

LOVE  
FOR HIRE

A photograph of a muscular man with dark hair, wearing black briefs, lying on a bed in a hotel room. He is propped up on one arm, looking towards the camera. The room has warm, orange-toned lighting and a patterned headboard.

LAYLA  
CHASE

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...She kicked off her flats and stepped across the thick carpet to stand in front of him. “The last time I was dating, I don’t remember having to convince the guy sex was an option. Of course, I didn’t mean to insinuate we’re dating.” She walked her fingers up his chest, his neck and tangled them in the hair at his collar. “Did that statement just expose my age?”

“You’re the one hung up by the age difference.” His hands slipped around her waist and tugged her close, right against his rigid cock. “Not much convincing needed here. I’m still hard from the kiss in the elevator.”

Relief they were finally communicating washed through her. As long as she was being honest, she might as well tell him what she really wanted. “Great, because I want our first time to be fast and hard.”

Eyebrows raised, Dez stared, a slow grin stretched his lips. “Are you the same woman who didn’t know how to fill out the initial questionnaire?”

“Same woman.” She stretched to brush a kiss on his lips, teasing his lower lip with the tip of her tongue. “With one of the security barriers breached.”

“I discovered the password?” He leaned over and captured her mouth, plunging his tongue into her mouth.

She moaned at his invasion and grabbed his shoulders. Hard was exciting. She parried and gave in to the experience of being mastered, savoring the sensations created by his probing tongue running along her teeth, then the edges of her lips, then back along her own tongue...

ALSO BY LAYLA CHASE

*Stagecoach Capture*

# LOVE FOR HIRE

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BY

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LOVE FOR HIRE  
AN AMBER HEAT BOOK

This book is a work of fiction. All names, characters, locations, and incidents are products of the author's imagination, or have been used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, locales, or events is entirely coincidental.

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*My thanks go to Delilah Devlin and Megan Kerans  
for their help in making Dez and Kimbra come to life.*

## Acme Escort Agency

*Allow us to make you feel like the world revolves around you, yet completely safe and relaxed. Professional, young, good-looking males and females providing intelligent, witty, and romantic company for any occasion. We're also trained in alternative therapies and massage, so when you call, ask about our special services and rates. Discretion is our middle name. At Acme, we're at your service—day or night!*

# CHAPTER 1

Kim Wilburt's gaze kept returning to the ad in the *Southern Plains* magazine. The elegant lettering and the black-and-white graphic of a man in a tuxedo gave the ad a touch of class. But her analytical mind couldn't stop picking apart the wording of the ad.

What exactly did "romantic company" mean?

"Anything interesting?"

Pressure on the back of her chair bumped her against the desk, and she jerked. At the sound of Greg Taylor's question, Kim slammed the magazine shut. "Not much. I'm thinking about placing an ad." She swiveled to look up at the newest member of her team.

Greg Taylor—programming genius but typical geek. He stood before her, munching on a slice of pizza with a saucy mushroom dotting the "i" on an AFI t-shirt.

He pointed to the slice and wiggled his eyebrows. "Lindsey ordered in pizza for the group. Want a piece?"



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If Lindsey had provided lunch, watch out, the woman was looking for a favor. “No, thanks. I’ve got food in my fridge.”

“Ah, yes. A perk of being the department head.”

A minor benefit compared to the headaches of beta-testing software and meeting SyncroComp Systems’ unrealistic development deadlines. “Greg, as you pass through the break room, please remind everyone about the three o’clock project meeting?”

“I can take a hint. ‘Out, Greg,’ is what you really mean.” He grinned and sauntered to the door, then paused and looked over his shoulder. “Arrive at next weekend’s meeting on the arm of a young stud. A sure-fire guarantee to fund Mate Match, version two.”

The door clicked shut and Kim found herself staring at the white expanse. So he had noticed what she was reading.

Was an escort really the answer to the business conference she’d been dreading for the past two months?

