



Last Chance

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Chapter One

“Hi, Mrs. Hadley,” Catie said, kissing her cheek. “Mr. Hadley,” and she kissed his. “I hear congratulations are in order.” She hadn’t been to Ted and Dana Hadley’s house in more than fifteen years. Since she was twelve. It was very surreal.

“Thank you, dear. We’re very proud of him. Our boy, a lieutenant! It’s very exciting.”

“I can imagine,” she said, smiling and nodding. She wished she could’ve been as excited.

“Would you like some cake, dear?”

“No, thank you.”

“But you have to. It’s such a special day.”

Not that special. But she smiled and said, “Yeah. It is. Perfect time for cake then, huh?” She wished Eric would hurry and get home.

Mrs. Hadley cut her a piece of cake the size of which she could’ve driven off in but, sport that she was, she took it and the little plastic fork and went to work.

“Where’s your new boyfriend? I thought you said he was coming.”

“Oh,” she said stuffing a piece of cake in her mouth, talking around it was rude and made her difficult to understand and for that... she was grateful. “He wanted to come, but something came up.”

Mrs. Hadley brushed bits of cake from the front of Catie’s blouse, “Well, so long as you could make it,” she said.

Catie moved slowly away from Mrs. Hadley. She’d always loved Eric’s mother but couldn’t stand being so near her just then. She felt awful. She should go home.

She could leave Eric a note, then she wouldn’t have to see him. This horrid, horrid thing would be over and she could get on with her life. She could leave without telling him anything. She could do that.

And let somebody else find the note? Let him get found out because she was a chicken shit? She couldn’t. They had history. They’d been friends as children; she’d lived next to him.

She’d hardly seen him since. Maybe once. At the grocery store.

“If it isn’t little Catie Simpson,” a voice said from behind her. She jumped and spun

around.

“Eric!” she said and her plate flew out of her hand. It landed on the table, luckily, and managed to look as if it was tossed there casually.

“Who else?” he asked, throwing an arm around her shoulder and steering her toward the back garden. By the time he said, “And I thought the party would be dull,” they were there.

For an instant she thought, *Great! Perfect place to talk*, except the garden wasn’t nearly private enough.

“Eric,” she said, turning into his arm so that it wrapped very comfortably around her neck, “is there some place we could go to be private?” She felt her body start to melt against his and indulged the feeling for a few moments before gaining control of herself and pushing away.

“Catie Simpson,” he said, a hint of surprise in his voice. He grinned down at her, a little lecherous and a lot sexy. “How private? You wanna get out of here?”

“No, I can’t,” she said, wishing she could, “I have a boyfriend. But I do need to talk to you. And about something I think you’d like to keep quiet.”

His smile slipped slightly. “Something you think *I’d* like to keep quiet?”

“Yes.”

His eyes were curious. “Alright,” he said. “Let’s go.” He grabbed her hand and pulled her behind him through his parents’ house. He nodded and smiled to the people calling out congratulations. At the far end of the house, in a hallway, they stopped. Eric opened the door to a bathroom and pushed her in. He looked up and down the hallway and entered behind her. He pulled the door closed. “Is this private enough?” He grinned.

“Yeah,” Catie said, and took a deep breath. “I guess there isn’t any good way to say this, not really, but.... What I mean—“

“Spit it out, Cate.”

She looked at him. Then at her feet. “I know about the job.”

“You know what about what job?”

“I know you didn’t get it. I know that your parents planned this party because they thought you would get it and I know you didn’t.”

He put his hands on his hips. “And what? You’re going to tell them?”

He didn’t look happy. He looked disgusted, disappointed. Catie wanted to curl up into a

little ball and disappear. Into the floor, the linoleum, burrow into the wood underneath; just disappear from the situation entirely.

“No,” she said, quickly. “No. I wouldn’t tell anybody. But Ronald might. He lives a street over, he was invited to the party, too and he was going to come, make a scene, be an asshole. I talked him out of it, but.... You know Ronald. He’s not going to keep his promotion a secret from everybody in the neighborhood. I mean, you can’t really expect him to.

“I thought maybe if you told people first it wouldn’t be so bad if he came in behind you and announced it second.”

He stood, unmoving for long seconds, and Catie started to get a little nervous. To feel a little twitchy. She wasn’t comfortable standing around, waiting for him to do something. Make some move. Call her an asshole, a liar, a stupid cock-sucking bitch, something, anything, but she wanted him to speak.

He took two large steps across the room, backing her up against a wall. “Do you think that’s funny?”

“No, no,” she said, trying to back up even though there was nowhere to go.

“Do you think it’s funny to threaten a cop? In a cop’s house? His parents’ fucking house?”

“No. I didn’t mean to threaten you. That’s not what I meant at all...”

