?” The hotel clerk looked up from his computer, shaking his head with fake sympathy. ‘What a shame,’ his small, worried frown seemed to say. The expression didn't quite reach his eyes, however. They seemed to be saying, ‘Who gives a shit?’

“My colleague here made the reservations personally,” Phillip said, giving the clerk a stern look. “But in any case we’ll take two single rooms. It doesn’t matter if they’re together or not.”

“Well...” The clerk made a big show of checking the computer again. “I’m afraid that will be impossible. I show only one room left and it’s rather expensive, I’m afraid.”

“What room would that be?” I asked with a sinking feeling. Surely it couldn’t be...

“It’s our honeymoon suit,” the clerk chirped happily, causing my heart to sink into my sensible low heeled pumps. I had known I was taking a chance booking us back at the same hotel where we had consummated our relationship, but I hadn’t been able to resist it.

I don’t know if it was some perverse, masochistic wish on my part to torture myself with thoughts of our one night together in the same place it had happened, or if I was subconsciously hoping that it might bring Phillip and I back together somehow. Whatever my reasons, they had all blown up in my face and I could feel myself blushing a dull scarlet as Phillip and the hotel clerk both looked at me intently.

“Well, I’m sure we can find something else down the road, Paxton,” I mumbled, shifting from foot to foot in my anxiety to be away from this place.

“No,” he said firmly, surprising me. “No, it’s late and I’m tired.” He turned to the hotel clerk who was watching us with interest. “We’ll take it,” he said.

“Paxton,” I protested, glaring at him.

Phillip glared right back.

“I’m not driving another foot tonight, McKinley,” he said. “And besides, *you’re* the one who booked us here in the first place. We’re going to just have to deal with it; you know perfectly well the bed is big enough for two.”

“Paxton,” I hissed, hideously embarrassed that he should say such things at all, let alone in front of the clerk.

Phillip just shook his head and handed over his credit card without another word. Taking the key from the now smiling clerk, he headed for the elevator, leaving me no choice but to follow numbly in his wake.

Once inside the room with the heavy wooden door shut behind me, I felt a kind of panic set in. The room was exactly the same, right down to the light beige decorations and the fruit basket on the table. It was like we had somehow warped back in time to a month and a half ago to that fateful night that should never have happened. That night I couldn’t forget no matter how hard I tried.

I looked anxiously for Phillip, but he was already in the bedroom digging through his suitcase. Obviously he wasn’t going to offer to take the couch instead of sharing the bed with me and I found I was too proud to take the couch myself.

‘We’re both adults,’ I lectured myself silently as I dragged my suitcase around to the other side of the bed and began looking for something suitable to wear to bed. ‘No matter what happened between us before, it’s over and done with now. We can certainly share a bed without making a federal case out of it.’

I thought about asking Phillip if he wanted to go to dinner and delay the inevitable, but we had eaten a late lunch and besides, now my stomach was doing so many flip-flops there was no chance I could get down a single bite. I thought of the way he had been caressing my thigh in the car, the way he refused to stop touching me despite my obvious discomfort and silent protests. Could it be that Phillip still wanted me the way I wanted



him—as more than a friend and partner? Or was he just concerned that I might be having the dream again?

“You ... uh, can have the bathroom first if you want, Paxton,” I heard myself saying. “If you’re anxious to get to bed, I mean. I might take a while.”

“Going to take a bath?” he asked in a low voice without turning around.

I felt myself blushing helplessly again as I remembered my last bath in this room. The way Phillip had carried me into the steamy heat and bathed me so tenderly in the big, marble tub. His hands on me in the soapy water... God, it made me so hot! I shook my head to try and dispel the unsettling images.

“I thought I might,” I answered him as coolly as I could. With a shrug, he took a bundle of clothes and his toothbrush and disappeared into the bathroom, leaving me sitting on the side of the bed trying not to think too much.

When he emerged from the bathroom, I felt a helpless kind of lust consume me. He was wearing only pajama bottoms and his muscular chest was bare. Beads of water clung to the little patch of black curly hair between the flat copper disks of his nipples and moisture curled the thick black hair at the nape of his neck. He looked absolutely mouthwatering and I realized I was staring at him only when he snapped his fingers in front of my face.

“Kate?” he said, looking concerned. “You all right?”

