

The image features a close-up of a man's muscular torso, showing his chest and abdominal muscles. He is wearing olive green military-style shorts with a matching belt. The background is a soft-focus sunset over a sandy beach. The author's name is at the top, and the title is in a stylized font across the middle. The publisher's name is at the bottom.

Denise A. Agnew

MALE CALL

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Male Call

Denise A. Agnew

Dedication

To my husband Terry, who I married during Desert Storm, January 19, 1991. I've never regretted a single moment of being your "war bride." You're the best husband a woman could ever have.

Chapter One

Present Day

Eve Carmichael's fingers hovered over the telephone keys, ready to punch in the numbers and take the plunge. She sank onto the edge of her bed.

Yep, time to make a serious decision.

No time like the present.

She stared at the phone. So why did she hesitate?

Maybe because she'd never been to a male review show before and somewhere in her Midwestern upbringing she'd gotten the idea that female sexuality equated to sin? Well, that's what her English friend Claudia thought. "Repressed American female sexual appetite," Claudia would say.

Ugh.

She didn't feel repressed.

Not really.

Besides, how painful could it be to watch a bunch of half naked men parade around on stage? A bolt of lightning wouldn't strike her down, for God's sake.

Male Call was an exclusive club downtown that catered to women who wanted to watch men strip ala Chippendales or Thunder Down Under. Eve's friend Chesney insisted she needed one trip on her birthday Friday night to blow off steam. Or blow off the accumulated sexual frustration eating away at her. Anyone about to hit thirty in less than a day—Valentine's Day to be exact, should have a wild, extravagant party to celebrate.

The big three-oh. Thirty years and what she had to show for it amounted to a large bank account, a comfortable house, a used Porsche that ran like a top, and—no. She wouldn't think about the promise Sean O'Callahan had made in his letters for the last six months.

She had to stop obsessing over him right now.

She glared at the phone as if it might have answers. Didn't matter that she'd always thought of her buddy Sean as trustworthy. Didn't matter that his letters stopped coming three weeks ago, and she couldn't reach him by email or phone.

Her heartbeat accelerated the minute she heard the mail truck pull away from the curb. Damn. She wanted to pretend that receiving mail from Sean almost weekly hadn't become a turn-on for her. After all, for months now she'd received letters from Sean the old fashioned way rather than by email. Long, expressive, incredible letters she could hardly believe came from the same man she'd known for the last year. As she raced out to the mailbox, she remembered his first letter to her six months ago. Sean, who'd left for the Middle East a serious, almost too tense man.

His penmanship held that blocky, rigid style she associated with uptight scientists or inhibited geeks. But now that she'd received dozens of his letters, she knew she'd been wrong about him.

Oh, so terribly wrong.

She'd always considered the computer software engineer subtly attractive in a strange way that hovered somewhere between staggering handsomeness and utter cruelty. But he never came up on her radar as a possible date.

Stupidity was her nickname. Now that she understood him so well, felt him down in the core of her being, she realized what her life would feel like without him. Her soul twisted in pain inside her.

She snatched open the mailbox and retrieved the usual assortment of junk mail and a bill. No letter from Sean. Misery meandered through her. God, she had to stop doing this. Torturing herself. Time to get a grip. She went back inside her house, closed the door, then wandered into the

bedroom. Okay, she could employ the one technique she'd learned from her single psychology class back in college. Designate thirty minutes to worry like hell. Worry and worry for that entire half hour and then stop. That's all the time she could take. She lay face down on her bed, but after five minutes passed, she sat up.

His letters. She'd read them once more, and they would take her mind off the danger Sean might have encountered...or something worse. She went to her dresser and snatched up a beautiful, dark cherry wood box that sat next to her jewelry case. She sat on the bed and opened the box. Retrieving the thick packet of letters, she lay back on her blue denim comforter and unfolded the first letter she'd received from him. Written on plain, college-ruled notepaper, it reminded her that she needed more of the paper she'd used to form his letters.

Hey Eve,

Damn, I already miss little bum fuck Clarksville. Can you believe it? I couldn't wait to leave and now I can't wait to get the hell back. Sure, I liked my job, but it was good for me to do something different. I was feeling restless there and wanting new vistas. I have challenges now. Big ones. Being a computer geek in the intelligence field isn't as dangerous as some jobs, but when you are sent on a convoy...well, you know how that goes. There is no safe place in this desert. Anyone and everyone can be caught sitting with their thumb up their ass at the wrong place at the wrong time. I don't spend much time looking over my shoulder. Much.

The desert is hot and hot and more hot. Fuckin' hot. As if you didn't already know that, too. Here's to snowy Clarksville, Wyoming.

Other than being broiling in the day and damned freezing at night, it's paradise here. There's plenty of hard work and yet plenty of sitting around. Which when you think of it, sounds like what you and I do at our regular jobs.

I'm just now getting some decent sleep and to take a break for this letter I promised. I can't believe you talked me into letter writing. You know

I hate to write letters. I suck at it, but I know you'd kill me if I didn't write. This letter's short, Eve. Write me soon.

Sean

She'd written him, so excited to tell him what she thought of his letter. She closed her eyes and imagined her letter in her mind's eye, remembering a good dose of what she'd said.

Sean,

You haven't missed too much. Nothing much changes quickly in this town, as you know. Life has been hell. A good hell of work and more work, overtime and more overtime. The money is good, but I think I need to come to Iraq for excitement.

Just kidding.

Sorry. Really bad joke.

The second level of hell, of course, is reserved for dealing with creepy Kowalski. Maybe I'll start calling him that in my mind. Creepy Kowalski with a capital CK. Or maybe I'll call him CK, and he won't have a clue why I'm naming him that. No, you know me better. I would never taunt the man, as tempting as it is. No matter what his foibles, treating him with respect has always been my goal. Want to know what he's doing now? He was caught walking into the ladies bathroom yesterday. He claimed he just wasn't paying attention. Well, I can believe that. I almost did that once when I was talking to you in the hallway one day. Remember? Almost followed you right inside. I about died of embarrassment. I wasn't around to see Kowalski's faux pas, but I "hear tell" as Becky Strommel would say, that Kowalski didn't even look fazed when Perry Granery caught him trotting in there. Things that make you go...hmmmm.

Then, just Monday, he brushed up against me in the crowded cafeteria and had this perfectly evil shit-eating grin on his face. I tell you it gave me the total spine-tingling, slasher flick creep-out.

Any ideas on how to banish his bad ju-ju?

On a different subject, Janet Cribbins has loaded twice as much work on me since you left. Don't blame yourself. It's not like you could do anything about it. Software engineering misses you big time.

Stay safe and hugs,

Eve

She eagerly grabbed his next letter.

Dear Eve,

You know what? I can't believe I'm writing a letter the same day I received one from you. What if I wanted to tell you something that I didn't want anyone else to know?

Eve's stomach did a wild dip, just as it had the first time she'd read it.

Sounds like software engineering is the same shit. But I have six months to think about how calm and normal being there with you at work would be. What you said about Kowalski bugs me. I always knew he had B.O. and wore goofy ties, but I figured he was nothing more than fashion-challenged (hell, so am I) and needed a woman to color coordinate his socks and tell him to take a shower.

Watch out for him for him, okay? I suppose he could have accidentally walked into the bathroom, but I don't know. Sounds suspicious. If he comes on to you, tell him I'm your boyfriend and when I get back from the desert I'm going to cut off his dick and feed it to him. Okay, even if you don't tell him that, consider notifying Human Resources. If you don't want to date him, it's sexual harassment. Let me know how it goes, okay?

Today we moved closer to Baghdad. Can't tell you how excited that makes me. Yeah. Right. The troops are restless, as the cliché goes. Many want to see more action. Can you believe that shit?

*Keep me updated on the mundane stuff that happens at work, will ya?
I think it might just keep me sane.*

Talk to you soon,

Sean

She smiled. She'd taken his advice and kept a close watch on Kowalksi. When he did ask her out three times in one week, she pulled the "Sean is my big bad boyfriend" routine. Just saying the words, "Sean is my boyfriend and he told me to tell you to keep your hands off me or he'd cut your dick off and feed it to you..." well, it was over the top, but it had worked.

She moved onto the next letter he'd sent.

Eve,

Are you trying to drive me nuts? I told you to write me about mundane life. Describing what you wore to the Christmas party almost killed me. A black low cut, short skirt with a slit up the thigh? Shit, I can see it.

She blushed reading the letter, amazed she'd had the nerve to describe the dress, surprised that she'd worn the thing in the first place. She continued reading.

You never wear clothes like that at work—of course you don't. It wouldn't be professional. But God, I'll bet you look fantastic in it. Wear it for me when I return from the desert, okay? The thought of you in that dress, with your hair down and—ah hell—I'd better not go there.

On to safer topics. The desert is an oven right now. Except for at night. Yeah, that's a bitch, too. Sand gets into everything—and I mean absolutely every fuckin' crack and crevice in machinery there is.

Look, I'm sorry if I'm spending too much time bitching about the weather, but what else can I bitch about?

She paused. Oh, yes. He could bitch about things related to danger, and it would worry her like hell. She knew that he understood that and tried to spare her the concern. Didn't do much good. She realized exactly how dangerous it was.

I gotta go. The sergeant needs to see me, and he's a pretty tough bastard all the way around. I may outrank him, but he makes a person pay one way or the other. Write again soon. Can you believe there are guys here, and women, too, who don't get a damned bit of mail? I'm a lucky bastard. With Mom and Dad's letters and yours, I'm doing well. Talk to you soon.

Sean

She remembered the letter she'd written immediately after.

Dear Sean,

I don't know what possessed me to tell you about my dress, any more than I know why I wore the dress. No. No, that isn't exactly true. I realized a while back that I soon turn thirty, and I might as well be a nun. I've spent way too much time working and not enough time playing. So from now on I plan to live a little, and the black dress is a part of that fantasy. Several men watched me closely that night, so I guess they found the dress pretty. Not one approached me to dance. I could have talked to them but something held me back. God, I'm pathetic.

Work is a little nutty. Kowalski has been acting strange again. I'm uncomfortable around him, but I don't know why. It's not as if he's bothering me anymore. You'll be happy to know your idea worked—he left me alone when I told him his dick was in danger of execution. Sorry to hear about the sand—I mean the sand invading everything. Stay safe, okay? Write soon.

Hugs,

Eve

She pulled out his next letter, and as she read the first few lines, her heart sped up and a new flush filled her face.

Eve,

A nun. Are you loco, darlin'? Don't even consider entering a nunnery. You're a beautiful woman with a ton to offer a deserving man. Don't settle, Eve. Do I think you should party and have a good time? Of course. But don't settle for anybody. Hell, what am I saying? Of course you wouldn't—you've got taste. As for the men staring at you during the party, they're men. We're supposed to notice beautiful women. It's in our genes. I think it had less to do with the dress and more with the body in it. You are gorgeous, and don't forget it. I keep imagining your body in that dress...ah, shit...I can spell it out for you if you like.

Now tell me more about this black dress. Damn it, Eve, you're making me fantasize. And if you don't quit it, I'll have to share those fantasies with you in every detail.

Sean

A hot spiral of desire coiled in her stomach. She fingered the cheap notepaper he wrote on. She didn't care. His words meant so much more than she expected. He wormed his way into her psyche with his subtle meanings and the phrases he used to describe his life in the war. She recalled her return letter.

Sean,

Me? Make you fantasize. Huh! Well, thank you for doing fabulous things for my ego. Please spell it out for me in black and white, or maybe in color. If you're very nice to me, I'll wear the dress for you when you return.