His hands shot out, undoing her zipper and pushing her pants to the floor. “You want to threaten somebody?” he said, ripping her underwear from her body. They were cotton, a thong and fairly cheap so she wasn’t terribly upset by their demise, but the abruptness of it, the sound of them tearing, it really turned her on. “Maybe I’ll threaten *you*. See how you like it.” He stood on the crumpled puddle of jeans pooled around her feet. “Step out of them. Now.”

“It’s not me,” she said, stepping out of the jeans and feeling a little breathless and a lot hot. “I won’t tell anybody.” Though she really didn’t want him to stop what he was doing, she did want him to stop thinking badly of her. “My boyfriend, Ronald Smith,” she said, trying to remind him as much as herself, “the one who got the promotion, *he* might not keep quiet about it.”

What am I doing? He knew she wouldn't tell, he understood what she was saying, and he'd planned to fill the neighborhood in on the status of his promotion. Or lack of one.

But from the moment he saw Catie standing in the middle of his parents' bathroom, looking so deliciously out of place and vulnerable, trying to save him, it was all he could do not to rip off her clothes. Instead, he'd spent an endless amount of time trying to think up a reason to.

Now that he'd chanced on an opportunity, slight though it might be, Eric was going to take it. If she said no he'd stop, but he prayed she wouldn't. Eric had fantasized about her since her status as 'girl next door.' When he'd seen her today, after so many years, it brought back a lot of memories. A lot of fantasies. Unfulfilled fantasies. He wanted her. He wanted her so badly he could taste it.

Or rather, he wanted to.

He dropped to his knees, parted her cunt lips and licked into her. Two of his fingers caressed the hole around her pussy before sliding in.

His hard-on doubled in size when his fingers came in contact with her heat. She was so wet. She wanted it; she wanted it as badly as he did. In his thankfulness he sucked her clit into his mouth and nipped lightly at it.

She moaned and he finger fucked her against the wall in his parents' bathroom.

"Eric, ohhh. Oh, Eric." Her voice was tight, concentrated.

He pulled his mouth from her and slid his fingers out to caress slowly, carelessly, the same nub he'd removed his lips from.

He gained his feet and put his other hand on her breast. He touched it, delicately at first, the way he thought a breast should be touched. He ran the pad of his thumb across a nipple that was already rock solid. When it poked from her shirt by almost a full inch he lowered his head and suckled her nipple through her shirt.

"Ohh," she said. "Oh, oh yes, oh..." Her whole body was tight, she was so clenched he knew she was on the edge. And he stopped her from coming, kept her teetering there, desperate.

She was so hot. He knew she would be. He'd always known she would be. He rubbed her wetness over her clit and around her opening and felt her quiver in time to her moans. Finally moving his mouth from the most perfectly erect nipple he'd ever encountered before in life, he

backed up and looked at it. There was a large wet circle dead center of her left breast. Her eyes were closed, her breathing ragged and her legs looked ready to buckle.

She was standing against the wall in his parents' house, in their bathroom, her shirt stained by his kiss and she was wearing no pants or panties. Her eyes were half closed in ecstasy.

"You're unbelievable." He grabbed the hem of her shirt and pulled it over her head, her bra, a little black thing, went flying over his shoulder. "You're so hot. God, I want to fuck you."

Her eyes said, "Do it, do it," but her lips didn't move.

"Tell me you want it," he said, unzipping his pants. He kicked them off the ends of his feet, unbuttoned his shirt and pulled it off. "Tell me you want me. Say it."

"I-I can't," she said, sounding miserable. "I'm dating somebody."

"Ronald Smith," he said. "My new boss." He grinned. "I won't hold it against you. So you've got lousy taste in men," he reached a hand forward to touch, skin to skin, the breast he'd teased from the other side of her shirt. "You can't be held totally responsible. It's not as if you chose him over me. I wasn't around."

She smiled. "Cocky. You always were cocky."

"I'll show you cocky," he said stepping closer and dropping his hand. He grabbed his dick and tickled her hole with it. "I want it," he said. "Do you?"

She wanted it. More than she had any right to. But she couldn't say yes. She couldn't. She was seriously dating another man. A man she would probably marry. Probably. Eventually.

But this was Eric. She'd had a crush on him, a painful crush on him, since she was eight, easy. Maybe seven, and here she was, inches from mind-blowing sex, already feeling a little bit like a jellyfish, and she was about to say no. Could she really do that? Really? Especially considering how nice it felt to have the hair on his chest scratch up against the skin on her sensitive breasts and to have his breath hot on her neck, oh... his lips on her neck... "Ohhhh," she moaned when he started to suck on that spot where neck met collar bone.

It felt good. It was so nice. His hands moved to her bottom and gripped her under the cheeks, "Ooh" she said when he picked her up and swung her around to sit on the counter next to

the sink.