Winning an award for developing a successful computer matchmaking program should be enough. The honor and the recognition within the industry were what she’d worked so hard for. She shouldn’t care that she had no man in her life right now—or for the past two years.

But she did—she cared a lot.

The traditional arguments raced through her mind. She was an intelligent individual, had earned three post-graduate degrees, owned her own home in a prominent area in northern San Antonio.

Kimbraleigh Wilburt deserved a weekend of undivided male attention.

Before she changed her mind, she grabbed the magazine and flipped through the pages to the ad. Phone grasped in one hand, she punched in the ad’s 800 number. When the connection clicked, she panicked and punched the disconnect button. What would she do if someone discovered her secret?

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Her intercom buzzed. “Excuse me, Kim?”

Kim pressed the lit button and leaned toward the phone. “Yes, Lindsey?”

“I need to submit your meal preference for next weekend’s banquet by the end of business today. Did you want the filet mignon, the cordon bleu or the stuffed portobello?”

“Put me down for two chickens.”

“Why two? I don’t understand.”

“I’ll be bringing a date.” With a secret smile, Kim clicked over to an outside line and punched in the numbers.

\* \* \*

The doorbell rang and Kim made a last adjustment to her silk blouse before resting her hand on the door knob. Since placing the call to Acme Escorts, she’d questioned her decision. In the past, her relationships with men had proved disastrous. Would hiring an escort be any different? Pressing a hand to her jumpy stomach, she opened the front door.

The silhouette of a tall man was backlit by the street lamp.

“Oh, my porch light must be out.” She stepped through the door and stretched toward the globe.

“Let me, pretty lady.” A deep voice resonated in the close space.

*Oooohh.* His bass tones rolled over her, and she shivered at the nickname. *Get real, Kim. He’s talking a standard line he uses with all clients.*

As he unscrewed the globe from its fitting, he glanced over his shoulder. “Do you have a replacement?”

The streetlight cast shadows, but she could tell his was a most appealing face. Tanned, open, friendly. But so young.

When his brow rose and a wrinkle crinkled near the corner of his mouth, she realized she was staring. Rude behavior that she herself wouldn’t normally tolerate.

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“Uh, sorry. I’ll be right back.”

She dashed inside and headed to the cupboards in her laundry room. How foolish must she have looked to be staring at a man who had to be ten or twelve years younger than she?

Maybe she hadn’t been specific enough in her phone interview. The conference would include all the giants in the Southwest software world. This guy looked like he’d fit better on the back of a horse, herding cattle, than in a banquet hall with computer executives.

The box of light bulbs sat on the lower shelf and she grabbed one. *Best to thank him for his help and send him on his way.*

She walked back to the front of the house and spotted him in the open doorway. His shoulders almost filled the available space—broad shoulders covered by a tan jacket. And he was tall. An attribute she’d specified. Someone who could make her feel feminine, which normally didn’t happen with her five-nine height.

“Here’s the bulb.” Now that he was in the entryway light she saw he had deep blue eyes, the shade of Texas bluebonnets. *And wavy brown hair with sun-kissed highlights.*

Where had that wayward thought come from?

His fingers grazed her palm as he took the bulb. “Ah, energy saver—that’s good.”

The skin he’d touched heated, and she drew her fingers closed. To savor the sensation? Pushing away the stray thought, she shrugged. “My small part in living gently on the earth.” Inwardly, she cringed at her prim words. This was the exact reason she avoided dates—she always reverted to her geeky state when around handsome men.

“I’ve read about that.” He turned the final fastener and brushed his hands together. “Can’t figure out how to incorporate that philosophy into my own life.”

“Really?” Rare was the person she’d met whose eyes didn’t glaze over when she talked about energy savings. “You could connect with a

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simplicity group.”

He moved closer and leaned a shoulder against the door jamb, his blue eyes focused on her face. “Never heard of them. How would I find out the details?”

On look into his interested gaze and she made a split-second decision. Concern for the environment was a positive, even honorable, quality. “We didn’t get introduced. I’m Kim Wilburt.