Life here is stable for the moment. No more weird remarks from Kowalski. In fact, he's quiet lately, which is a bit odd for him. Guess I can't

have it both ways. I just hate the way he looks at me. The way he looks at everyone.

As for the rest of work, Janie asks about you every day now. At first she didn't say a thing, but now she's drooling to know how you're doing. You remember Janie, right? Ultra inhibited, super conservative Janie? If I didn't know better, from her florid descriptions of your assets...well, I'd swear she's either in love with you or has a warrior fantasy going on. She asked me for your address to send a care package, but I hedged and said I didn't have it with me. Then I remembered that you aren't allowed care packages directly. So I'll tell her that. She'll be mega disappointed.

My sister, Brenda, continues to be a pain in the ass. Last week she came into my kitchen and started telling me how to arrange things. She's driving me bonkers with her bossiness. You'd think she was decades older than me rather than five years. Yesterday she called and told me I shouldn't go to Mom and Dad's picnic until I learned to cook. I always bring ready-made things. So, sue me. I'm a lousy cook. If you were here, I'd have chief Sean to the rescue. My mouth is watering for some of your chicken cordon bleu.

Come on, tell me about those fantasies you're having. I enclosed a snapshot of me in the dress. Guess I'd better sign off.

Hugs,

Eve

She reached for his next letter, stretching out on the bed with a sigh. God, she loved reading and rereading this letter.

Eve,

Are you trying to induce a heart attack? The photo you sent about...well, let me state this perfectly bluntly. Seeing you in that dress—shit, I shouldn't have been reading it while I was walking back to my quarters. I about ran over a colonel, and believe me, they don't appreciate that. The photo...well, let's just say the fantasy part came to life. If you wanted to give me a hard-on, you did. All I wanted to do was be there with

you and make love to you. Okay, that's too flowery a description for what I wanted to do. I wanted to fuck you.

There, I've said it. Now that I've told you, I hope it doesn't scare the hell out of you. Chalk it up to roasting my brains in the desert and you looking so soft and sweet in that photo. God, Eve, you're driving me nuts. I wish I could tell you more, but this letter has to be short because we're moving out in thirty minutes. It'll be interesting to see if I actually get a letter or something from Janie. Later, when things calm down, I'll write about my fantasies. Write me again soon. Damn it, Eve, I miss you.

Sean

He was right. When Eve first read the letter, his blunt statement of what he wanted to do to her had frightened her. Not in a bad way, but in a way that made her blood heat and her heart pound at the mere thought of him with her right here, right now. She'd decided to bring on the heavy ordnance. She'd bought some pretty pink letter paper with red lips printed at the top. After she finished writing, she'd sprayed some rose scented cologne on the paper. If that didn't make him dream, she didn't know what would.

As for Janie writing him a letter, part of Eve worried about that. *Okay, face it girl. You're jealous. The idea of another woman catching his eye by writing him letters...*

Oh, damn. She didn't want to be this green-eyed but she was.

Sean,

Glad I could float your boat. You've paid me a great compliment. I doubt any man before you has had that reaction to my photograph. What did you do with all that pent up sexual need after you saw my photo? I wish I had a photograph of you. Something in uniform and macho, if you please. Anyway, I had a dream last night, and I'm blushing right now as I recall it. I was lying on this silky white king-sized bed. Lying on it utterly naked. Okay, I wasn't totally naked. All I had on was this skimpy red bra and tiny thong panties. A filmy purple and red gauze material draped over

the four-poster bed. But the ceiling above the bed is mirrored. The beautiful room is Victorian, with dark wood and green velvet. There is soft flower scents, rose and maybe lavender. Some parts of the dream were beyond hazy, as all dreams are. This one felt special. Anyway, I'm off track. That black dress lay on the foot of the bed. I should have been cold, but the room felt comfortable on my bare skin. I was really excited and frankly, horny as hell. Okay, I'll admit it. I knew you were coming to see me. How I knew that, I don't know. Then the bedroom door opened, and you stood there. Naked. Honestly, since I don't know what you look like naked...oh, wow, I can't believe I've told you about this dream. I'd better quit now before I say something ultra incriminating and you decide to stop writing me.

Hugs,

Eve

She sighed, still somewhat embarrassed by the letter. Then she remembered she hadn't phoned Male Call.

She'd promised to make reservations and something held her back. Maybe she should find it exciting to watch male strippers dance half naked for her, but the only thing her imagination could conjure was a half-clad Sean performing an erotic two-step. She slipped off her athletic shoes and stretched out on the bed so she could enjoy reading his letters. Suddenly, she felt way too warm. She unbuttoned her shirt slowly and unfastened and unzipped her low-rise jeans. *Ah, that's better.*

Eve,

You're killin' me here. I've enclosed the picture you wanted, though I got the razzing of my life when two of the guys found out why I wanted them to take it.

His photo fell from the envelope onto her lap, and she quickly retrieved it. Oh, oh, man. When Eve had seen the photograph for the first time, it had floored her. Stunned her. Turned her on like no other picture

of a man she'd seen before. She'd seen plenty of attractive men in her life, and she'd always thought Sean could be cute in a nerdy way. This picture blew away her conceptions about Sean belonging to geek city.

Decked out in desert battle dress uniform pants and boots, but without a shirt, he held an automatic weapon in front of his chest in a rough and ready pose. The grin on his face was cocky but charming. His espresso eyes held an intense, badass gaze. His military short, silvery blond hair defined his high cheekbones and made his perfectly cut jaw more prominent. And oh, his chest and arms. Sean owned well-muscled arms and a gorgeous chest sprinkled with dark blond hair that trailed down over his six-pack stomach and into his waistband. *Oh, my, my.* He was delicious, but in a rough, sharply angled way that shouldn't have turned her on like this. Most women at the office talked behind his back about his tousled messy hair and too-big shirts. Maybe those too large shirts had been hiding this kick ass physique all this time.

He looked dangerous.

Fuckin' seriously hot.

If the office ladies could see him now...if they even knew what fantastic shape he was in—that his body was this fabulous...

She groaned and jealousy flashed through her. *Oh, man.* She had it bad.

Even now this photo created a desire that filled her blood with instant sexual attraction. His letters had turned her low-grade intrigue into full-on heat. Her mouth watered. She tore her gaze from the photo with difficulty and returned to the letter.

Now that you've seen my ugly mug, I hope you're satisfied. You asked me what else is happening. Hell, there's a whole lot I can't tell you and you don't want to know. We reached Baghdad, and things are dicey. That's about all I can say.

Let's not talk about this fuckin' place, okay? You know that dream you told me about, the one where you're lying on the bed naked? Sounds fantastic. Want me to add to the dream?

Oh, did she ever. "Please tell me."

She read the letter with an eagerness that should have disappeared by now. Instead, what he said next sent her desire rocketing straight through the rooftop.

You're lying on the bed waiting for the mysterious man, but he's delayed. So, you help yourself...literally. You want to be ready and hot when he comes to you because you've been waiting for him forever. You've wanted this guy to notice you and now he does, and he can't wait to touch you, kiss you.

Her breathing sped up at his seductive words, and she closed her eyes only a moment, just long enough to imagine Sean watching her.

Your hands slide slowly up your ribcage and across your belly, touching softly. Your nipples are tight and sensitive and you need them touched. Your palms and fingers skim over your breasts and it feels so damned good. Your heart starts to pound.

She closed her eyes once more and followed his fantasy, sliding her fingers over her skin, her ribs, her breasts and felt the true, tingling pinprick of heat. Her nipples went hard through her bra, and Eve almost took her skirt off so she could experience the erotic picture he'd drawn for her. With eagerness, she slipped her fingers under the waistband of her jeans and coasted across her belly. Her fingers nested intimately between her aroused, plump petals.

Your body wants more. Because your pussy aches, you touch your hot, wet lips. Smoothing the juices along each fold, you can't wait for something to break loose. You bring your wetness to your clit, circling around and around and it feels so good. Can you feel it?

Following his explicit directions, she enjoyed the light, knowing touch. Her fingers manipulated her clit as her body demanded a finish, but she withdrew her hand and laid it on her stomach. She needed to read the rest of the letter, though she'd already devoured it many times before.

He comes into the room and startles you, but you're ready for him.

You keep your hand on your pussy and when he sees you playing with your pussy, he thinks, "This is a fuckin' turn on."

And any man who wouldn't think that would have to be loco.

Gotta go for now, Eve. Talk to you soon and take care. If you have any more fantasies, tell me, okay?

Sean

Her fingers kept stroking, tickling her pliant flesh. She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt this wound up, this aroused. Well, maybe the first time she'd read his shocking letter. Not shocking because she was offended, but wicked because she never expected Sean to write letters like this to her. To anyone, if she gave it much thought. Hell, no, she hadn't given it any thought before he shipped off to Iraq.

She tossed the letter on the bed and closed her eyes. The sensation bombarded her, the need to come too strong. Over and over she slicked her juices over her clit. Eve imagined his fingers strumming her into a hard point of extreme delight. She arched, trembling as her fingers moved faster, faster...until...

Oh. Oh, yeah.

Chapter Two

Ecstasy brought Eve straight to the top of the roller coaster and sent her downward into sweet, melting pleasure so breathtaking she couldn't resist. She cried out in soft, shaking bliss.

She lay on the bed, her breath panting as she enjoyed the pleasure before reality hit. She wanted Sean. No doubt after that mind-scattering fantasy streaking through her system.

She retreated to the bathroom and when she came out, she grabbed the next pile of letters.

Eve,

Life here is sometimes routine. Dust, heat, a long stretch of uncertainty. All we know is taking care of our own and making sure we finish the job, do it well and stay safe. By the way, don't watch the news, because it'll make you crazy. Life here means taking one day at a time, and being grateful for every step I make. When I return to Clarksville, I'm taking life differently. I realize now I didn't appreciate what I have as much as I should. Number one, I need to get a life. Yeah, I'm in that big brother program, I have my golf game...but there's more, and I understand what it is.

I'm glad Kowalski quit. Good news. Sounded like he's been on a downward spiral forever. Please be careful around him. I'm not kidding. I don't want you to worry, but stay alert where Kowalski is concerned. If I never learn anything else while I'm in Iraq, it's to trust that weird feeling in my gut that tells me to zig rather than zag. Say you'll do the same, okay?

I never realized until I came here that I'm pretty damn good at escaping dangerous situations. I won't tell you until I return, but things have happened here that prove I need to trust my instincts.

I had one hell of a dream last night. It was hot. And I don't mean desert hot. Steamy, yes. Mind-boggling. It makes me want things maybe I shouldn't want.

Man this dream...where do I start? I was in this castle in a great bed. One of those huge four-poster things. Kind of like what you described in your dream. I was nekkid as a fuckin' jaybird, and when I left the bed, I went to the window and saw this huge forest, some of the trees with red blooms, and grass greener than anything I'd seen before. Seconds later, the door opens on this huge bedroom and you walk in. You're wearing this silky blue robe. You smile and look so happy. Then you walk toward me and drop the robe on the floor. Under the robe is this slinky, long blue gown with a low cut neck that goes to your navel. I can see your stomach. Your breasts press against the material, and I see your nipples. Your smile is seductive and welcoming. I touch your flat belly, and I want to kiss it. Then you're in front of me, and I draw the dress up over your head until you're naked. We kiss, and when your skin slides over mine, I'm in seventh heaven. Then the dream turns into a mix of erotic images. My hands coasting over your breasts, my tongue on your nipples, my fingers sliding deep inside you. You are so hot and wet, and I want to lick your clit. Then I'm lying on the bed, and you're straddling me. You're riding hard, and it's torturing me because for some reason I can't touch you. Then I realize you've tied me to the bed. The dream ended abruptly. I was frustrated and aroused.