“Never mind saying yes. It doesn’t matter. I don’t give a shit. If you’ve got a big enough problem with this you can just say no,” and he grabbed his penis and pushed it into her.

“Uh!” he said, and his eyes rolled back in his head.

But then she said, “Wait.”

“You’re right,” he said and pulled her off the sink. He swung her around so that she was facing the mirror. “Oh! You could see me the whole time,” she said half laughing until she felt his dick come at her from behind. “Wait a minute,” she said, but he said, “Just relax. You’ll like it.”

“No, I don’t think this is a good idea, Eric,” but his penis kept coming, slowly pushing in and pulling out, giving himself time to lubricate her. “Relax, Catie. Relax. You’ll like it.”

But his voice was starting to sound harsh and he started making the yummy man noises of sex, really, really good sex, and she thought maybe it was because she kept saying she’d like to rethink the thing.

That thought made her feel powerful. That she knew he would never make her do something she was dead set against made it a thousand times more intense. “I think we better try it a different way, Eric. Maybe anal just isn’t our thing,” but she was smiling. She was getting into it.

“Oh God,” he said, pushing into her a little more forcefully than before, almost as if he were desperate to get himself inside. It hurt a little bit, but was softened by the sounds he was making. They were so sexy, it made her so hot, she put her fingers to her clit and rubbed herself. The last inch of his penis was pushed forcefully into her hole, “God, yes,” he said and then, “Oh, oh, oh, oh, yes. Yes,” as he pumped slowly behind her and picked up speed. Her fingers picked up speed, too. She wondered vaguely what it looked like from his end and wished she could see it. It was probably really hot.

“God, you’re so fucking hot,” he said, answering her question as he plowed into her. One of his hands slid down her back and the other grasped her hip. “So... fucking... hot...” he punctuated his words with thrusts and picked up speed.

He was coming at her at roughly the speed of a 747 and she was getting off on it just as much as he was, flicking her clit with ferocity. “Oh!” she said, trying to hold herself back, trying

to wait for him, “Oh!” but she couldn’t, it was coming and she had to take it now or lose it. “Yes! Yes! Yes!” and her finger stilled, and her body clenched around him, and he hollered his release in less than coherent English and slowly pumped away the last of his climax into her bottom hole.

He pulled out and was already stepping into his boxers when she turned around. He didn’t look at her. He grabbed his pants and turned his back on her.

What? she thought, but didn’t want to embarrass herself with a bunch of ‘What’s wrong? Is it me? Are you regretting we did this?’ crap.

Instead, she tried to pull on her own underwear but her leg went right through. Then she remembered how’d they’d been ripped from her body and she almost moaned, but seeing Eric already zipping up his jeans while she stood there naked rattled her. She grabbed up the remaining bits of her clothing, the ones that weren’t torn, and pulled them on at warp speed. Her bra whizzed from her fingers, around her back and was in position and closed in less than ten seconds. It took him a while to do up all the little buttons on his shirt but hers was a t-shirt and went over her head in no time at all. The two finished dressing in almost the same breath.

Catie wanted to say “HA!” but looked at him questioningly instead.

He turned back to her. “You’re a sweet fuck,” he said, leering a little. “If your boyfriend wants to tell on me now, he can. But be sure he knows I have something on him, too.”

Her mouth dropped open. No way was that revenge sex! No way. “But I think what I have on him trumps whatever he can say about me, don’t you?” He smiled at her and she wanted to slap him, he looked so smug and self-righteous.

“You’re such a bastard.”

He shrugged and reached around her to open the door. “Just make sure he knows,” he said, “I wouldn’t want him making any decisions without having all the facts.”

And then she did hit him. Hard, but the blow bounced off his back as he walked away.

Eric was disgusted. With himself, with Catie, with Ronald. He’d had feelings for Catie for as long as he could remember. That she’d come to his house for the first time in about fifteen

years, her only reason because she thought he was a phony and that her boyfriend, her fucking boyfriend Ronald Smith, was better than him. He'd come to his parents' house dreading having to tell them he hadn't got the promotion, not to mention that he'd quit the force entirely, but then Catie'd shown up with her news. Little Catie Simpson from next door. Her *boyfriend* had gotten the job. Who would've thought?

So he'd fucked her. Not because of Ronald Smith, he hadn't given the asshole two thoughts the entire time he was pounding Catie in the ass... God she looked good bent over.

He'd only wanted her. It wasn't until after the deed that he started to think about the ramifications. That's when he'd really started to get mad. At her for letting him fuck her when she had a boyfriend, at himself for being such an idiot and wanting to fuck her anyway, and at Ronald because he'd beaten Eric to her.

He'd wanted to hurt her. He'd wanted to hurt Ronald. He'd wanted to hurt himself. And so he'd said what he said and now Catie would have to tell Ronald everything. He'd broken up their relationship as surely as if he'd walked over to the man's house and given Ronald a video of him and Catie fucking in his parents' bathroom.