“Dez Renato.” He clasped her hand and shook it. “Acme sent me to get the contract signed.”

*Only for the paperwork?* Disappointment slowed her movements. How could she ask about her assigned escort? “Won’t you come in? I wasn’t sure how the process worked.”

Dez sauntered across the tiled entry and gazed around. “Solid structure, nice detailing on the stairwell.”

“You sound like you know about house construction.”

“I’m restoring one in Monte Vista.”

“That’s impressive. I haven’t decided how long I’m keeping the house.” She appraised his tall figure beside her Queen Anne chair and decided his long legs would barely fit. “You might be more comfortable on the sofa.”

“Your choice, ma’am.”

She groaned and sat on the edge of a chair, waving a hand toward the sofa. “If you could use my name instead of ma’am, maybe I wouldn’t feel so much older.”

“Nothing to do with age.” He chuckled and sat, laying a thin folder on her oak-and-glass coffee table. “The paperwork is incomplete and just says Ms. Wilburt.” He looked up and captured her gaze. “Tell me what you prefer and that’s what I’ll call you.”

Her stomach twirled at the intense look in his eyes, and she swallowed hard before answering. “I prefer Kim.” She could drown in those eyes that looked nowhere but deep into hers. For an instant, she

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was the center of his universe.

And that was thrilling. Until he looked away and she was brought back to the reality of this impersonal arrangement.

“Okay.” His head dropped in a short nod. From an inside jacket pocket, he grabbed a pen, then flipped open the folder. “Is Kim short for Kimberly?”

At the abrupt change in his behavior, she blinked and shook her head. “No, it’s short for Kimbraleigh.” A part of her wanted to reconnect with that intense gaze, wanted that special feeling back. “When I was growing up, my family called me Kimbra.”

“Kimbra is a beautiful name. That’s what I’ll use.” He extended the forms in her direction. “If you could fill out the last few questions, we can finish this part.”

Remembering the content of those questions she’d left blank, she jumped to her feet and crossed to the bay window overlooking her terraced garden. “This...circumstance is new...and I wasn’t sure how to answer all the questions.”

Rustling sounded behind her and she braced. *For what?* She didn’t know. Large hands rested on her shoulders, his warmth immediately seeping through the fabric to her skin. After the initial shock, she almost swayed.

“Can’t have a frown marring your pretty face. Let me rub away that tension you’re feeling.”

Her eyelids drifted shut, and she let her head drop forward. “Mmm, that feels great.” This was special treatment she could get used to.

“At Acme, we know the first time may be confusing for clients.” His tone soothed, while his hands kneaded. “We’ve discovered success with conducting the final interview in person.”

“Do all the interviews come with massages?” The sensation of warm hands against her stiff muscles was heavenly. She envisioned them on other parts of her body, and suddenly her skin flushed with

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heat.

He chuckled. “Only if a massage will help.”

A nagging thought reminded her—his actions were just part of the company’s services. “I don’t know anyone who wouldn’t appreciate what you’re doing.”

“You’d be surprised.”

With a sigh, she rolled her head to the side and opened her eyes enough to catch sight of their reflection in the window. The blissful expression on her face, her figure dwarfed by the hunk behind her, his youthful head above hers, his hands working circles up the column of her neck.

A stranger’s hands circling her neck.

Icy dread flashed through her blood, stilling her thoughts. What the hell was she thinking?

Stepping from under his hands, she gathered her wits and turned with a thin smile. With determination, she assumed her department head persona. “Let’s get back to my requirements. I don’t believe this subject was covered over the phone. Please excuse me if my statement isn’t the most tactfully worded.”

She took a deep breath and looked Dez directly in the eye. “I’ll need an escort who can keep up an intelligent conversation involving computers, software mostly.” There, she’d stated her need. *Had that sounded too pompous?* “Or at least, one who can follow along in such conversations. How do I specify that?”