I can't wait to touch you.

Talk to you soon.

Sean

Eve had stared at that letter the first time she'd read it, amazed, stunned, and feeling as if her world spun around three-sixty. Sean had blown her away, and the emotional intensity made her tremble. Not only

the sexual dream—that alone would fry her cookies, but the way he warned her against Kowalski. She'd written back right away.

Sean,

I'll admit you freaked me out with your last letter. If you're dreaming about me that way, it only means one thing, right? Spell it out in black and white, mister. What does it mean? When you get back we'll have explore these fantasies and dreams. Or are we just talking about it while you're there and I'm here and when you come home, we'll pretend nothing happened? Oh, hell, Sean. I'm not trying to pressure you. You could say I'm amazed and...turned on.

As for me watching the news, I haven't done that in a long time. Work is the same otherwise. Busy but somehow less interesting now that you're not around. People ask about you all the time, and I admitted I'm in contact with you. They've teased me about writing you. The women have, anyway. You know me. I'm always blushing, no matter what I do to try and stop it. Never works. My face gives me away.

Hugs,

Eve

Another letter came from him in short order. He must have written back immediately after he received her note.

Eve,

I'm glad you aren't watching the news.

As for my last letter, I'm sorry I scared you with the fantasy. I came on strong. I really did dream it just like I described, so yeah...I know it means I think you're sexy as hell. But I won't write about my fantasies again if it scares you.

Sean

When Eve received that closed, almost curt letter, she realized she'd blurted her emotions and gave him the wrong impression.

Sean,

Oh, boy. I stepped in it, didn't I? No, I don't want you to stop writing your fantasies. I was just aroused after I read that dream. What you said—no man's ever said those things to me before. It blew me away, and took me off guard. Please don't feel like you need to hide what you're thinking from me ever. I may not watch the news, but I know you're not telling me everything you've gone through. You mentioned using your instincts to avoid dangerous situations. I don't mind if you tell me, but if you don't tell me because it upsets you, then don't worry. I understand. Whatever you might think, know that you can trust me. Feel free to dump what you're thinking. You can't scare me away.

Love,

Eve

Sean's next letter came swiftly.

Eve,

I'm glad as hell you want to hear my dreams and fantasies. You're one of the best things in my life right now. Yesterday, one of our convoys was hit and two men died. I know that could be me someday. Yet despite the shit going down, your letters mean so damned much. I'm excited about getting the next one and the next one. Don't stop.

My fantasies are even hotter than my dreams. Sure you wanna hear them? I can't fantasize about you every night because it makes me hard as hell, and you know what? I'm saving it up for if and when you want me. I know, that's bold and probably pretty fucking presumptuous. I'm not pressuring you, but telling you what I feel. Sometimes I want to tell you everything, but obviously I can't. Then there are times I don't want to say a damn thing to you or anyone else. It's a weird feeling, wanting to clam up, to pretend none of this is happening. Then, at night I dream about you,

and it feels so good I know it's real. You're real. I remember each and every morning that I'm here for dozens of reasons. Number one, I'm fighting to come home to you.

Sean

The phone rang. She didn't want anyone to call and remind her that she didn't live in a fantasy world filled with endless sex with Sean.

God, she wished.

It took her a good five rings before she snatched up the cordless.

Chesny's brassy tone came over the phone. "Don't you ever answer your phone?"

"You know I don't. What's up?"

"You sound crabby."

She sank onto the bed and sighed. "Maybe because I'm reading this letter from a hunky soldier that's dripping sex and someone called and interrupted me." She said the words before she could stop herself. *Oh, shit.*

"Oh, ho, ho! You've been holding out. What hunk soldier?"

"Crap."

"Crap what?"

"I'm not sure I want to tell you. You'll make some smart ass remark when you learn who it is."

"No I won't."

"I know you. Of course you will."

Chesny's wicked laugh came through the line. "Just tell me before I kick your lily white ass."

"You can try," Eve said.

"Come on." Chesny drew out the last word in a plea.

"Not right now."

"Brat."

"That's my middle name. Eve Brat Carmichael." She sighed again, wishing she could banish Sean from her thoughts for at least a moment.

"Fine." Cutlery rattled in the background. "Did you make reservations at Male Call?"

Eve slapped her forehead. "No, I forgot."

"Damn, girl, you are hopeless. Never mind, lazy," Chesny said as her Sheltie yapped in the background. "I'll make the reservations."

Eve closed her eyes. "I can picture it now."

"What?"

"Exactly how my birthday is going to play out. We'll arrive at the club and all these sequined women will push for good seats so they can slip a dollar into a guy's jock strap."

"These guys don't wear jock straps."

"You know what I mean. Butt floss. G-strings. V-strings. Whatever. Then dozens of semi-nude men parade across a stage, gyrating, dancing to a techno pop beat. They aren't my idea of a sexy. At least not some I've seen."

Chesny groaned. "What's not to like? They have muscles, they're strong, they know how to wiggle their assets."

Eve stood and wandered out of the bedroom into her kitchen to fetch a diet cola she hadn't finished earlier. She sipped and listened to her friend's rave review until she interrupted with, "Oh, yeah, they're gorgeous all right. Waxed hairless, polished, oiled and generally slick-looking all the way around. Real exciting."

"Damn it, girl, you're no fun."

"So sue me." She injected a smile into her voice. "I'll call later. Right now I'm..."

"Yeah?"

"Too preoccupied." She wandered around the kitchen.

"By what?"

"It's a long story I've been keeping from you."

"Sounds like you want to confess."

"Maybe I do."

"Spill it. Chesny loves to provide therapy to the lovelorn."

"I'm not lovelorn."

"Not a problem. I have an answer for everything."

"Okay. It's..." She swallowed hard. "You remember that geek at my work?"

"Which one?"

She took another swig of cola, then headed into her living room to flop on the sage green chenille couch. "The software engineer. Sean O'Callahan."

"That Sean? Well, he's pretty...uh...interesting."

Eve rolled her gaze to the ceiling and decided to ignore her snide insinuation that Sean was nothing to look at. "About six months ago he shipped off to Iraq. I told him, on impulse, that I'd write him while I was there. Anyway, I've been writing him, and it's getting...heavy."

Chesny chuckled. "Aha. That's the soldier you were talking about before?"

"The very one."

"Getting hot? Or hot and heavy?"

"Well, maybe not heavy. It's...our letters are explicit." She gave her friend more information, but left out finer details of the correspondence.

"Wow. So that's why you aren't interested in other half naked men," Chesny said. "Sean already has you panting after him."

Eve grimaced. Panting sounded so undignified, but that's what it was, really.

Eve placed her drink on a coaster on the coffee table and stared at the floor. "Maybe."

"Hmm. Do you think Sean feels the same about you?"

"He hasn't told me to piss off. He's the one who initially started the erotic tone. Sort of."

"Uh-huh."

Eve fumbled for words. "I don't *feel* anything. I mean, lust maybe but that's about it."

"Right. You're working way too hard if you think that's it. When is this guy coming home?"

Eve frowned as she slung her stocking feet onto the couch. "Good question. I'm worried because I usually get a letter really frequently. A couple a month or more."

"Wow!" Chesney almost bellowed.

Eve held the phone away from her ear for a second. "I write him often, too. The letters are just getting more intriguing all the time."

Chesny snorted. "I like that. Intriguing she says. Is that code for filled with descriptions of full-on fantastic sex?"

To Eve's surprise, her cheeks filled with heat. "Getting there."

"Ooohhh darlin'."

"He sent me a letter with a photograph in it and he's...well, let's just say he's not a geek anymore. He's been working out. He's not the skinny, dorky man I thought he was. He's funnier and nicer than I gave him credit for. I can't believe I didn't pay more attention to him before. I feel like a complete idiot."

"Sounds like he's having a Mr. Darcy moment."

Eve laughed. Chesny loved Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and Mr. Darcy was one of her favorite fictional male characters of all time.

"I think you'd like the picture. I think any woman with half a hormone would," Eve said.

"That nice, eh?"

"That nice."

"Well, break me off a piece of that."

Eve laughed.

"Once a geek, always a geek. He sounds wonderful," Chesny said. "Still, it sounds like you're worried about something. Tell me."

"It's been three weeks since I got a letter from him. Human Resources hasn't heard anything negative."

“Oh, it’s probably nothing but a mail delay then.”

“Maybe.”

She wanted to believe that, but concern remained no matter how much she tried to brush it away.

Eve heard the clatter of little feet and Chesny’s husband’s voice.

“Sweetie, I gotta go,” Chesny said. “You just keep me informed will ya? I’m a little surprised you kept it from me.”

“I don’t tell you everything. What’s private is private.”

“You’re right. But why did you tell me now?”

“Because I’m worried about him, I guess.”

“He’ll be fine. I’ll talk to you tomorrow night and let you know when we’re meeting up for Male Call.”

They hung up, and when Eve crawled in bed that night, she hoped Sean’s next letter would arrive tomorrow.

Chapter Three

When Eve received Sean's letter the next day, she didn't make it all the way into the house before she ripped open the letter. She stood in the garage, her heart pounding as she unfolded the paper. The date read three weeks before the present.

Eve,

I'm writing this from a hospital bed.

Her breath sucked in and her purse thudded to the garage floor. She ignored it and continued reading.

Don't worry. I'm okay. Just got a little flesh wound. EVIL GRIN. I always wanted to say that. No, seriously, it isn't that big a deal. I was transferring from one base camp to another when our convoy was attacked. I was knocked out cold and some shrapnel hit my right calf. But it was minor.

Don't worry? Had the man lost his mind? Concern drilled her with spiked teeth. Well, at least she knew he was alive. Her stomach twisted as she paused in her letter reading. She stood in her garage, her designer purse on the concrete slab collecting dirt. She shivered with cold even though it was warm, and she'd feel better when she read the rest of the letter indoors.

She hurried to snatch up her purse, and once inside, she dumped it on the kitchen counter. She sank onto a breakfast barstool and continued reading.

You know that my time here is up soon anyway, right? I've been here six months and you could say timing is right—if there ever is a time to get wounded in battle. I'll get a Purple Heart, but let me tell you, I could have skipped the fucked up path it took to arrive.

Enough of this shit. I'm looking over my shoulder wondering how much longer it's going to be before I see you. Yeah, that's right. I can't wait. Look, I know I might be pushing something here, and if I'm going too fast, I'm sorry.

I gotta go. Damn nurses coming in to give me sponge bath again. Some of the guys in here love the sponge baths, but I keep wishing it were you giving me the bath. Hell, I could write a whole fantasy on that one alone.

Don't write me again—

The phone rang, and her heart about rammed into her throat. She jerked and dropped the letter as she reached for the cordless phone near the counter.

"Yes," she said a bit harshly.

"Well, you don't have to snap my head off," Chesny said.

Eve sighed, staring at the letter and wanting to read more of what he had to say. "Sorry. I just got a letter from Sean."

"Cool. Isn't that cool? You were worried just the other day."

"Yes, but he was wounded in battle."

"What?"

"Not badly. But his letter was rushed and what if he's cooling things off? What if I let myself get all worked up over this guy and he sees this as all play? I mean, I'm not serious about him or anything—"

"Bull hockey. Otherwise you wouldn't be rambling on about him like this. If he's cooling off, just let him rest under your boot like lint on the

street, girl. He's not worth it. Switching to another topic a moment, I have just the thing to perk you up."