He stopped outside in the middle of the road and wondered what Catie would do next. She would have to break up with Ronald, but what then? Would she go to one of her girlfriends? Would she start dating somebody else?

Would he have a chance with her?

No. Not after the way he'd behaved. He picked up his feet and walked the rest of the distance to his car. He'd call his parents from home and tell them about the promotion. He would've made a grand announcement, laughed the whole thing off in front of the whole neighborhood and made it easy on everyone... he let his head fall against his steering wheel.

He still had to make it easy for everyone. His parents would be mortified if he didn't. But first he'd make himself scarce for an hour or so. Give Catie a chance to leave so that he wouldn't have to see her looking at him as if he'd broke her heart.

Chapter Two

Catie leaned against the wall, trying to get control of herself. *Just breathe*, she told herself. *Just breathe*. In...out, in...out. When she started to feel better, she made her way into the kitchen and grabbed her purse. She tried not to make eye contact with anyone and stopped herself, with difficulty, from running out of the house.

She didn't want to see Eric, took great pains to avoid running into him. Then she heard someone say they saw him leave.

"He'll be back," Mrs. Hadley said. "He probably had important business to take care of, but he'll be back. Don't worry."

Catie breathed easier and sped from the Hadley's house. Less than five minutes after starting her car she was at Ronald's house, parked in the driveway. Her jeans smelled of sex so she pulled a skirt out of a shopping bag in the back of her car and threw it on. She'd deal with the jeans later.

She hadn't yet come to think of the place as theirs since none of her stuff (other than clothing) ever made it in. She'd moved in with Ronald 'officially' more than a week ago. Her apartment had been put back on the market and her stuff had moved into storage.

She threw her keys onto the table in the hallway. "Anybody home?" she called.

"In here, baby." Catie followed the sound of Ronald's voice into the game room where he and his friend Justin played pool.

"I'll just be upstairs," she said, turning to leave. Ronald stopped her.

"Wait," he said, "How was the party?"

"It was fine. He's going to tell everybody," she said, not ready to tell Ronald what had happened, but knowing she'd have to. Eventually.

"Don't go, baby, come here. I missed you." She walked over to him and let him pull her into a hug. "Justin has been looking forward to seeing you, too. Why don't you wait around a while and talk with us."

Catie knew what he meant but wasn't in the mood. "I'm tired. I just want to take a bath and go to bed."

He ran a hand up the back of her thigh, catching the bottom of her skirt and pulling it up over her ass. "What, no underwear?" he said, holding up the fabric with one hand and slapping her bare bottom in full view of Justin. "What do you say, Justin? Do you think she's playing coy or that she's really too tired."

"Definitely coy," he said, coming up behind her and sticking his fingers into her wetness. "Definitely." Justin rubbed his fingers along her slit and she felt herself get hot all over again. He felt the heat and wetness Eric had conjured and he used it to turn her on again. She rubbed up against Ronald's hard-on and gyrated her hips on Justin's fingers and said, "Well... I guess a quickie wouldn't hurt."

It might be the last time she got a chance to have a threesome. She'd decided she could no longer pretend with Ronald. She loved him, in a way. Not the right way. She loved the sex, she loved how open he was about threesomes, and she adored his kink, but as far as real serious feelings were concerned? No. She didn't think she did. Not really.

Ronald lifted her shirt up over her breasts. He unclipped the front fastening and got an immediate view. He turned her around so that Justin could see and touch while Ronald got undressed. He grabbed Catie by the hips and sat on the couch. "Come here, baby," he said, pulling her onto his lap and positioning himself to enter her. Justin stood a few feet away, watching.

Then Justin took off his shirt and pulled his pants down. He came over to her and pressed the head of his penis to her lips.

Catie opened her mouth and allowed him in. She sucked on him and stroked his balls as she jumped on Ronald's erection and listened to the men moan in stereo.

It would be the last time, she thought. Ronald deserved a decent goodbye. She'd give him that. She owed him that. He liked threesomes, and he particularly liked them when Justin was around. Their dicks were pulled from her and she was laid on the ground.

"Wait, wait, Justin," Ronald said, "I want her face. I want to fuck her face."

"No," she said as Ronald got to his knees on either side of her head, but he wasn't paying as much attention to what was coming out of her mouth as what he wanted to go into it.

"Open up," he said and pushed himself in with a groan. He pumped up and down on her face and she deep throat like he liked. His balls bounced off her chin and she felt another dick

poking at her pussy. When it slid in she heard another moan and the men were in concert with each other, pumping into her. Then she pushed on Ronald's hips and forced his body away from hers.

"What?" he said, breathing heavy.