A grin spread his lips and he turned back to the sofa. “You just did. A couple more questions and you can review the contract before signing.” With the papers spread on her coffee table, he jotted a few notes, then looked up. A lock of wavy hair tumbled over his brow, but he ignored it.

Her fingers itched to brush it back to nestle with the rest of the careless brown waves framing his face.

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*Hold on. Where had that sensual thought come from?*

“Next question. What level of familiarity are you requesting?”

Wild, sexy images of what he might mean passed through her mind. Heat bloomed in the skin along her chest. In a move meant to hide the evidence of her arousal, she grasped the open edges of her blouse, pretending to fiddle with the collar. “Um, familiarity? I’m not sure I understand.”

“Let me demonstrate.” His voice rasped, and he patted the sofa cushion next to where he sat.

As if drawn by the magnetism in his voice, she moved across the room and sat, her skin tingling like a building static charge.

“I can show you what it would be like on a first date.” His hand pulled hers away from her blouse and his thumb ran a path along the ridge of her knuckles.

She glanced at her hand, dwarfed by his. *Nice*. She couldn’t remember the sensation of being touched in a casual, kind way. At least a year before her divorce—when she’d finally stopped pretending her marriage wasn’t falling apart.

“Hand holding, supporting your elbow when we walk together, brushing hair off your forehead. All those actions demonstrate we’re learning about each other.” He raised her hand, brushed a kiss on the back side and rested her palm on his chest. “And you, of course, would be reciprocating with similar actions.”

Unable to resist, she spread her fingers and savored the feel of hard male muscles beneath a crisp linen shirt. *Very nice*.

“Or we could be a couple who has known each other for several weeks.” He hooked a finger under her chin and tilted up her head until their gazes met. “In that case, we’d share long, soulful gazes.”

The velvety tones of his words washed over her and she inched closer, keeping her gaze locked with his. Even the tips of his eyelashes were tipped with gold.

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“And our touches would be more familiar.” A hand rested on her thigh and squeezed.

She gasped and jerked her leg. “Oh, sorry.” Lordy, the man would think she was a frigid virgin.

A corner of his mouth quirked upward, exposing straight white teeth. “The exact reaction we need to work on.”

Excited by the weight of his hand on her thigh, she drew a deep breath. “The ad said something about alternative therapies. What are those?”

His hand lifted from her leg and he reached for the paperwork, extending it in her direction. “Take a few minutes and read through the list. Put your initials next to the services you may require.”

Kim’s brow furrowed at his abrupt attitude. She took the folder and glanced over the data on the top sheet, verifying the basic information. As she read the types of additional services, she fought to keep her mouth from dropping open. Massage—whole body, leg, foot, heated stone therapy, facial.

Affection levels—polite, caring, loving. After the demonstration he’d just given, her mind raced with what the “loving” physical level involved. Her breasts felt heavy and her nipples had tensed into tight buds.

She glanced at him, but his head was turned, his fingers running over the polished stones in the glass dish on her end table. Relics of her parents’ rock-hunting days.

This was her special weekend. She checked a few boxes. She’d earned a reward for those late nights at the office and weekends spent verifying computer code. *For those missed candlelit dinners and strolls along the Riverwalk.* She checked a few more. *For the lack of male companionship in my life.*

With a flourish, she signed the contract and handed it back. “I want the deluxe package, the one with all the extras.”



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\* \* \*

“Wonderful.” *Business details done, on to the conditioning.* With his most blinding smile, he turned and crooked an arm along the back of the sofa. Using lazy, gentle movements, he brushed wisps of reddish hair off her neck. “In that case, a pre-event date is recommended.”

“So you’re to be my escort?”

“Signed, sealed and delivered.”

“This date is for us to get used to each other?” Her brow furrowed and she pursed her full lips. “What do you suggest?”

Now that the contract was signed, he took an extra moment to study the woman who’d be his focus for the next few days. Amazing green eyes. Thick red hair that brushed her shoulders. Conservative clothes that covered what looked like a killer body. “Dinner in a restaurant where the wait staff knows you. Convincing them we’re a couple will boost your confidence.”