Eve didn't want to ask.

"You're not gonna ask, are you?" Chesny said.

"Nope."

Chesny sighed loudly. "Okay. I'll tell. I've made reservations for tomorrow night at Male Call. And I guarantee you'll have the best thirtieth birthday you've ever experienced."

Eve grinned. "Um, as far as I know, I've never had a thirtieth birthday before, and I don't plan on having another. Besides, I think one session with Male Call will be enough."

Chesny's laugh echoed over the phone. "Maybe. I have a feeling you'll be coming back for more."

"Right."

"Damn it, since when did you become so freakin' glum?"

"I'm not sure."

"Yeah, you are. You just don't want to admit it."

Eve groaned. "Just slit my wrists now and be done with it."

"That bad? Are you thinking about Sean?"

"The verdict is still out."

"You are truly hopeless, girl."

"Okay, maybe I won't slit my wrists. I'll start a lonely hearts club for women who got frisky by letter and were burned by lust."

"Come on! You're doing that—what did you call it a while back? Catastrophic thinking? You're reading too much into his letters because you've discovered he's an A-number one hunk. And as Claudia says, 'you're gaggin' for a shag'. He's probably needing a good humping, too, and he likes you so the progression is natural."

"Chesny, you make it sounds like animals in the wild."

"Well, it can be like that sometimes."

Eve wouldn't know. With a wild sense of complete mortification, she realized she'd never had break-down-the-mattress, headboard-rattling sex. Nope, her sexual encounters over the years had been tame and well, not all that satisfying.

Eve burst out laughing. "Chesny, you are a life saver. Maybe you're right. I need to get a sex life and drain off this energy."

Chesny made one of her loud whoops into the phone. "Now that's what I'm talking about."

They signed off a short time later with promises made on where and how and when to meet at Male Call the next night.

Eagerly, Eve returned to the letter and reread the last few lines.

Don't write me back, because I hope to be back in the U.S. in the next few weeks. If you send a letter to Iraq, it'll probably end up in some grimy soldier's hands. Can't have that.

Sean

Relief pooled low in her stomach, warmth that removed some of her earlier apprehension that he didn't want to talk with her anymore.

She paced the living room for far too long, wondering if a visit to the club tomorrow night would remove her worry about Sean.

From the date on his later, he might be about ready to come back to the U.S.

Right now.

* * *

"Yeah, baby!" Chesny cheered as the first set of dancers parted the curtains on the stage and strutted their stuff. "Oh, yeah, baby," Chesny clapped her hands. "Bring it!"

Eve couldn't help laughing and almost choked on her merlot. Catcalls rang out, whistling and yells for action. But the men strutting forward

were fully dressed. A firefighter in turnout gear, a police officer, an astronaut and a cowboy. For the last thirty minutes Evi and Chesny had enjoyed watching a plethora of semi good-looking men.

Eve hadn't thought of Sean in a whole fifteen minutes.

"Ladies, we have a special treat for our birthday girl, Eve Carmichael. She's sitting right in the front row. Stand up and take a bow, Eve."

Cringing, her face flushed, Eve stood and took a quick bow as the audience clapped. She sank into her chair and glared at Chesny. "That was your idea, wasn't it?"

Chesny's smile was unrepentant. "You betcha." Her black hair was tousled in long spirals along her face, her cocoa skin glowing with health. Tonight she wore a conservative suit, while Eve had stopped by the house and dressed in her clingy black dress.

The announcer on stage cleared his throat. "Ladies, now that we've hailed the birthday girl, we dedicate this next dance to her. And above all, one man wishes to dedicate this entire dance to Eve."

She frowned, wondering what insane birthday stunt Chesny had cooked up.

"Tonight, we also have a Native American, a pilot, a lineman, and best of all, a soldier from the United States Army."

Eve swallowed hard at the mention of the soldier. Hell, Sean would swallow his tongue first before he ever paraded across the stage like—

As the last man filed out, she was totally stunned.

There, standing in all his semi-naked glory, was the most gorgeous military man she'd ever seen. His close-cropped blond hair emphasized his piercingly direct Caribbean blue eyes. He wore a pair of desert battle dress uniform pants and desert boots. And his torso. Holy meat on a stick. Broad shoulders, gorgeous and powerful arms, a flat, six-pack stomach. And a generous, though not overwhelming dusting of dark blond hair over his chest and down his stomach to disappear in his waistband.

As the music thumped, the beat sensual and promising wild sexual pleasures, her heartbeat joined the rhythm, finding an equally delicious

sensuality pulsing and building over her body. The guy dressed as a soldier wasn't just playing a soldier. She knew him. He was the genuine article.

Sean in the living flesh.

She couldn't believe it. Her mouth dropped open.

And he smiled right at her, his grin warm, sexy, and crooked with mischief. Her brain tried twice to wrap around the concept. After all, he shouldn't be here. He should be in a hospital in Iraq. Instead, he started to dance along with the other guys, his hip movements slow, seductive. Though she knew it wasn't possible, the next few moments passed in slow motion. His hands smoothed over his short hair, then down over his pecs and the rippling muscles in his stomach. Unlike the other dancers, who wore tear-away pants, she doubted he planned to strip to his underwear. When his hands went to his hips, her attention fixed on his package, an area of his body she'd never given thought to until they'd started their letters. Her gaze snapped up to his, and he grinned again.

He was...stunning.

His hands went behind his head and helped display the fine condition of his body. With everything inside her, she longed to stroke him, touch that firm flesh. Erotic visions floated into her head. She couldn't shove her lustful thoughts aside and didn't want to. Her gaze touched him everywhere, enjoying the way his muscles flexed, bunched, moved to the sweet sounds of music. His hips rotated, initiating a bump and grind that spoke of unadulterated, X-rated sex. The ladies went wild. Chesny hooted, whistled and urged him onward. Eve couldn't blush, could only watch with growing fascination as her body responded in the deepest core.

Whenever her eyes met Sean's intense gaze, she saw curiosity, happiness, and animal awareness. Something primeval moved between them that even their letters couldn't top. Her body clenched and ached as she imagined sliding her body along his and her fingers exploring Sean's rock hard body. Her nipples tightened and tingled against her bra.

By the time the dancers finished the set and left the stage, she was flushed, excited. Too eager to be with Sean and express her relief at seeing him unharmed.

Instead of returning backstage, Sean jumped down and landed in front of her table. She gasped, watching his muscles ripple and surge, a demonstration of pure animal prowess that sent surges of pulsating desire straight through her pussy. She was wet between the legs already, made her nipples tighten more and her heartbeat pound.

"Hi," he said a little breathlessly as he sat in an empty chair next to her and leaned in close. "This seat taken?"

"Hi," she said, her voice soft and surprised. "No, it's not."

She couldn't stand it. She reached for him.

Sean's arms went around her, and they shared a hug. Her arms tightened around his neck as she buried her face against his shoulder and smiled for all she was worth. He smelled of wonderful, brisk musk. Again her body reacted, taking in his body heat. One hand cupped over the back of his neck, and when she tilted her head back to look at him, their lips were so damned close.

The crowd around them went wild.

"Kiss her! Kiss her!" went all around the room.

She couldn't look away from his stunning eyes. How had she been so blind before and not noticed how deep, how mysterious his eyes were?

His fingers tangled in her hair, and before she could do more than blink, his mouth settled over hers.

Chesny let out another squeal of approval, then Eve didn't notice anything more than the tender way he tasted her. He didn't kiss her hard, but as if he feared frightening her away. She kissed him back, trying to reassure Sean. Though she responded, he didn't take the kiss deeper than a sweet, exploratory meeting. Long, warm seconds later, he drew back and broke into a smile.

"Sean," she said, still hearing shouts of approval around her.

"Eve." He winked. "Happy birthday."

She pushed back from him. "Thank you." She turned her gaze on Chesny. "I suppose you had something to do with this?"

Chesny's dark eyes sparkled with unholy glee. "I confess."

Dazed by the last few minutes, Eve looked from Chesny to the confident and not the least contrite Sean and asked, "But how? I thought you were wounded and in Iraq."

He tapped his forehead. "Takes a lot more than a bump on the head and a little metal to get me down. I'm a software engineer." He winked.

"Seriously," Chesny said, "I found out about your uh...interest in him several weeks back."

Eve wrinkled her nose and Sean laughed.

"My what?" Eve asked.

Taking her sweet time, Chesny sipped her wine. "You know. Your crush on warrior boy here."

Eve swallowed hard as heat filled her face. "Umm...well..."

"Sean called one day when you were away from your desk. He didn't want me to tell you he was in town because he wanted to be here for your birthday as a surprise."

"Brat," Eve said to Sean.

His muscled arm, which lay along the back of her chair, almost embraced her shoulders. His unrepentant smile said everything. He didn't regret the subterfuge.

"Well, speak up, soldier," Eve said.

He shrugged. He leaned in and whispered in her ear. "I have no shame."

As his breath wisped across delicate, sensitive skin, she shivered with pleasure.

As soon as the show ended, the dance floor opened up at the back of the small club. A few women decided to dance with each other and some women had brought male partners with them and they started to dance.

Chesny winked. "Well, I'm outta here."

Regret spiked in Eve. She didn't want this night to end. Apprehension and excitement mixed hand in hand as she thought of time alone with Sean.

"Stay and dance with me." Sean's deep voice close to her ear sent wildfire into her veins. She shivered in need. Need for his touch. For his arms about her.

"Okay," she said without hesitation.

Chesny winked. "You two have a good time." She waved as she left the table. "Talk to you later."

"Come on." He smiled as he put his hand out to Eve.

She followed, her small wallet purse still looped over her chest to make sure she wouldn't lose it. She moved it to the side so that when he held her close it didn't come between them. And oh, oh, God. What it felt like when he drew them body-to-body and started the slow, sensual dance. To her surprise he didn't draw her full to him, but kept a more respectful distance.

"You all right?" he asked.

She grinned, flabbergasted by all that had happened, and wanting this sweet moment to continue into the wee hours. "Never been better. You're here, and safe and that makes everything great."

"Music to my ears," he said.

"I never thought in a million years that you'd do something like this."

He shook his head, his gaze suddenly harder and deeper. "You disapprove?"

She grinned. "Do I look like I disapprove? It was just stunned seeing you up there. I never..." Her throat went tight. "I've learned a lot of things about you I didn't imagine when we worked together."

His fingers held hers, his hand moving from her waist to slide around her waist and draw her to him. He winked, his gaze teasing. "What you thought you knew about me didn't match up?"

She lowered her head a little, staring at his chin. "I'm ashamed to admit it."

“You thought I was a geek.”

Oh, Lord. She could tell a lie, or she could fess up to her prejudice. Damn. “I’ll admit it. Yes. But even so, I’ve always liked you. You know that, right? I never would have said I’d write you if I didn’t consider you a friend.”

“You saw me more as a buddy.”

She nodded. “Absolutely.”

“And now?”

Okay, Eve. Plunge into the deep end of the pool. Come up for air and say what you think and what you mean. “You’re a buddy, but an even closer friend now than when you left. We’ve learned so much about each other.” She added her own version of a teasing smile. “I admire you. And face it, Sean, you’re just damned sexy.”

His grin widened to epic proportions. “Eve, you could be good for my ego.”