"You'll see," she said. She wrapped her legs around Justin's hips and clamped him to her. "Stop," she said to him. "I want control. I want both of you to give me control this time."

The men looked at each other. Catie was usually the one willing to give up control, not take it on.

Justin nodded. "Yeah, sugar. Whatever you want. You have control." He pulled halfway out and then slammed back into her. "Uh," he said and did it again. He laid his head on her shoulder and said, "Are you sure? I could come right now, all over you. I want to. Let me, Catie, please let me." And he slowly stroked in and out of her a few more times as Ronald looked on and rubbed at the dick in his hand.

"This is so hot," he said.

Under normal circumstances Catie would have given in, let him and Ronald and herself come early but this was her last night with them. She had to grow up. Get serious about her life and find somebody she could love, not just lust after. Besides, she had an idea she'd been curious about for more than a year and she wanted to test it.

"No," she said. "If you're giving me control, you have to give it to me completely. Do you agree?" He slowly moved in and out of her. If Justin had his way she or he was going to blow before she ever had the chance to command. She couldn't let that happen so she disconnected herself from him and scrambled away. "Do you agree?" She crossed her legs when he started to crawl toward her. "I'm serious."

The guys looked at her. Agreed.

"Good," she said, standing and putting her hands on her hips, "good. Then Justin," she said, and moved to the pool table. She sat on it. "Come here. I want you to suck on my nipples and put only the tip of your dick inside me. For every time you let your dick slip inside, you will be punished. Now, get over here." He moved forward with a sort of feral grin on his face.

"You could've done this while we were on the floor," he said.

"No talking. And no, we couldn't, because I wanted to be on the pool table."

"I love kinky chicks," he said. "Love 'em," and latched onto one of her brown nipples with such grace and suction that she almost forgot to mention,

"That's one."

"One what?" he asked, switching to the other perfectly erect nipple.

"I said there was no talking. That's two." And let him lay her back onto the table. He positioned himself for entry but allowed only the head of his penis to intrude.

"Swing me around so that you're lying on the table with me," she said. "Don't slip."

He did as he was told but at the last moment he plunged into her. "Oops." He smiled and did it again. And again, and again.

"Punishment time," she said sweetly and motioned Ronald over. She knew he loved to watch so she'd let him for as long as Justin was well behaved. Now that he wasn't...

"Get some lube and put it in Justin's asshole," she told him. "And then put your dick in him, all the way to the balls, seven times."

Ronald looked intrigued but Justin didn't. "What?"

"What what? I'm in charge, and I'm in control. I want to see. You have to do it, Justin, you know you do. You know the rules."

He glared at her. "I'll get you for this."

She laughed. "I doubt it."

Ronald came back and started to lube up Justin's asshole. Justin looked Catie in the eyes the entire time.

"Don't slip," she said, starting to smile.

"What does it matter now?"

"Well, I could tell him to come inside of you."

He looked at her with something nearing disgust. She didn't think he meant it though.

"Oh my god," he said, closing his eyes and putting his head down on her chest.

"Don't clench. It'll just make it harder. Besides," she said, stroking his hair, "maybe you'll like it. Relax, relax."

"I can't relax. I have to hold myself up and out of you."

She smiled. *Oh, yeah.*

"Alright, come on in." He sank into her, and she felt (and saw, since Justin had moved his

head out of her line of vision) Ronald's first ragged entry. He was taking deep breaths; he looked like he was trying to control himself.

He really digs this, she thought. He loves it.

She knew it.

Well, she'd suspected.

"Slowly, go very slowly. Give him a chance to relax between inches." But she soon realized she shouldn't have worried. Justin's erection wasn't dying inside her, it was growing harder. When Ronald was all the way in, he sighed and slowly pulled out.

"Seven times," Catie said. "Remember, only seven times. And you," she said to Justin, "may fuck me slowly while he is fucking you."

He looked at her as if he could hit her but he was clearly enjoying himself. She felt the proof of it. "You're so big. You're really liking this, aren't you?"

He started fucking her then, slowly, occasionally forgetting to move because of the sensations Ronald's dick was giving him. "Five, six, seven," she counted off the last strokes of Justin's punishment.

"Fuck me, Justin. With your mouth. For every ten seconds it takes me to come, you get a punishment."

It wasn't fair of her. It was no longer a punishment to him and she, and he, knew it. Justin ate her and Catie came, but at the end she just made up a number. "You've racked up fifteen punishments. They'll be the same as before." He crawled off the table and bent over. His hands stretched and flexed on the green felt of the pool table. Ronald grabbed his hips and breathlessly pushed himself in.

Catie got on her knees and sucked Justin's dick as Ronald fucked him. She wanted Justin to enjoy it. She wanted him to come. Mostly she wanted him to come when he didn't want to. She'd help him along, show him something new, and he and Ronald would have a whole other world of sex to explore when she was gone.