“Fine, Paxton,” I mumbled, wishing he wouldn’t use my first name when he was half dressed like that. It seemed too intimate somehow ... too dangerous. I ducked past him into the bathroom and locked the door firmly, lecturing myself the entire time about how I had to get over this ridiculous obsession with my soon to be ex-partner. We had spent one night together and it would have to be enough. There was use wishing for more.

I filled the tub and sank into the soapy water, trying to relax and calm down. It occurred to me that maybe giving myself an orgasm would help relieve some of the tension that was coiled tighter than a wire inside my stomach. Despite my success with masturbation the second time Phillip had made love to me, I hadn’t tried it since even though I ached for him every night. I think I was afraid to try—afraid that if he wasn’t somewhere near me I would still be unable to help myself.

I slipped my fingers beneath the hot, soapy water and spread the lips of my sex, gasping under my breath as the heat invaded me intimately. Just the water’s caress was almost enough to make me come—I was that hot and needy. But when I tried to touch myself, I found I couldn’t.

This time it wasn’t the old hurtful memories that kept me from giving myself release though ... it was the new memories. Memories of Phillip and I together. The way he had touched me, tasted me and shared the taste of my sex with me when he kissed me. The way he had made love to me, roughly at first the way I needed him to, and then so gently afterwards, helping me climb slowly towards an explosive orgasm that made me feel weak and drained. The way he curled his body around mine, sheltering me and making me feel so protected and loved. The images just kept coming, flashing before my eyes until I couldn’t see for the blur of hot tears that obscured my vision.

I tried to stifle a sob, hoping Phillip couldn’t hear me in the next room. Why did it have to be this way? The misery I was feeling gripped me so tightly that I couldn’t breathe. I wanted to curl into a ball and never feel anything again. But curling into a ball in a tub big enough to do the backstroke in is not the best idea as I quickly found out. The

sides of the big marble tub were slippery and my head slid under the bubbles. I flailed, taking in a lungful of water and a huge gout of foamy bathwater slopped into the floor.

I sat up, choking and gasping.

Phillip pounded on the door. “McKinley? Kate? Are you all right? What’s going on in there?”

“Nothing, Paxton,” I yelled, or that was what I meant to yell, anyway. What came out was a strangled choking sound.

“That’s it,” I heard him mutter. “I’m coming in there.”

“No!” I shouted, just as he broke in the door. I was so mortified that I took a deep breath and ducked back under the water, just wanting him to go away. Phillip didn’t take the hint.

With a panicked shout of, “Kate!” he reached into the tub and dragged me up and out, his large hands digging into my slippery upper arms. “Kate, are you all right?” He pulled me close, heedless of the fact that I was dripping all over both him and the bathroom floor. I felt a flood of unwanted desire rush through me as my naked wet body touched his warm, bare chest.

The differences in our size had never been more apparent. Always in our working relationship, Phillip had been careful not to make me feel small or weak. Oh, there was some joking about him always driving because my legs weren’t long enough to reach the pedals and silly things like that, but he had never used his own height or the size difference between us to his own advantage. Maybe his obvious panic over my safety made him ignore the silent rules so long held between us, or maybe he just wanted to touch me.

He picked me out of the bathtub as though I weighed no more than a feather and cradled me close to his chest, holding me uncomfortably tight. I felt helpless in his arms—it wasn’t a feeling I could afford to indulge in just then.

“Phillip, stop it!” I protested, fighting to be free of him. I was naked and wet and outraged that he should see me like this. The last time we had been in this position he had been about to make love to me and I couldn’t forget it or ignore the burning shame I felt when I thought of how he had washed and dried me like a child and then touched me and tasted me so gently.

“Are you all right? I thought you were drowning.” The genuine look of panic on his face was almost enough to make me forget my pain and shame—almost.

“I was just taking a bath,” I said with as much dignity as I could manage while being held wet and naked in his arms. I wanted with all my heart to cling to him, to bury my face in his neck and never let go. Instead, I pushed away. “Do you mind?” I asked coolly, trying to cover my breasts with one hand and my lower half with the other.

A look of pure frustration passed over his sharp features. “Hell, yes I mind.” His voice was low and rough as he was still holding me as though I was a child. He seemed completely unwilling to release me.