Sean’s body moved like poetry until the distance between them collapsed. His body brushed hers continuously, his hand caressing her lower back, his fingers drawing her smaller hand to his chest. She shivered under his attention, a delightful arousal sparking, simmering below the surface as she tried to hold on to a shred of sanity. But she couldn’t. His touch was too caressing, his scent an intoxicating blend of man and musk. Eve wanted to drown in Sean’s masculinity, his gentleness.

“God, this dress feels...God, better than I ever imagined it could.” Sean buried his face in her hair. “And pardon my cursing, but you smell fuckin’ edible.”

A giggle slipped loose. “Thank you.”

When his hand skimmed over her back once more, she couldn’t suppress a wild quiver.

“I always thought you had a beautiful body, but now I’ve seen you in this dress, it’s driving me wild. The way this material clings to your every curve.” He pulled back, and she could feel his erection pressing her stomach.

Her eyebrows went up. "Feels good?"

His gaze dipped to the low cleavage. "Damn, yes." His voice went huskier, his eyes burning with nothing less than pure male hunger. "When I saw you sitting at the table, I had an instant hard-on. You're drivin' me crazy. The material hugs your pretty butt, and your flat belly, and the way your hips sway, the way your breasts curve..." He didn't finish.

A sensual beat poured from the speakers, a throb and stroke she experienced with acute fever. As they twisted a slow and erotic path across the dance floor, heat drove her to move sinuously, suggestively. By the ravenous male attention in his gaze, she knew she didn't have to seduce him. Yet she knew that she wanted him primed, dying for her, on a razor edge of masculine desire.

"Please tell me you'll stay with me tonight, even if it's just to talk. I want to be with you," he whispered into her ear.

Pleasure, strong and lethally persuasive, flowed through her veins. "Yes." Her fingers tightened on his shoulders and eased around his neck. "Let's go to my place and see what...comes up."

"Mmm." His male groan of affirmation renewed desire spinning through her stomach, aching in her pussy.

She knew, without too much doubt, what they'd do if they spent time together. Eve craved it like oxygen.

During the short drive to her place, excitement burst inside Eve. Sean drove his motorcycle behind her sedan, wearing his battle dress uniform and helmet, all the way to her house. Her adobe style house called to her, promising sanctuary from prying eyes. The idea of having private, possibly intimate time with Sean was making her pulse throb and her heart pound.

"Follow me," she said after he'd parked his cycle. Once inside the house, she turned on one dim light to illuminate her living room. Sean

glanced around, his gaze curious as he placed his helmet on her coffee table.

“Beautiful place.” He walked toward her purposefully.

He looked so hard, so edgy, that her primal female instinct to fear the warrior male kicked in and she backed into the couch.

He caught her in his arms, and she reveled in the strength and warmth. His gaze took in her dress.

“Man, I can see why men stare at you. It’s...you’re beautiful. You’re—aw screw it. I can’t wait any more.”

He tugged her closer, molding what seemed like every inch of his superbly conditioned body against her. His fingers slipped into the hair at the back of her neck, and he kissed her.

This time his kiss went for broke.

His tongue brushed hers, thrusting deep to caress in the most carnal dance of give and take. A firestorm arose in her loins, and a rush of moisture dampened her folds. Her nipples tightened, and Eve thought she would almost come on the spot. Her hands caressed Sean everywhere, searching his intriguing, hard angles, testing muscles. She moaned and pressed into his embrace, welcoming the delicious press of solid cock against her belly. She writhed in his arms as he continued to kiss her with an animal intensity she couldn’t resist.

He pulled back, his breathing hard. “God, I’ve wanted to do that for six months.”

“That badly, eh?” she said weakly, trying to catch her breath.

“Oh, yeah. I was tempted to kiss you like this when we were in the club, but I’m not supposed to show physical affection while in uniform. Against the rules. I was pushing it when I kissed you that one time.”

“Oh.” That pleased her, and she smiled. Pleased her because he’d lost cool control, something she’d never seen him do before when he represented geek man at work. She trembled on the edge herself, ready to let her hair down.

She had to understand what they had here—if this relationship meant more than spine-melting lust. Her arms tightened around his neck.

“You scared me. I was so worried when a letter didn’t come after three weeks.” Tears stung her eyes, and she understood now that she’d invested far more in this man’s well being and in her feelings for him than she’d realized.

“I’m sorry.” He brushed her cheek with his fingers and snuggled her closer. “I’ll admit that I thought maybe when you heard I was hurt, that you wouldn’t want much to do with me.”

“What? Why?”

“Because a lot of guys get Dear John letters when girlfriends and wives find greener pastures at home, or when they can’t take the thought of their man in danger.”

A tear slipped down her cheek, emotions boiling up. “I didn’t like thinking of you in danger, but...um...the thought of not writing you, of talking with you that way just didn’t cross my mind.”

“You liked the fantasies, didn’t you? The ones in our letters.” His wicked smile made fresh arousal tingle in her lower belly.

“Yes.”

“Damn, I’ve waited for this for so long.” He hugged her, burying his face in her hair. “I wanted it even before I left for Iraq.”

Surprise stunned her. She pulled back a little. “You did?”

“So damned bad I’d go home and jack off in the shower.”

Heat raced through her. “God, Sean.”

His fingers trailed up her back, big, hot, and caressing. She quivered, her body fine-tuned and ready for any eventuality. He made her crazy, nervous, and wonderfully aware.

She swallowed, licked her lips, and plunged into the fire. “What do we do next? Where do we go from here?”

His smoldering gaze held her immobile. “Straight to bed, I hope.”

His mouth tasted hers gently and teased at the corners for the most exquisite, soft moment. She drew in a slow breath, staggered by the tingling racing through her belly and straight into her folds. Hot, swollen with achy desire, she pushed her hips into his.

"I can't believe this is happening. Am I dreaming?" he asked. "Tell me I'm not going to wake up in that desert hellhole and find you're not here."

The agony in his voice surprised her. Eve caressed his shoulders. "I'm here. You're here. It's all real." She needed to reassure him with a heavy, overwhelming compulsion.

Her heart pounded with a new, startling beat as he swept his hands over her back down to just above her buttocks. As his touch lingered there, she tipped her head back and his lips followed. Tender, brushing exploration warmed her body from the center outward. Her nipples went hard and tight, and he cupped the side of her breast.

She gasped, and Sean halted, his big hand holding her breast with a reverence that took her breath away.

"Do you want me to stop?" he asked.

The fire in his eyes held a feral, raw passion she never imagined seeing in a man's eyes as he embraced her. "No."

With a knowing smile both gentle and holding a hint of male arrogance, he cupped her breast more firmly as his mouth settled over hers. This kiss wasn't tentative. Long, deep, and assured, his mouth devoured and yet didn't press. She knew no matter what, he'd never do anything she didn't want.

She never imagined a man tasting her as if she meant the world. Though her emotions jumbled, one thing stood clearly. She wanted him and she wanted him now. All the while, his fingers slipped over her breast, massaging. Her body ached, wanting so damned much to move, to arch into his hard frame and demand he extinguish the growing fire.

His fingers passed over her nipple, and she gasped into his mouth. His tongue plunged, caressed, fucked her mouth with a ruthless passion that sent white-hot sparklers of desire coiling inside her so strongly she almost cried out. Under his touch, Eve came unglued.

When he broke from the kiss, heat once more warmed her face. God, things tumbled down the slope so fast. Her hands smoothed over the khaki T-shirt on his chest—he'd taken off the top that went over his T-shirt, and the material stretched over his muscular chest with loving attention. When she slipped her hands over his shoulders and dared look into his eyes, she couldn't deny the spiraling attraction reaching exciting heights within.

"Hey," he said softly. "Am I going too fast? You look a little shell shocked."

"Yes and no." She smiled and smoothed her hands to his upper shoulders. "I'll admit this is a huge surprise, and I'm still taking it in."

His arms kept her firmly along his hard inch of his body. His mouth traveled gently across her forehead, then touched her nose. "Whatever you want...whatever you don't want...your wish is my command, Eve."

"My own special genie."

He tossed her a crooked smile, so damned sexy and irreverent. "Hey, now. Soldiers don't look like genies."

A soft laugh came from her. "No. You absolutely don't look anything like a genie. Your picture...um..."

"Yeah?" His handsome head tilted to the side.

"It blew me away. Made me want you so much."

"Then I'm yours."

Chapter Four

Without another word, Eve reached up for him, and he met her halfway. To Eve's surprise and excitement, he picked her up in his arms. Wild thrills darted through her stomach. God, a man had never done that before—showing her his strength and turning her on because of it.

"Bedroom," he said, his voice husky.

She grinned. Her body wanted him, her mind even more, and she knew the biggest sex organ in the universe was the mind. She directed Sean down the hallway, though her brain felt mushed enough she couldn't be certain if she'd send him the right way.

When they tumbled onto her king-sized bed, the room stayed shadowy, illuminated only by the night light in the hallway. She inhaled deeply and enjoyed the moment, felt it through her bones and sinew as he slipped his arms around her. He kissed her gently, but under his touch, his body vibrated with a sexual restraint. She knew deep in her bones that he wanted more, that he need more and wanted it fast. But so did she. They'd waited, built up the anticipation after all these months. The erotic content of their letters had fired them to exquisite heights, hanging in the balance and on the edge of going nuts. She pulled back from his kiss and cupped his face.

"You all right?" he asked, smoothing her hair back from her face.

She smiled. "I'm wonderful. More wonderful than I've been in a long time. You don't have to hold back with me. I want it all."

She drew him into a passionate kiss, her tongue tasting his with delicious searches, her body wanting everything he could show her. His hands skimmed over her body, exploring hungrily. Warm palms skated

over her breasts, fingers plucking her nipples and cupping her breasts. Her thighs dropped open as she strained upward, writhing upward to press her hips to his. His cock pressed against his pants, and she struggled with the fastenings. He helped her, and faster than she expected, his cock was in her palm. Sean shivered as she stroked the long, thick length, her touches unrestrained.

As she tortured him, she whispered, "God, you're so..."

He groaned. "What?"

"Strong."

A soft laugh left his throat. "Yeah?"

"Oh yeah."

She tugged at his T-shirt, and Sean helped her slip it over his head. Her fingers splayed over his solid pecs and enjoyed the sensation of his chest hair tickling her skin. His stomach muscles rippled when her touch explored the ridged surface. Man, he was sexy. Ripped and so damned gorgeous she thought she'd die right here. Her fingers returned to his powerful erection, glorying in how it surged with life under her attention.

He pressed her hand to his cock and stopped her teasing. His eyes glimmered with desire and emotion. "I want to be inside you when I come. Much more of that and I'll burst."

Gathering heat spilled into her stomach. She gasped as he released her hand and kissed her, his tongue a thorough invader. Their urgency escalated, and her breathing quickened, her pulse rising to meet the lust pounding in her heart. His body entranced her—his hardness against her softness, his barely restrained passion. Again and again his tongue fucked her mouth. As his palm slid upward over her thigh, she realized her high-heeled black pumps had fallen off, and he worked her pantyhose down her legs. Eve wished she'd worn her lacy thigh-high stockings and garter belt. With infinite care, he removed her panties along with her pantyhose and tossed them on the floor.

"Oh, babe," he whispered as he smoothed his fingers along the inside of her thigh.

She quivered, gasped under his touch and giggled. He didn't relent, his touch more insistent as his gaze deepened, a fire apparent as he watched her react to sensual demands. More than anything, she wanted his hand between her legs, and as if he read her mind, his fingers found her wetness. He kissed her and drank in her moans. Stroke after lush stroke warmed Eve—her body sang under his attention as he took her higher. His fingers were so gentle, but he didn't relent, smoothing her arousal over sensitive folds until she writhed. She wanted to beg, but the words wouldn't come, and when Sean touched her clit, all it took was a tentative touch.