She blinked. “My what?”

He drew a caressing finger along her cheek. This was one of his favorite parts of being an escort. The verbal seduction. “I see it in your eyes. You don’t know how sexy and desirable you are. How sultry your green eyes are, and how that dimple when you smile can cause a man to miss a breath. Someone in your past convinced you otherwise, and you still believe that person.”

The skin around her eyes tightened, and her gaze skittered to the side. “That wasn’t in the interview.”

At the wounded tone in her voice, his chest grew tight. *Odd reaction.* He refocused on Kimbra. The guy who’d done this must have been a real bastard. “Shh, sorry.” Dez leaned close and grazed light kisses along her soft jaw to her ear. The scent of raspberries filled his nose. Sweet and luscious. “Within a week, you’ll believe differently. My task is to make that happen.”

On a sigh, her eyelids drifted closed and she grabbed a handful of

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his shirt as an anchor.

“You, Kimbra, will embrace the vibrant, sensual female inside. Those who know you best will be hard pressed to recognize this new ‘you.’” His thumb ran along her lower lip, dipping inside and pressing until he felt the tentative sweep of her moist tongue.

More responsive than he’d anticipated. He couldn’t deny a flash of pride at what he’d accomplished within the span of a single hour.

His practical side took command. He eased away and stood, grabbing the folder as he straightened. “I’ll pick you up tomorrow night at seven o’clock. Wear something sexy.” A wink and a smile and he walked through the front door.

*Phase One completed.*

## CHAPTER 2

Dez's vintage Jaguar braked to a stop at the valet parking stand in front of Reynaldo's. He hopped out, tossing the car keys into the hand of the waiting uniformed valet.

Kimbra bit her lip and fidgeted with the hem of her new dress. Her one-bare-shoulder, barely-reaches-the-knees dress. After that session with Dez last night, she'd known not a single dress hanging in her closet fit his description of sexy. For whatever crazy reason, she wanted to be sexy in his eyes.

Ignoring the questioning looks of her office mates, she'd actually left the building in daylight hours to drive to the Quarry Market, to a new boutique recommended by her shopping-addicted younger sister.

The thrill of shopping on a weekday had been decadent.

And the world at SyncroComp had not come to a grinding halt. Ninety minutes later, she'd returned to no more chaos than normally reigned in the programming department.

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The car door snicked open and a masculine hand extended into her line of sight.

She accepted Dez's help and climbed out, gripping his hand to steady her balance on the too-tall stilettos. Why had she believed a perfect stranger's opinion these heels made the dress? What they were was a twisted ankle in the making.

A gentle breeze fluttered the skirt around her thighs, its gauzy fabric tickling the backs of her legs. The sensation reinforced how different her appearance was tonight. Even her makeup was more dramatic than she usually wore.

Dez leaned close and rested a hand on her lower back, his fingers urging her forward. "Did I tell you how much I like your dress?"

A thrill ran through her and she ducked her head, then shot him a sideways glance. A second compliment about her dress. "I believe you did mention it. Thank you for noticing."

A sexy grin appeared and he winked. "Babe, you're a hard woman to ignore. That color makes your eyes sparkle like emeralds."

Kimbra sucked in a breath and couldn't hold back a smile. Compliments had been scarce in her past and each one of Dez's eased its way into her heart. The man was certainly a charmer.

*And he's playing a role.* A part of her felt obligated to keep that fact in her awareness.

They walked to the entrance, and Dez held open the etched glass door.

"Ms. Wilburt." The hostess nodded at Kimbra, but widened her gaze at the tall, handsome man accompanying her. "Your table is ready. Follow me."

The subdued orchestral music, small tables and flickering candles hadn't changed since her last visit. Accompanied by a man, Kimbra couldn't help seeing the room from a different perspective. The setting created a romantic mood, and a small part of her hoped to be seen with

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Dez by a friend or acquaintance.