“Phillip,” I said, almost pleading now. “Put me down! I’m getting you all wet and besides, I’m cold and ... and naked.” I blushed as I said it, trying not to look in his hazel eyes, now dark with emotion.

“Why should I care if you’re naked, Kate? I’ve seen it all before or did you forget?” he growled.

“How could I forget when you keep throwing it up in my face?” I said angrily. “Put

me down right now!”

“No.” He strode across the room and tugged one of the large white towels from the rack to wrap around me, but he still refused to put me down.

“What are you doing?” I demanded. Who was this man and what had he done with my partner? Phillip was always sensitive to me, always nondemanding, always gentle. Who was this caveman that was carrying me around like a favorite bone he refused to be parted with?

“Drying you off.” He wrapped me in the towel and carried me into the sitting room. He sat on the couch, holding me in his lap and refused to let me go. “We’re going to get to the bottom of this right now, Kate. The way I see it, you’re planning on dissolving our partnership as soon as we get back so I’ve got nothing left to lose.”

“You’re going to lose your testicles in a minute if you don’t let me go,” I threatened. “Or how about your freedom when I call the local PD and report an assault?”

His face was grim. “Fine, report me to the police and charge me with anything you want. I don’t care. I don’t even care if I go to prison—no place could be worse than being at the station without you. Only seeing you in passing in the halls, working with some other lucky bastard who doesn’t deserve to be anywhere near you, to touch you, to hold you...” The look in his hazel eyes was almost wild and his grip on me was growing tighter and tighter.

“Phillip?” I pulled back from him as much as I could, looking at him warily. Why was he talking like this? He was acting like a jealous lover, acting like I was leaving him for another man instead of taking a transfer.

“Goddamnit!” he burst out, his voice breaking with rage and pain. “I can’t stand it anymore, Kate. I never would have done what we did—never would have made love to you if I knew it meant losing you forever. I know I’m only making this harder, but I can’t help it and I don’t know any other way to say it.”

The look in his dark eyes was pure anguish. “I love you. I’ve always loved you, I think, almost from when they first put us together. I ... I understand if you don’t return those emotions and I respect that but...” He shook his head. “But I can’t let you go without a fight. You’re the most important person in my life—without you I’m incomplete, crippled...” He closed his eyes tightly, unable to continue.

“Stop it!” I took his face in my hands, heedless now of my state of undress. He looked so unhappy, so utterly miserable. But it was his words that were making me feel like my heart was beating in every part of my body at once. “Look at me,” I demanded, feeling my voice wobble and crack. “Look at me and say that again.”

He looked at me, his eyes suspiciously bright, his jaw tensed as though for a blow, waiting, I supposed, for my rejection. But he was brave enough to say what I needed to hear.

“I love you,” he said simply. “And this last month and a half has been the worst in my life. Watching you slip through my fingers ... feeling you go and not being able to do anything about it.” He closed his eyes again. “God, Kate ... I’m so sorry, I know you don’t feel ... feel the same. And here I am just making it harder.” He started to push me off his lap.

I clung to him, wrapping my arms around his neck and refusing to be dislodged.

“Do you mean it?” I asked, still unable to let his words penetrate my heart. “Really mean it? You’re not just saying it to keep ... to keep us together at work? Because I’ve

realized something, Phillip—it's all or nothing with us and it doesn't seem to work any other way. I've tried, but I can't go back. If I can't have you completely then I can't have you at all."

"Don't want me is more like it," he sighed deeply, looking troubled. "Our relationship is more important to me than anything in the world. I love you, I can't help that. And I shouldn't have made love to you that night. I should have resisted the impulse to take us to the next level. But, Kate..." He ran a hand through his dark hair. "If you only knew how long I've wanted you—not just once, but for the rest of our lives."

What he was saying was finally sinking into my heart as well as my brain. "Then why did you say it was just for one night?" I demanded, looking at him closely. "Why make me believe you only were just helping me out as a friend?"

He blew out a breath in frustration. "You seemed so concerned about how it would affect our professional relationship—I thought it was what you wanted to hear. I thought I could tell you the next day that I wanted more from you—more for us. But the next day you were so cold. You'd already built a barrier of ice I couldn't get through. It was like I could see you, but I couldn't touch you."

The pain in his voice was more than I could bear. I snuggled closer to him, winding my arms around his neck and pressing as much of my skin as I could get against his, heedless of my lack of clothing.