She came apart, screaming into his mouth as her body arched. She quivered and shook, trembling wildly as ecstasy wracked her from within, throbbing through her belly, core and clit.

But if she imagined the excitement was over, she thought wrong.

He drew down one shoulder of her dress until he bared her breast. He eased her into sitting position and undid her bra. Before she could take a breath, his mouth closed over one nipple. Hot, sweet pleasure sang, tingling deliciously as his tongue rasped hot and ravenous over her aroused flesh. He treated each breast to hot suckling until she squirmed with impatience. He kissed his way down her stomach, lingering over her belly button. She closed her eyes and savored the seduction, wanting to rush the moment, yet wishing it would last forever. She lay back, feeling like a goddess being pleasured by a god.

When he reached her pussy, his tongue did a hot, wet pass over her super sensitive clit.

She gasped.

Lingering, licking, he ate at her pussy. His tongue pushed into her, and she lost control. She couldn't stay immobile, her hips wriggling, legs restless. He moaned, sounds of pure enjoyment leaving his throat as his tongue plunged in and out. Long moments passed as he soothed, played, stroked her clit into screaming need. Then two fingers pushed into her channel, and his tongue flickered across her aroused button. She shook with excitement, her senses gathering until she exploded in a splintering

nova of pure bliss. When she came down from the heights, she panted and gasped for breath.

"Please," she murmured, dazed and yet frenzied to continue. "Please tell me you have a condom somewhere."

"Easy." He smiled. "I've got more than one."

She returned his grin. "Good."

He leaned close to whisper in her ear, and his breath wafting across her skin sent sweet shivers or pleasure across her skin. "Do you want to be fucked?"

"Now," she said breathlessly her hand clasping his erection once more. "Do it now, Sean."

He reached into one of his pockets and drew out a condom, and within seconds he smoothed protection over his hardness. Bracing on arms and knees, he lowered his hips between her thighs. He eased the broad tip of his cock between her folds, teasing her pussy with subtle bumps and touches. Damn the man. He meant to tease her into another sexual meltdown. As he kissed her, she arched her hips upward. He pressed home and eased that thick bar of male flesh through tender, highly sensitive tissues. He felt so delicious, so wonderful, that when he pressed tight against her cervix, she shivered in excitement and pleasure. He started thrusting immediately, and she groaned as each stroke pulled her closer and closer to completion. Every movement of thick, long cock caressed her inside, and she'd never felt anything as wonderful.

His hips lifted and lowered between her thighs, each slow thrusting drawing her arousal into a fine pinpoint of excitement. Heat filtered through her veins, and she existed in a dream world too beautiful to believe. He slowed the pace, driving her to within an inch of begging.

With one sharp thrust, he speared Eve. She groaned and gasped as his broad length stretched her.

"I'm sorry," he said around panting breaths. "Did I hurt you?"

"No. It feels so good."

His hips rolled, bumping against her clit, grinding until she couldn't take it any longer. She exploded under his pumping hips. She cried out,

her breath suspended as waves of orgasm careened and caught and brought her aloft. She quaked deep inside, and the splintering, beautiful sensation ebbed. He fucked her through the orgasm, never relenting.

As his movements became more powerful, she knew nothing but a pounding beat, a mindless swirl of heat and madness. Stroke after stroke escalated the heated cries of pleasure leaving her throat, and soon she was moaning, gasping his name, touching him all over in a frantic dance leading to another explosion. Her pussy clenched around him, and she gasped in violent release, her entire body quivering and quaking.

He drove deep one last time, shuddering as a roar ripped from his chest.

When he collapsed, Sean rolled to his side and gathered her into his arms. "God, that was...was..."

"Fantastic?" she said with a hopeful tone.

He laughed. "Better. Way better."

She sighed and moved in his arms just enough to snuggle deeper into embrace. She loved how he felt. He meant so much she couldn't think of the right words.

When one of her thighs slipped between his legs and her skin brushed against his balls, he caught his breath.

"Something wrong?" she asked.

"Nope. Nothing wrong."

"You're in that no mind state men get after they've just had sex."

He chuckled. "You're a damned smart woman. And yeah. I'm totally mindless. And probably not just after sex, either."

His agreeing laugh sent new happiness exploding inside her. His hands swept over her arms down to her ass. He cupped one ass cheek and squeezed it.

"Damn," he said softly. "Now that is an ass to die for."

Her giggle sounded girlish, and she felt free. Free and easy emotion slipped through her veins. She moved and displaced his arms around her.

Eve propped up on her elbow and looked down on him.

"You're beautiful." His gaze fixated on her and she felt self-conscious for only a moment. Sometimes her face made her appear younger than her years. He brushed his index finger over her nose and across her cheekbone. "So pretty."

She smiled. "Thanks." She ducked her head, and heat filled her cheeks. She touched his stomach, and his cock twitched. "I think you're the most gorgeous man I've ever seen."

He snorted. "Yeah, right. Women think I'm so good looking they're falling at my feet. Not."

She sighed. "I feel bad about that."

"What?"

She shifted until she sat up, her long legs curled to the side, her weight supported on one hand.

"God," he said, "don't sit like that."

"Why?"

"Because you look like a goddess, and I'm a horny soldier who hasn't touched female flesh in over two years."

She didn't move from her provocative pose, but her mouth parted in surprise. "Really?"

"Nope. I've been too busy working hard and..."

"And?"

"Taking you for granted."

"What?"

"Yeah. I should have paid more attention to you before I even left for Iraq. Those letters were hot. And sweet. I couldn't wait to get them. I was so damned happy when you agreed to write me."

"You were surprised that I'd write you? Why? We're such good friends."

He shook his head. "Because over the time we've worked together, I could tell you thought of me as just a friend."

"Friends don't write friends when they go to war?"

"Sometimes they don't. Like I said, there are a hell of a lot of guys who get Dear John letters."

She frowned. "And here I was worried that you wanted to stop writing me, and all the while you thought *I* might stop writing."

"Yep. To be honest."

"So you don't trust easily?"

He shrugged and reached for her, tugging her down into his arms. He tangled his fingers in her hair.

"Sean?"

"Since I was a kid people have left me. My parents spent a ton of time when I was in grade school trying to keep their business going."

"They were gone a lot?"

"They averaged fourteen hour days. Then on weekends they volunteered, and sometimes it seemed like they forgot me. My aunt Tina was my babysitter, and when I was sixteen, she was killed in a climbing accident. She was more a mother to me than my mother."

She shifted, curling her arm around his midsection to hold him closer. "So you learned that people could leave you no matter what you did."

He nodded. "That's a good way of putting it."

Eve's fingers traced a seductive pattern along his left thigh. He shivered. "Anyway, I'm not trying to sound pathetic."

Her hand stopped circling on his thigh. "Tell me more."

"About my childhood?"

"About...your time in Iraq. When you learned to zig rather than zag."

"Now?"

She felt him stiffen and knew somehow she'd said the wrong thing. Damn it.

He slipped out of her arms. "Be right back."

Concerned that Sean might be backing off a little, she slipped into her robe and headed to the kitchen. Some space wouldn't hurt them one bit.

She opened the fridge and stared at the contents without really seeing anything. She finally grabbed a bottle of water and opened it.

"Eve?"

She took a long swig from a bottle of water, then put it back in the fridge.

"Hey there," she said, knowing her smile was a little detached. She didn't want to push him. After all, he'd just gotten back from an environment so much different than the one he was in now.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Well, as my English friend Claudia would say, 'I'm brilliant'." Her gaze landed on his cock. She couldn't help it. The man was...well...delicious. After all, his cock had turned hard and hungry again.

Her bathrobe was only half tied, and a long strip of bare flesh from breasts to the light brown curls at her pubic mound showed. He walked straight toward her as if she had a leash and was tugging him toward her.

"Right. Look, I'm sorry I went quiet on you." He clasped her waist and brought her close. She put her hands on his chest. "What I'm trying to say is that I'm seriously hung up on you, Eve. And I want more with you than a one night stand."

Her hands slid upward over his chest, and she toyed with his nipples. She smiled, and this time the warmth held happiness. "I know. I'm sorry I came on strong. I shouldn't have asked for a confession right away."

He cupped her face and placed a kiss on her nose. "I'll tell you about my bad dreams and how I zigged instead of zagging."

She slipped her hands to his waist and held him there, and his cock surged into full attention.

"Talk to me," she said softly.

“I’d rather show you what I’m feeling.”

He gathered her into his arms and steered her backwards. He lifted Eve at the waist and plopped her onto the kitchen counter. With one movement, he undid the tie on her robe and it opened over her breasts. He licked his lips and cupped her breasts gently.

“God, these are beautiful.”

She looped her arms around his neck, and he dove in to lick and suck her left nipple with greedy enjoyment. She shivered as hot pleasure spread to her stomach and lower.

Eve brushed over his shoulders. “Are you trying to distract me with sex?”

He grinned up at her. “Yes.”

“You’re not getting away with it.”

He kept his arms around her waist. “Okay. You broke me down.” He swallowed hard, and she knew he didn’t find speaking about this easy. He brushed her hair away from her face. “While I was in Iraq, my senses seemed heightened. I used those feelings to make sure when I was on a convoy or in some other situation that wasn’t safe...I used it to... It sounds crazy.”

“No. Go on. It doesn’t sound crazy to me.”

He took a deep, shuddering breath and turned away from her gaze. He leaned back against the counter. Her arms encircled his neck, her hands warm on his chest. She leaned into him, and her legs went around him, too. It felt good to her. Comfortable. Nothing harried or frantic or demanding.

“At least two times when we were moving out...when we moved base camp, I had a bad feeling,” he said.

Her arms tightened around him. “What kind of bad feeling?”

“One morning we left base camp and the weather was for shit. I was edgy as hell. The guys in the Hummer kept commenting on how jumpy I was. I’d never mentioned my feelings like that before. I’d said and done things to keep fellow soldiers—friends safe. They started to call me

Spooky. Anyway, on this trip, I tried to warn them, but they all looked at me like I was a nutcase. I shut up. Even Micky, who is a friend of mine, wouldn't listen this time. Weather was coming up. A dust storm started right before insurgents started firing off at the convoy from across the desert. We called in firepower and a gunship came to the rescue."

"That's a good thing right? You were able to take out the insurgents?"

"Not before our Hummer wheels were shot out. We'd jumped out of the vehicle. That's when a sniper from the other side decided to shoot. Right before he pulled the trigger, I felt this instinct to move to the right. A bullet hit the Hummer right where I was kneeling. The asshole started firing randomly, and before each shot, I moved and avoided getting hit. Right then the gunship came in and took out the snipers."

"Oh, my God." Her voice came out soft, and she tightened her arms around him, wishing she could be his shelter from the horrors she knew he must have seen. "I can't imagine how horrible it was."

"Just another day in Iraq," he said sardonically. He turned in her arms and she kept her legs anchored around him. "You don't hear about it every day."

"No." She frowned. "Like I said, I don't watch the news much."

"Good thing. This event wasn't on the news."

"Oh, Sean." Eve's heart sank thinking about what could have happened to him, and she wanted to run from reality.

What she saw in his eyes, so brilliant blue and intense, blew her away. She saw caring and desire written within his gaze.

"I'm sorry, Sean."

His brow creased. "For what?"

"That you had to go through that."

He shrugged. "I made it. I'm fine."

She shook her head. "There's something else you're not telling me. When did this zig instead of zag incident happen?"