"Oh, oh, oh," Justin said as she sucked on his cock and rubbed his balls and Ronald fucked him in the ass. But Ronald was about ready to blow, he was moaning and crooning and rubbing Justin's ass lovingly as he pumped away at it.

Come Justin, come, she thought desperately. She'd never be able to do this again and it

was something she'd fantasized about for ages. She wanted him to come like this, against his will, against his judgment, against his beliefs.

"Oh, oh, OH!" he said and she picked up speed, sucking and rubbing and sucking and rubbing. He came, and as he did he grabbed the back of her head and forced her to swallow as he pumped the last of his semen into her mouth. Ronald came moments later, pulling out just in time to spew his come onto Justin's ass rather than in it.

Catie took a shower before finding Ronald the second time. She found him, passed out naked on his bed, his feet in Justin's face. Justin was also naked.

That didn't take long, she thought.

She walked around the bed and nudged Ronald. "Ronald. Wake up, Ronald. I need to talk to you."

"Can't we talk later?" he asked, talking into his pillow.

"No," she said, "I have to leave." Her bags were packed and stacked in the foyer. She was glad now that she'd put most of her stuff in storage. It made the whole situation less awkward. It made leaving easier.

Ronald rolled over and tried, she could tell, to wake up. "I'm getting up," he mumbled. "I promise."

"Yeah, yeah," she said. "I've heard it all before. Get up!" She slapped him on the ass. Hard.

Justin started murmuring in his sleep and she said, "C'mon. I don't want to wake Justin up. I just need to talk to you for a minute."

"Alright, alright," he said and finally rolled out of bed. "God, that was hot, wasn't it? What got into you?" he asked as they ducked out of the room. "Since when do you get off on homo stuff?"

"I don't know. I thought the two of you might appreciate a little opening up. You guys are pretty boring when it comes to anal stuff. You've never even done it with me," she said, thinking of Eric earlier that afternoon. "I thought you might like it. Maybe it would add something to the

repertoire.”

“It will, baby. It definitely will.” He ran a finger up the crack in the back of her pants.

“That’s another thing I wanted to talk to you about,” she said when they got to the kitchen. “You want something to drink?” She opened the fridge and pulled out a soda for herself.

“I’m good,” he said, and sat at the table. “Besides, you haven’t told me what happened with that asshole, Eric Hadley. Telling everybody he got my job.”

“You know he didn’t tell everybody that. His parents did. And they started talking about it as soon as they found out he was up for the position.”

“I don’t care. I don’t like him.” He kicked a chair out for her when she moved around the table.

“Thanks. But why does it matter? He’s never done anything to you, has he? Why do you hate him so much?” And then she got it. Before Ronald shrugged, before he looked skittishly away, before he opened his mouth to attempt an answer, she understood.

“Ohmigod,” she said, “you like him, don’t you? But what about Justin?”

Odd she didn’t wonder about herself. Maybe it wasn’t odd. Maybe she’d always known the way it was with Ronald on some level. Maybe she’d always known their relationship would never be deeper than friendship and kinky sex that only took place when there was another man somewhere in the room. She was his... what? The dividing line, maybe the connecting line, between homo and hetero sex? But he was such a kink. Why would he care if he was a homo?

Justin.

But she didn’t think Justin was gay, not totally anyway. He would be mostly hetero with a taste for some kinky homo sex. Occasional.

Oh.

“Like him? What do you mean?” But his cheeks were red and he wouldn’t look her in the eye.

“So you don’t, then? You don’t like him like that?”

“No. Of course not,” he said.

Okay, she thought, and told him what happened between her and Eric that afternoon. As a friend, as an ex-lover, he deserved to know. “He may not think very much of me. He may not ever want to see me again. I mean, I threatened him. A person doesn’t get over something like

that easily.

“But I learned something from being with him, Ronald. I want more from a relationship than what we have. I really felt something with him, something different, important. At least at the beginning. The end felt like a version of everything I’ve ever done before, but at the beginning, the heat, remembering the times we’d shared, how I’d loved him when he was just the boy next door... I miss that. I want more emotion from sex than what we have, and I think,” she said, slowly, “that you do too.”

Ronald looked at her for a while without saying anything. He barely moved. Then, “I can’t believe you did that,” he said. “I can’t believe it.”

“You can’t believe I did what?” she asked, feeling defensive. “You can’t believe I fucked another guy? Isn’t that what I did an hour ago? And right in front of you... while you masturbated!” She took a deep breath. Tried to calm herself. Ronald had a right to be angry. “Don’t be a hypocrite, Ronald. Please. You don’t even want me.”

He played with the fringe on one of the placemats and said nothing.

She hated to leave him like that. He’d been such a huge part of her life for such a long time and now she was walking away from him—and Justin—forever. It didn’t seem real.