"I love you, too," I whispered, daring to let myself say out loud what I had felt for years. "I was ... being careful. I thought you meant what you said about it being a one night thing—that you were only helping me out as a good friend and partner."

"I *want* to be your friend and partner," he whispered into my hair. "But I want to be so much more than that too. I've wanted it for years but I've been too much of a coward to do anything about it. I was too afraid of losing you." He hugged me tightly to him and his large warm hands caressed my bare back in a slow, delicious rhythm. "Then when it looked like I was losing you anyway..." He shrugged and settled me more comfortably in his lap. "I figured I had nothing left to lose. Nothing could be worse than a life without you."

"Oh, God." I sighed, not sure whether to laugh or cry. What a comedy of errors this last month and a half had been. I kissed his neck, breathing in the warm, spicy scent of him, enjoying the way he made me feel so safe and secure nestled in his arms. He was the only person in the world I could let down my guard around, the only man that could take away my pain with just a word—a touch. And how I had missed touching him—missed those big hands on my body, even in the most casually affectionate gestures.

"I missed you," I whispered, rubbing my palms over the smooth skin of his back, relishing the feel of him being so close. I kissed his neck again, opening my lips this time to taste the delicious saltiness of his skin against my tongue.

"Kate," he nearly groaned, pushing me away from him. "You've got to stop that if you don't want things to go too far. I haven't been able to touch you in over a month. My ... my control is not great right about now."

"Who said I wanted you to be in control?" I demanded, leaning down to press a soft, suggestive kiss to the corner of his mouth. I could feel my damp towel slipping under the restless motions of his hands. He was still touching me, still caressing the bare smooth skin of my lower back despite his words and I could feel the hard ridge of his cock digging into the back of my thigh. He was right—his control was close to breaking.

Suddenly, I wanted it to break, wanted it to break completely and totally, making him mine forever.

I pressed another kiss to the corner of his mouth and then took his lips in an aggressive kiss I knew he wouldn't be able to resist. Phillip's low moan as his mouth opened and his tongue found its way between my lips let me know I was on the right track. His large, warm hands roved over my body, making me hot, making me need him. The towel was around my waist now and my breasts, the nipples aching hard, were pressed against the flat muscular planes of his chest.

"Phillip," I whispered, pulling back from the kiss only when I thought we both might die of oxygen starvation. "Phillip, I need you."

"What?" He looked at me, his hazel eyes unfocused, dazed. His hands had encircled my waist and risen seemingly of their own volition to rest right under my breasts.

The warm touch sent shivers all through me, making my nipples so tight I felt like I might explode with wanting him. "I need you," I repeated. Not wanting him to have any doubt what I meant, I reached down and deliberately placed his hands on my breasts. We both groaned aloud at the contact. It felt so good—so *right* to have his hands on me again. But I needed so much more.

"I need you to touch me—to take me." I reached down and pulled the bunched towel from around my waist and dropped it carelessly on the floor. Spreading my legs, I straddled his waist, one knee on either side of him, completely naked and unashamed. I ground myself against him, feeling my wet center open as I pressed myself down onto the hard ridge of his cock which was straining against the thin fabric of the pajama bottoms he wore.

"Phillip," I breathed in his ear. "I need you to *fuck* me."

"God, Kate," he groaned, pulling me even closer. "You don't know what you're doing to me. You driving me crazy!"

"I want to drive you crazy," I told him softly. "I want to make you as crazy for me as I am for you."

"Well, you're succeeding." He kissed me again, earnestly, hungrily, one hand leaving my breasts to twine itself in my hair and hold me still for his assault on my mouth. When he pulled back, his hazel eyes were serious. "I want you Kate," he said, his deep voice hoarse with emotion. "More than anything or anyone I've ever wanted in my entire life. But I need to know something before we go any further."

"Anything," I whispered through kiss-swollen lips. My body felt like it was on fire and I knew Phillip had to be fighting the same surges of emotion and need that I was, yet he looked perfectly serious as he held me close in his arms and looked into my eyes.

"I need to know that this is more than just for tonight," he told me, searching my eyes carefully. "I need to know it now before we go too far. I don't want just another one-night stand with you, Kate. And I don't want to go back to just being friends and coworkers. I ... I lost you once. I couldn't stand to lose you again." His voice nearly broke on the last words. "I need to know this is forever."