"About a month after I got there. Then the other incident..."

"When you were hurt?"

“Yeah. When that bomb went off, the Hummer saved our lives. Me and three other guys inside. Still, the side of the Hummer ripped open and part of it hit me in the head and knocked me unconscious. I had a cut to my leg, too. Apparently I had blood pouring down the side of my face, and the other guys thought I was a goner. The helmet probably saved my life.”

Fear sliced through her. She pushed her fingers gently through his close-clipped hair. “Where...?”

He tapped above his left ear. “Right here. There isn’t even a scar. You can’t tell anything happened.”

She inspected and saw nothing. His ear tempted, and she kissed his lobe. When he shivered and moaned softly, she grinned.

“That time I wanted to zig, but it wasn’t like I could tell the men anything more than I had the first time. I was out cold for eight hours.”

She didn’t know what to say, so she kissed his forehead tenderly.

“While I was lying in the hospital, I started to dream.”

“Nightmares?”

“In a way. Yeah. I’d dream that you and I were making love, and when you walked out of the bedroom, I waited. For a good minute. Then I had this horrible fear I’d lost you. And when I walked out into the living room in my apartment, you weren’t there.”

“Oh no. “

A shiver wracked his body. “I’ve always used my instincts to guide me.”

“I wish I could say the same about me. I keep saying that I should, and then something throws me off track. I think my mind is playing cruel tricks on me.”

He clasped her forearms and held on. “You’re fine. There’s nothing wrong with you.”

In a way he still looked lost, and she decided one thing with those instincts she’d talked about so much. She decided she couldn’t leave him

wondering, and took a huge risk. "I'm not leaving you, Sean. We've shared so much, especially tonight. I'm not going to leave you."

His smile was sweet and cocky and so damned handsome. His hands drifted upward to cup her shoulders. "Thank you."

He started to kiss her neck, and the warmth of his breath on her skin made her shiver. She wanted more. Boldness struck Eve, and she lay back on the counter.

With a feral male grin, he drew open her robe. Bared, she felt vulnerable. His warm fingers brushed down her thighs. She groaned as sweet pleasure urged her to open her legs to his attention. He leaned in to feast. Warm pulses tingled between her legs as he traced the sweetest kisses to her thighs. She shivered when his lips tickled sensitive skin. The ache built so quickly, she wanted to squirm and twitch. She wanted his cock buried deep within her. With the first brush of his tongue over her already aroused flesh, she gasped. Then, so delicately, he licked one fold, then the other. He pushed his tongue deep inside her to caress. He bestowed the most intimate kiss, his tongue thrusting, fucking her pussy with touches she couldn't get enough of. Eve wanted to beg, but she tumbled headlong into wonderful feelings. When his tongue flicked over her bud, she gasped.

"Take me, Sean," she asked, pleading.

"Stay right here."

He smiled and hurried to the bedroom. When Sean returned, his cock was sheathed. She couldn't wait for his possession and slid forward on the counter.

"Get off the counter and turn around," he said gently.

When she complied, the urgency inside built high. "Please, Sean."

His fingers teased the pliant flesh between her legs. "So wet."

She smiled. "It's all your fault."

He laughed softly. "Good."

He kissed the back of her neck, his arms circling her waist to pull her back into his embrace. His cock head probed between her pussy lips,

and she pushed back before he could thrust. Impaling herself on his thick heat, she groaned aloud with the pleasure as every inch took her. She held on tight to the counter, and her heart pounded as he stayed imbedded deep. She centered all feelings on how wide, long, and hot his cock was. He touched her breasts, brushing over her nipples, then Sean's fingers wisped over her clit.

She writhed, groaned, shimmied on his cock. "Sean...oh God."

He pulled back slowly, and the torment was acute. As Sean tugged on one nipple and brushed her clit with the other hand, she urged him to thrust.

"Do it."

Her demand spurred him onward, and he pumped, pushing so deep Eve writhed. His fingers danced over her clit, teasing the button. Her nipples stung with sweet pleasure. He slowed his thrusts to a spine-melting pace sure to torture her into a heady orgasm.

"Please, Sean."

"Hmm?"

"Please stop teasing me. I need you to do it hard."

He drew out until just the big tip of his cock remained inside her. Her pussy ached with need to have him as deep as he could go. "How bad do you want it?"

"Badly. I'm aching. I want to come so much."

"God, I like the sound of that," he said, his words low and raspy with passion.

He started to pound into her, his thrusts sharp and demanding. Each thrust hit a pleasure spot deep inside her no other man had managed to find, and as his cock rubbed over that exquisite place, she writhed and moaned uncontrollably.

Bliss detonated inside her as his cock hammered, his groans and grunts of male excitement growing higher. An explosion of satisfaction slammed her, and she screamed as her pussy clenched and released over

the iron-hard heat moving inside her. Sean groaned deep in his throat, his cock pulsing as he thrust deep one last time and climaxed.

As they melted together, she knew one thing with absolute certainty. She'd fallen hard for Sean.

When Eve left a sleeping Sean, she did it to start the coffee and grab the paper. Wearing her sloppiest blue sweats, her hair tangled from sleep and wild sex, she went into the kitchen and prepared her favorite European roast coffee. She smiled as she remembered the sex that had started in the kitchen and restarted in the bed not long after. Wow. They'd had sex three times last night, and not only was she a little sore, she felt good from one end of her body to the other. Her grin wouldn't vanish, fueled by the knowledge Sean cared for her the way no man had before. She looked forward to spending more time with him. They had the whole weekend to make love, to—

Wait. She couldn't get ahead of the ball game. She didn't know what he had planned, and she needed to run several errands.

One minute at a time, Eve. One minute at a time.

Sean swaggered into the kitchen clad in nothing but his boxer briefs, and she almost groaned at the sight of all that mussed, gorgeous masculinity striding toward her.

He smiled. "Morning."

"Morning." She cleared her throat. "I'm making some coffee. Should be done in a minute. I can make some breakfast, too."

He slipped his arms around her, surrounding Eve with delicious warmth she couldn't resist. "Sounds great. We need to talk, though."

Uh, oh.

In her experience, that statement often meant listening to something she didn't want to hear. "Oh?"

"Yeah."

He nuzzled her hair instead of talking. She drew in his wonderful scent and sighed. God, she loved this. Tears came to her eyes, and she realized she'd never experienced these feelings for a man this intensely. Caring and warm appreciation and overwhelming, wrenching love. For a wild moment she couldn't remember the loneliness she'd harbored inside. Couldn't remember what it ever felt like before Sean entered her life.

And she was wholly, wretchedly terrified of losing it all.

She shifted until his arms fell away, and she watched him. His face held incredible strength asleep or awake, his beautiful masculine chest moving up and down with each deep breath. She could watch him like this forever. She couldn't resist and reached out to palm his hard pecs and slowly brushed over his incredible six pack stomach. Her body quivered in renewed arousal.

He drew in a harsh breath, and she smiled.

"Hey, what are you doing?" he asked with a smile.

"Checking out what a dancer at Male Call feels like."

His mouth covered hers and passion flared in her belly as Sean's mouth rocked over hers. His tongue plunged deep and started a sexual rhythm that echoed in her loins. Hot. Hungry. A beast she couldn't deny and didn't want to.

When he let her up for air, she gazed into the dreamy expression in his eyes. "I'm loving every minute of this."

His eyebrows winged up. "That's good to know. Look, there's a big question I have to ask you. You don't have to answer right away." His brow furrowed, a worried expression in his eyes.

She slipped her fingers through his short clipped hair, memorizing the sight of him as if he might disappear any moment. "All right. Sounds serious."

He nodded. "It is. How do you see our relationship going from here? I know we were just friends before I left for the desert, but the way I feel now..."

Her heart leapt, a wash of possibility and beauty hovering just beyond her touch. "That isn't something I expect to hear a man saying."

For a second he looked perplexed, then he said, "You haven't known the right kind of men."

Her lips quirked upward. "Not until now."

He went silent for a short time, then continued. "My commanding officer said we'll be deployed within six months or less on another rotation."

Her heartbeat slowed, or at least that's what it seemed like. She'd known, even if only in the back of her mind, that this could happen.

"Oh," she said, her mind a jumble.

"Oh? That's all you can say?"

She closed her eyes as hot tears assaulted her. She kept them closed, too afraid to confront his expression. "I know it's your job. I just...the thought of you going back there when you've been hurt once..."

She opened her eyes and the tears flowed whether she wanted them to or not.

His eyes went soft and warm, and his arms tightened around her waist. "Hey, it's all right." He kissed her forehead. "Please don't cry. Since I'm a reservist there is just as much chance they won't call me up again. But with the way things are going, there's no way to say for certain."

She nodded. "I know. I'm sorry. I've never felt like this before, and I'm afraid it'll turn out to be a dream, and I'll wake up and you won't be there."

"Hell, that's my biggest nightmare, Eve. That I'll wake up and discover I'm still in Iraq and I didn't just have the greatest night of my life."

Joy overruled her fears and her tears turned to happiness. "I feel the same way. I don't want to be without you."

Relief flashed over his face. "Good. I realized how much you mean to me when I was out in that desert. I realized that I've waited far too long to tell you. Life is too short to pretend, Eve. I'm falling in love with you."

Hell, I'm *in* love with you. I know this is fast, and I don't want to scare you. But if I have to leave again for Iraq, I want you..." He took a shuddering, deep breath. "I don't want to leave here without you as my wife. Marry me, Eve."

Her breath caught in her throat as she looked up at him, and she thought she'd never heard more beautiful words in her entire life.

Words spilled from him in a rush. "Like I said, I know this is quick, but—"

She cut him off with a kiss.

When they surfaced, she said, "Yes."

A huge smile broke over his lips. "Yes? Yes you'll marry me?"

"One hundred percent, absolutely yes."

His mouth took hers once more, and they didn't have that coffee until quite a bit later.

Epilogue

One Year Later

Eve stood in the parking lot of the army base, waiting for Sean's bus to arrive. Nervous excitement danced in her stomach. Other women around her waited as well, their arms filled with flowers or children—all of them gifts for the men who returned. A few men stood waiting for their warrior wives to come home.

When she'd married Sean in a small ceremony a month after he'd proposed, some people maintained they'd moved too quickly and that hasty marriages never made for lasting love. She knew, in their case, that nothing could be further from the truth. Sean had been called back with his unit in less than two months after they married, and she knew that being his wife now, rather than waiting, was the best thing she'd ever done.

Many a night, after a hard day at work, she'd opened his new letters and read his love on every single page. They could have graduated to email, but decided they wanted to keep the tone of how they'd fallen in love in the first place. Letters seemed more personal. More lasting. They'd have each other's letter to cherish forever.

She glanced down at the sparkling wedding ring set on her finger and felt a spiral of pride rise up inside. The sound of vehicles rumbling down the road toward her caught her attention.

Finally, several buses lumbered into the parking lot, and her heart leapt with uncontainable anticipation and happiness. She'd waited for this moment for so long. It took forever for the buses to unload, or at least it felt that way to her. When she saw Sean's distinctive walk, she

recognized him in a sea of desert camo clothing. At this distance, all soldiers often appeared the same. But not him. Not to her.

Eve saw Sean searching the crowd of joyous greeters, and she headed for him at a run. When he saw her, he quickened his pace and a huge grin split his face. He dropped his duffle bag on the ground as she launched into his arms. When he kissed her, the love that spread through her ignited a fire inside she knew could never be extinguished. The kiss went on and on, a carnal excitement erupting between them. She didn't care how the kiss looked, and apparently neither did he.