And for what? For the chance that Eric might one day come to care for her? What sort of bizarre fantasy land had she tripped off to?

This is not the act of a sane woman, she thought, but walked out of the kitchen anyway. She walked to the foyer, picked up her bags, and walked out of the house.

So she wasn’t sane. What else was new? She threw her bags in her car, walked to the other side and got in. She backed out of the driveway and forgot to look back at the house she had planned to call home. Years later, when she wondered about this, she’d realize she hadn’t forgotten to look back.

She just hadn’t wanted to.

Chapter Three

After pulling out of the driveway, Catie stopped. She drove around the block and stopped again.

She had no place to go. She'd given up her apartment, and all her stuff (what she didn't have bagged up in her car) was in storage. She'd grown up in town and had once had a lot of friends in the area, but they'd mostly all moved away. Who was she trying to kid? They weren't who she wanted to see anyway.

She wanted to see Eric.

It didn't matter. Catie didn't know where Eric lived, and even if she did, she was probably the last person he wanted to see.

If she tried to explain, would he listen? She could probably get his address from his parents. They'd give it to her. They loved her!

She could get his address, but could she use it? If she used it, would he listen? If he listened, would he care? She felt so conflicted, so scared and frustrated. She sat immobile, thinking in terms of 'why' and 'what if' for nearly half an hour. Then she shook herself, pushed her unanswered questions to the side, and put her car in gear.

First things first, she thought, and since she knew she could get his address, she decided to do that and face all other obstacles when and if she had to. Not before. *First things first*.

She arrived at the Hadley's to find the street just as packed with cars as when she'd left several hours earlier.

Odd.

She stepped out of her car. The sun was starting to set and it half-blinded her as she walked to the house so that she heard the couple speaking before she saw them.

"It's such a shame. He's such a good man. I'm sure he'd be great as a... sergeant? Corporal?"

"Lieutenant."

"Lieutenant. Yes, right. They're missing out. I talked to him, you know. He was very nice. I think I would trust him with my safety."

That was the moment when Catie burst into the shade and first saw them. A man and woman, both in their mid to late thirties, both in upscale, perfectly pressed clothing. The lady was wearing a dress that was billowy and blue, and she looked a little like a fairy minus the pointy ears, and he looked like he would be right at home with a cigar and in a smoking robe. As she looked at them, her perception of the world seemed to alter just slightly. Things like trees, peripheral vision, and her internal organs, got up, leaned to the right and swayed a little.

What the hell? she wondered when she tried and found she couldn't look away from them.

"What... what's going on?"

"You didn't hear?" the woman put a hand to her chest and let her shoulders arch forward in that polo event sort of way. She leaned in and said, "Well. You know how we're all supposed to be here to celebrate Eric Hadley's promotion to lieutenant? He didn't get it. And not only that," she said, leaning closer and making the world tilt another fifteen degrees, "he plans to quit working for the police department all together. He's retiring."

"Retiring?" Catie said, but her voice sounded far away. Of course, she knew it wasn't, because it was coming from her mouth which was *attached* to her but... it certainly *sounded* far away.

"Yes, retiring. From the police force. He'll still be working, just not there."

"Then where?"

"I don't know. I guess anywhere he wants. He's going into business for himself. He wants to be a private dick."

"Private eye, darling. Eye."

"What's the difference?" she asked, turning to the man.

"The body part the word attributes itself to."

The woman rolled her eyes at Catie. "He's sooo proper. It drives me nuts sometimes." She turned to the man. "I meant crazy."

"Ha ha," he said, and Catie started walking away from them. She inched slowly backward, and as she did the world righted itself. Five steps away and she felt distanced enough to move her eyes in any direction she wanted to.

She immediately looked at the ground.

"Thanks," she said, and turned toward the house.

"Anytime," she heard behind her, but she didn't turn. Catie didn't understand why she'd responded like that, but being so close to them felt really odd. Sort of like being sucked into a vacuum through your forehead.

Eric wanted to be a private eye? she thought, beginning to wonder where she'd heard that. Not from Ronald. Or Justin.

She couldn't remember. It was like trying to remember a dream five minutes after waking. It was there, she could feel it, she was holding it in her hands, but her hands were slippery, and it was getting away. And away. And then it was so gone she stopped wondering.

"Mrs. Hadley," she said, after swinging into the kitchen.

"Yes, dear?" she asked, not missing a beat.

"I was going to ask you a question. About Eric. I have something of his and I wanted to return it." Oh, that sounded bad. That didn't sound believable at all. Catie bit her lip and drummed her fingers on her leg. "Could you give me his address? So I can mail the stuff to him?"

"Why don't you just bring it by here sometime?"

"No, no, I wouldn't want to bother you."