"Forever," I echoed his words, feeling an emotion so deep I had no name for it breaking inside me at the thought. It was like an underground spring suddenly gushing forth to irrigate the dry and thirsty landscape of my soul. For a moment I was so happy I couldn't talk.

"Kate? How do you feel about that?"

Phillip was still looking at me anxiously.

I realized that I hadn't really answered his question.

"Yes, Phillip," I said softly, running a hand through his thick dark hair and looking into his eyes. "Yes, I want us to be together forever. I want that more than I can put into words."

With a muffled moan that might have been my name, he crushed me suddenly to him, pressing me so close I felt like we might merge into one person before long.

Again the feeling of rightness swept over me. This was where I belonged, right here in my partner's arms. In my lover's arms. And I never wanted to leave.

"Katie ... Kate," Phillip was murmuring against my neck, his breath hot and sweet on my bare skin.

I shifted in his lap and the movement pressed my wet, open sex against his thickness once more, reminding me that we had unfinished business.

"I love you," I whispered in his ear, placing a hot kiss just below it. "I love you and I want you, Phillip. I want you inside me." I pushed his pajama bottoms down and rubbed my wet, open sex against the shaft of his cock, making sure he couldn't mistake my meaning.

Phillip groaned again, a low needful sound that seemed to pierce right through me. I felt his hands on my breasts once more but then, inexplicably, he withdrew.

"What?" I looked at him, confused and needy and so hot I could barely breathe.

"What, Phillip? Why did you stop?"

"Kate..." He shivered against me, obviously fighting some battle within himself. "I want you too, more than I can tell you. But, well, I want to do it right. I want to make love to you for a long time. Want to take it slow," he shook his head. "But I'm afraid I can't do that right now. I'm too hot—I need you too much," he gave a low, frustrated groan. "God, all I can think about is spreading your legs and ramming into you, but I don't want to hurt you."

I took his hand and placed it between my legs. "Feel me, Phillip. Feel how hot and wet and ready I am for you," I told him, pressing myself against his palm. "You won't hurt me," I whispered, needing him so badly I could scarcely get the words out. "I want what you want."

"Katie," he groaned against my neck. I felt two long, strong fingers slide into my heated sex as he tested my wetness, my readiness to take him. I bit my lip to keep from screaming as his thumb rubbed restlessly over my swollen clitoris. I had never been so wet and ready in my life. He was driving me *crazy*.

"Please, Phillip," I gasped, digging my fingers into his broad shoulders. "Please, I need you."

"All right." His voice was stronger, more certain as though he finally believed what I was telling him. He removed his fingers, making me almost cry with the loss of sensation. But almost immediately, they were replaced with the blunt head of his cock.

I reached between us and took his shaft in my hand, marveling at its hot, silky texture as I rubbed the broad mushroom-shaped head against my slick open sex. Phillip and I both gasped at the intimate contact and then I was spreading my legs even wider and pressing him into the wet quivering entrance to my body. I felt like I would die if I couldn't have him inside me—I need him so badly. Needed to feel him taking me again in the way that only he could.

It didn't take long for Phillip to take control of the situation. He grasped my hips and pulled me onto him, reaching the bottom of my channel and grinding against me in one smooth, long thrust. "Kate!" he gasped when he was completely sheathed inside me. "Oh, God, Kate. I've been needing this for so long—needing to *fuck* you."

"Do it!" I moaned, grinding my hips against him. I loved the way the base of his cock rubbed against my sensitive clit, loved the way his thick shaft opened me wide, the lips of my sex spread to accommodate him. I felt hot, wanton, completely out of control. I wanted everything he could give me. Wanted it *now*. When Phillip's large hands tightened on my hips, I knew I was about to get it.

With an inarticulate groan, he pulled almost all the way out of me and thrust back in again, pressing hard so that the head of his cock was kissing the mouth of my womb. God, it felt *so good*. I gripped his shoulders and pressed hard against the couch with my legs, helping him build the rhythm of our need. Each thrust of his cock inside me seemed to send a jagged shard of electricity through my veins, lighting my nerves and making me work even harder for what I knew was coming.