When they parted, he held her close, his forehead against hers. "God, I missed you. I love you so much."

"I love you, Sean," she whispered. "Welcome home, soldier."

"Good to be home, wife. Wanna go home, and I'll show you some of my maneuvers?"

She laughed. "Oh, God. Please do. I've been dying to see your heavy artillery for the longest time."

He threw back his head and laughed, but no one paid any attention. They were too busy enjoying their own personal reunions.

He released her and picked up his duffle. As they walked toward their car, a peace deeper than anything she'd known settled over her. Her soldier had come home safe and sound, and they had their whole lives ahead to share.

About the Author

Romantic Times Book Review Magazine called Denise A. Agnew's romantic suspense novels "top-notch". Denise has written paranormal, romantic comedy, contemporary, historical, erotic romance, and romantic suspense novels. The fact she has lived in Colorado, Hawaii, and the United Kingdom has given her a lifetime of ideas. Her experiences with archaeology and archery have crept into her work, as well as numerous travels through England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Denise lives in Arizona with her real life hero, her husband. Visit Denise's website at www.deniseagnew.com or email her at danovelist@cox.net

Sacred, worshiped...hunted.

Goddess of the Grove

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Book two from the *Sacred Places* series.

All Korey O'Caha wants in his immortal life is to keep evil at bay, protect the witches he was destined to teach and to bed as many women as possible. He doesn't want love but he didn't plan on Gigi. Her very presence calls all he vowed sacred in life into question. She quickly becomes his reason for existing but can she ever fully accept him and who he is—a seven hundred year old immortal druid sorcerer? Will the secrets she's hiding be his undoing?

Gigi, the daughter of a great god, could not stand idly by and allow innocent druid children to be slaughtered. She intervened, placing them under her protection. In the end she was imprisoned in a place where time moved differently than here on earth. That was almost seven hundred years ago. Once freed, she ran as far from the old country as she could. Never did she expect to find ties to the land, let alone a man who stirs her blood the way Korey does.

As shadows from the past resurface, bringing news of an uprising, truth and passion ignite, leaving Gigi at the mercy of Korey.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Goddess of the Grove*:

Korey rubbed his jawline as tension threatened to make it lock. "I willnae calm down."

Coyle made another attempt to come towards him and Korey's power prickled, warning he wasn't safe to be near. "Dammit, cousin, do you wish to bring the gods to Gigi's doorstep?"

"No." What he wanted to do was toss Gigi over his shoulder and run for the hills with her, never allowing anyone to harm her. The moment her *precious* Parth dropped his spell, Gigi went about her business as if nothing had happened. Korey was impressed with how easily she'd learned to hide who she truly was from everyone but was hurt she chose to do so with him.

You hide from her.

He balked at his inner voice for daring to point out the irony in the situation. He'd spent years pining after a woman he thought wouldn't understand who and what he was only to find she more than knew of their kind.

"If you do nae calm yerself, cousin, I will be forced to knock you out with my power. I do nae think you wish to be unconscious if the dark sorcerer returns." Coyle went to his office door and peeked out. "Gigi still acts as if nothing occurred. Can you believe she's the woman who saved our village? How did we nae recognize her?"

"What?" He gawked at his cousin in disbelief.

Coyle centered an amused look on him. "You do nae remember?" A sly grin spread over Coyle's face. "Och, Korey, how can you forget the first woman you ever gave flowers to?"

He opened his mouth to protest but stopped the minute he thought back to his childhood. Seven hundred plus years ago there had been a woman—a beautiful one at that—who stormed into his village, blanketing them in her power. He had weak memories of exactly what she looked like but knew enough to know she was breathtaking.

Korey's mind drifted to Parth's behavior when asking Gigi what was so special about the little boy who had given her the flowers.

Had I known giving you flowers would win yer hand in marriage, I would have done so myself.

Suddenly, it felt as if he'd been struck in the midriff. Korey went forward, putting his hands on his knees and breathing hard. Coyle clapped him on the back of the neck, chuckling slightly. "'Tis a bitch when the love bug nae only bites you in the arse, but does so without you knowing the lil' bastard was there to begin with."

Korey rubbed his stomach and shook his head. "Gigi cannae be the...Coyle, she...it would mean she's my..."

Coyle drew upon his power and in a split second was holding a bucket before Korey's face. "Here, cousin. I've no wish to see you throw up on my office floor."

Pushing the bucket away, Korey narrowed his gaze on Coyle. "How can you joke at a time like this? I just found out the love of my immortally long life was

tortured on account of us and is in danger still. Nae only that but she isnae in any hurry to fess up to—”

Coyle tapped Korey’s head. “Nae to interrupt your tangent but you do realize you admitted to loving her, right?”

“I did no such...” He paused and then pulled the bucket back towards his face. “Och. ’Tis a horrible bug indeed.”

His cousin’s laughter grated on his nerves but Korey held his tongue, too worried about the goddess who graced their presence.

“Breathe.” Coyle rubbed Korey’s shoulder. “That’s it. In and out. Are you better now? You know, I felt the verra same way when I realized Deri was my mate. I felt as though someone had run me down and then backed over me for good measure. ’Tis common, I expect, for us to fall hard when we finally do get around to falling.”

The door to the office opened and Gigi entered. She took one look at Korey and arched a brow. “Drink too much again?”

He couldn’t help but smile. “Aye, something like that.”

Marc must face the biggest challenge of his life—convincing Liv Davis that he means to love her forever.

Chased

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Liv Davis had just about given up on her happily ever after. Burned by love more than once, she's beginning to think Mr. Right wasn't in the cards for her.

Marc Chase is a confirmed bachelor and lover of women—lots of them. He's determined not to fall head over heels the way his brothers have. Until he kisses Olivia Davis and realizes head over heels may not be such a bad thing after all!

Can Liv open her scarred heart for this younger ladies man? She loves Marc more than she can begin to admit but she's terrified of being rejected again. Marc faces a challenge greater than he's ever faced before. Making a woman believe he's more than just a great bedmate—making her believe he's in it for good.

In the end it will all come down to two days in a hotel and a bet. Can they both win?

Book Three in the Chase Brothers Series

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Chased*:

Marc's place smelled like his cologne and fresh fruit. She saw a set of hanging baskets filled with apples and peaches and knew that's where the scent had come from. His living room windows were large and looked out over the street. It was nicely furnished with bookshelves on the walls and pictures of his family all around.

He kept surprising her and that made her uncomfortable. In the box marked *unavailable bachelor for life*, he was non-threatening because it wouldn't pay to develop feelings for him. But in the box labeled guy way deeper than she'd thought who loved his family? That guy was dangerous to her well being.

“Now.” He flipped the lights off before lighting candles set all around the living room. “I’ll be right back.” He disappeared down the hall, returning after a few moments. “You look gorgeous with candlelight on your skin. I figured you would. Then again, I’ve yet to see you in a situation where you didn’t look gorgeous.”

His hands went to the tie at the right shoulder of her shirt and undid it, letting it fall forward. Her nipples, already hard at his presence, hardened even more at the cool air and the look on his face.

“Okay, let’s go down the hall before I take you here on the floor of my living room. I’ve already had you in a truck, I need to mind my manners now.”

She laughed and let him drag her down his hallway to his bedroom. A king sized bed dominated the space.

“I’ve been dreaming of this,” he murmured, pulling his shirt up and over his head. Her heart raced at the sight of him, tawny in the candlelight.

“God you’re beautiful.”

He stopped and cocked his head, smiling. “Thank you, sugar. I’ve got nothing on you.”

Her blouse lay around her waist and she removed it, laying it on the arm of a chair.

“Nothing on me.” She snorted. “Puhleeze. Look at yourself in that mirror there. You’re gorgeous. Hard and fit and muscular. I know you know you’re handsome, women fall over you all the time and you catch quite a few too.”

Chuckling, he unzipped her pants and shoved them down, letting her lean on him as she stepped out of them and her shoes.

“Good gracious.” He stalked around her, taking in every inch of her body. A body he’d helped her shape and strengthen. She’d never been ashamed of her nudity but she certainly felt a lot better about her overall tone and shape now that he’d kicked her ass for two and a half months.

“Now you. I want to see all of you.”

He stopped in front of her and slowly undid the buttons at the front of his jeans. Each *pop* of the seven buttons drew her nerves, and her nipples, tighter.

He shoved his jeans down and off his body, taking his socks off with them and then stood gloriously naked in front of her.

“Wow.” Her mouth dried up. Flat, hard stomach with an enchanting line of hair leading to his very healthy equipment. Listing to the left. She liked that, liked how it’d felt inside her. Right then it was very hard. “I do so love a man with such a good recovery time.”

He laughed but made no move to stop her as she took her time looking him over, taking in every inch of his body. Unable to stop herself, she skimmed her palms down his back and over his muscled ass. “This is even nicer unclothed.”

When she reached his front again, his eyes were a deep, dark green and a very naughty grin had taken residence on his lips. A thrill worked through her at the sight of that face. Shit, she totally should have started doing younger men years ago. Even as she thought it, she knew it was a lie. It wasn’t about his relative youth, it was about *him*.

“By the way? You’re not overcompensating. Not at all.”

Surprise overtook his features for a moment and he threw his head back to laugh. The floor swept out beneath her and she landed with a laugh on the bed, Marc looming over her.

“Did you like what you saw?”

“I like what I see very much. I’d like it even more if you got busy with all those arms and legs, your mouth and hands and that verra fine cock you’ve got there.”

“On your hands and knees then. Face the other way. I want to fuck you from behind but this way I can see your face in the mirror. See you come with those beautiful cat eyes looking up at me so you don’t forget who’s bringing you such pleasure.”

Holy shit, the man was lethal with the talking. Who knew? Ugh, again with the surprises. He was like the ultimate Pandora’s box of naughty.

She moved quickly and he settled himself behind her. They were well matched height wise, his groin pressed against her ass and the back of her pussy.

But he didn’t plunge in. Instead he bent and licked the length of her spine until a soft squeal of surprised pleasure came from her.

“I don’t have any neighbors and the shoe store is closed. Feel free to make as much noise as you like.” The edge of his teeth found her hip, biting her gently. “I just want to eat you up.” He paused and met her eyes in the mirror. “Again.”

She moaned as shivers of delight broke over her. She looked back, under the line of her body, watching as he sheathed himself.

“Now then.” He pressed the head of his cock just inside her body and waited. One of his hands gripped her hip, keeping her from ramming herself back against him to take him inside. The other stole around her body and palmed a breast, moving to slowly tug and roll the nipple until she writhed as much as she could.

“Please!”

“Please what? Tell me what you want, Liv.”

“Fuck me. Please. Stop teasing me and fuck me.”

“My pleasure.” He slid deeply into her in one strong push before pulling out nearly all the way.

If Marc hadn’t already loved her, watching her as he fucked her would have sealed the deal. It took a lot of trust for a woman to let herself be taken from behind like that. More trust to tell a man what she wanted and then to receive it with utter erotic abandon.

Her breasts swayed as she moved back to meet his thrusts, soft sounds broke from her as he played with her incredibly sensitive nipples. She was wet and creamy and he’d never felt anything as good as being deep inside her. His fingertips found her clit again, coaxing her into another orgasm.

And when she came? Holy moley she looked absolutely luscious. Her face flushed, eyes glassy, lips wet from her tongue. He’d seen a lot of women orgasm, but this one was beyond compare.

He loved how easy it was to make her climax as well. Once when he’d gone down on her, another as he made love to her in the truck, a third time with his hands just moments before and now he’d have her do it herself.

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