"No bother," she said, smiling sweetly. "He comes over a couple times a month anyway. He could just pick it up."

"Well," she said, trying to think, "it's at my new place. I just moved, you see, and it would be easier for me to mail it..."

Mrs. Hadley looked at her suspiciously and Catie looked down to see she was biting her nail. While she was talking. She yanked the finger from her mouth and smiled.

"Okay," Mrs. Hadley said. "Let me find my purse and I'll look it up for you. Or... no, wait. Let me just get Eric. He can tell you."

"Eric?" Catie said. "I thought he left."

"No, no. It's his party; he's the guest of honor. Oh, Eric," she said, looking over Catie's shoulder, "there you are. Little Catie Simpson needs your address. Seems she has something of yours and she'd like to return it."

Catie spun around. Her worst nightmare. He was right there. She felt the blood rush from

her face.

Why did she insist on making an asshole of herself every time she saw him? Why? She was being punished. She'd done something terrible at some point in her wretched life, and she was being punished for it.

"Little Catie Simpson," he said, mimicking his mother. "She's got something I want? What?"

"Can I talk to you?" she asked him, gathering her courage around her.

He remained where he was, leaning on the door jam with arms crossed and looking at her. Then he straightened and said, "Sure."

He didn't look happy, he probably wasn't, but at least he'd talk to her. He led her to the back garden, the place he'd led her to initially when they were still in the joking, arm around the shoulder phase of the day. *Jesus*, she thought, *was that seriously today?*

Time was not as constant as it was supposed to be. Not when Eric was around. They reached the back yard and found themselves virtually alone. Except for a few birds in the bird feeder and a random squirrel running off with a dropped cheese doodle.

Nature, furry woodland creatures, Catie Simpson...she felt like the poor man's Cinderella.

The feel of Eric's hand lying on the small of her back brought her to the present. He directed her into a little nook in the garden where a small pond of goldfish was surrounded on three sides by wrought iron garden furniture. The fourth side housed a mini waterfall. She was placed at one end of a green lacquered loveseat and Eric sat next to her.

"What'd you want to talk about?" he asked.

It was her big chance. The moment when she could, once and for all, tell him everything. "I had a dream," she said, not knowing where she was going with that until, "and you were in it. You quit your job to become a private dick. Eye!" She shook her head and frowned. "Wow, déjà vu. Sorry."

"Yeah," he said, "so go on."

"Okay, the truth is," she said, trying to be brave, "I really like you. I've liked you since we were kids and I've never seen you out and about, or in your house, or anywhere and not wanted to be around you. Even that one time I saw you in the supermarket. I wanted to jump in your cart.

I didn't care where you were going but I wanted to come too. I've never felt like that about anyone. Even today, in the bathroom, after..." she looked away from him and at the goldfish, "after we'd been together, when you were so mean. I hated you then. For five seconds I truly hated you. Then, out of nowhere, I don't know... I missed you. It doesn't make sense. I hadn't seen you in years and years but I was so sad. I thought you were disappointed in me and I couldn't stand thinking that."

Catie shut up. Her throat was blocked. Someone had tossed an anvil in there while she wasn't looking. She wanted to say more, but knew if he turned her away, after what she'd already said, she'd be devastated.

To put more of herself out there and to be rejected still... she couldn't face it. She didn't want to be put through it.

Catie, her words hanging in the air like mini missiles, all of them ready to turn on their maker at the first hint of rejection, refused to look at Eric. The goldfish were barely there, blips of varying shades of orange and yellow, but that was fine. She was more looking away from Eric than she was looking at the fish anyway.

She waited a long time for him to say something. To grab her hand, touch her hair or tell her to fuck off. She was seconds from standing up and just walking away from the whole thing when he said, "I did quit. The private eye thing—it's true. That's what I'm going to be doing."

"That's great," she said, starting to feel ill.

He shifted in his seat. "What about Ronald? What's going on with him? You guys engaged or something?"

And that was the moment Catie regained hope. Not enough to face him, but enough to keep breathing. "No. My bags are in my car. I left him today."

"Huh," he said. "How'd he take it?"

"Good, I guess. I think he knows it's for the best. I think he's probably relieved."

They were silent for a few moments. "I always knew he was a stupid man."

Catie turned to look at Eric. An idiotic smile was turning the ends of her lips up, and as hard as she fought them to stay down, not to get too much hope up, they kept rising. Her smile was full blown when Eric said, "I could never be disappointed in you. I thought you'd hate me for what I did. I was mean. I was a lot meaner than I needed to be. I was just so pissed off that

you were with someone else. He's such a...," he stopped. "It doesn't matter." He looked at her. "You're not with him anymore. It's a good thing, too. I know someone who could make you a hell of a lot happier."

"Yeah?" she said, still smiling. "Who?"

But she already knew. She even agreed.