"Kate..." Phillip gasped my name through gritted teeth. His thickness inside me was swelling with every thrust and I sensed that he was holding off his own orgasm as well as he could because he wanted me to come first. "Come for me," he told me, pressing as deeply into me as he could get. "I want to feel that beautiful cunt coming all over me while I fuck you, Kate."

"Oh ... oh, God ... oh, Phillip!" I was gasping, crying his name, clawing at his shoulders as he worked himself inside me, filling me with relentless pleasure. His words as much as his actions were sending me over the edge. As if sensing that, Phillip began to talk to me again.

"Katie," he murmured in my ear as he thrust into me again. "Katie, you're such a good girl. Such a good girl for spreading your legs and taking all of my thick cock inside you. I love to fuck that sweet little cunt, love to feel you squeezing me, so tight and hot and wet. Such a *good* girl." On the last sentence, he gave a particularly hard thrust that I could feel in the depths of my soul. It was too much—it was just enough.

Crying and gasping, I gave in to the pleasure and found myself falling over the edge of orgasm and into oblivion.

Falling into forever.

\* \* \* \*

It took a minute for me to realize that someone was calling my name in a soft, concerned voice.

"Kate? Katie? Are you all right?"

I opened my eyes to see Phillip staring at me intently, looking a little bit worried. I suddenly realized I was no longer straddling him. Instead I was wrapped in a blanket and curled on his lap like a little girl. Large, warm, anxious hands were stroking through my hair with a touch so gentle and loving it nearly brought tears to my eyes.

"I'm okay," I whispered, struggling to sit up. Phillip wouldn't let me. "What happened?" I demanded.

"You actually passed out for a minute or two. Scared the hell out of me," he stroked the hair out of my face, his eyes never leaving mine. "Are you sure you're feeling all right?"

“As long as us making love just now wasn’t a dream,” I said, struggling to sit up again. This time he helped me, but kept one long, protective arm around my waist.

“No dream,” he said softly. “Oh, Kate, I’ve wanted this for so long. Wanted the right to be with you and hold you. To be more than a friend and a partner.”

“Me too,” I admitted shyly, snuggling to get a little closer to his big body. He was still wearing his pajama bottoms but no shirt and I loved the feel of his bare chest against my cheek.

“But I was always afraid if I went to far—pushed you too hard—that I might lose you forever. I nearly did, Kate.” Phillip’s hazel eyes were solemn. “I can’t believe how close I came to doing just that.”

“Hush.” I reached up to place a finger against his lips. “We didn’t lose each other,” I told him when he kissed my finger. “We had a rough time for a while there—mostly because for two highly educated people, we’re so damn stupid. But we made it through.”

Phillip laughed, a deep rumble that vibrated through his chest and shook my whole body. “You’re right about that. When I think of how dumb I was, thinking it would make you feel better if you thought our first time was a one-night stand...” He shook his head ruefully. “I was a complete idiot.”

“Hey, you’re not the only one that was dumb, partner. I have to share the blame on this one.” I grinned and patted his chest. “But before we turn this into a dumb and dumber contest, we need to remember one thing—we’re together now and I’m never letting you go.”

“And here I thought *I* was the one that had *you*.” He tightened his grip around my waist to make his point and looked down at me, still smiling. “And to think it all came around because of an X-rated dream. Well, at least we fixed that.”

“Not completely,” I told him, shaking my head,

“What?” Phillip frowned down at me, concerned all over again. “Do you mean you’re still having it? It’s still bothering you?”

“Not *the* dream, no,” I told him, snuggling closer to press my face against his chest and listening to the comforting sound of his heart drumming in my ears. “But I have a feeling I’m going to be having X-rated dreams about you for a long time to come. You just be sure you’re around to make them come true.”

“Kate,” he whispered softly, tilting my chin to look into my eyes. “I love you so much. I’m going to make sure *all* your dreams come true from now on.”

## **The End**

### **About the Author:**

Evangeline Anderson is a registered MRI tech who would rather be writing. She is thirty-something and lives in Florida with a husband, three cats and a college-age sister but no kids because enough is enough already. She wrote erotic stories for her own gratification for a number of years before it occurred to her to try and get paid for it. To her delight, she found it was actually possible to get money for having a dirty mind and she has been writing science fiction and paranormal erotica steadily ever since.

Evangeline welcomes reader comments. Visit her on the web at



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