When they reached the secluded table, Kimbra spotted a bill pass between Dez and the hostess and shivered in anticipation at what treat would be arriving at their table.

Dez's hand ran along her shoulder before moving to the back of the chair and pulling it out. Once she was seated, he edged his chair closer to her side.

She raised an eyebrow and let her gaze drop to the chair.

"Didn't like being so far away." He clasped her hand, entwining their fingers. "The hostess knew you. How often do you come here?"

She shrugged, feeling the fabric stretch along her chest. "Depends on my work schedule. Once a month or so."

"Always alone?" Dez's gaze centered on hers, his tone low.

"No, usually with a friend."

The pressure of his fingers increased for just a moment, then released. "A special place like this should be shared."

What did that tightened grasp mean? Was he sending her a message she had missed? "I come with female friends."

His hand smoothed along her arm and she relaxed into his touch, enjoying the fact he liked touching.

"Good...you're not jumping when I touch you. That's improvement."

She smiled, but didn't want to give away what she was thinking. If she didn't improve, would he keep up this behavior? Why would she want this to end? Who would want this to end?

"Here's the champagne you ordered, sir." The sommelier popped the cork and held the bottle over a flute, pouring in just enough of the pale liquid for Dez to taste and approve.

Champagne?" She rested a hand on his arm, glad for the chance to touch him. "And the celebration is...?"

Dez held up both glasses, waiting for them to be filled. "You. I'm

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celebrating the new gorgeous, sexy Kimbra we discussed last night.”

His words rolled through her, making every womanly cell in her body want to strut. The lyrics to an old song from her grade school years ran through her mind. *I am woman, hear me roar.*

“Here, Kimbra.” Dez passed her a glass and held his tilted in her direction.

“Thanks.” She accepted the glass and clinked the edge with his before sipping the bubbly wine. Tuesdays in San Antonio had never been this fun before.

“Kim!” A male’s voice sounded from across the room.

Conversations hushed, and people looked around the cozy restaurant.

Dez raised an eyebrow and turned his head.

A round man wearing a half apron with dark smears wove his way through the tables, a wide smile displaying his obvious delight. He raised a hand in greeting.

Ron. Didn’t take long for the staff to relay her presence to the head chef. Being the recipient of Ron’s hug involved damp clothes, aromas of garlic and peppers, and bone-crushing pressure. “Hey, good to see you.”

He released her enough to plant kisses on both cheeks. “I’m always glad to know when my special friends come to eat at my table.” He straightened, keeping a hand on her shoulder, then stilled at the sight of her companion. With a jerk of his head toward Dez, he asked, “And who’s this?”

Kimbra suppressed a laugh at her friend’s inability to hide his surprise. “Ron, this is Dez Renato.”

Dez lounged in his chair with an arm hooked over the back.

A posture that looked too casual, almost posed, but she couldn’t figure out why. “Dez, this is Ron Ellington, who’ll be responsible for the wonderful food we’ll be eating tonight.”

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Dez rose from his chair and extended a hand across the table. “Pleasure, sir.”

Ron stepped close to the table and clasped hands. “Welcome to Reynaldo’s.”

The men shook hands, scrutinizing each other as they did.

Kimbra knew this was the exact test Dez had mentioned the night before. When he settled back in his chair, she covered his hand with hers and turned with a wide smile. “Dez is anxious to sample the food here. What is tonight’s specialty?”

With enthusiasm, Ron described in detail the culinary delights available for their selection.

In a slow move, Dez reversed their handclasp and idly ran a finger over her palm, extending the strokes to the tip of each of her fingers.

Kimbra felt every one of his caresses and the resulting tingles that ran up her arm. She breathed in sharply, and fought to keep her eyes open and look like she was listening to Ron’s detailed descriptions.

How had she lived for so long without the pleasure of a man’s touches?

Without this delicious tension running through her body?

She had no idea. Now that she’d discovered these feelings, she intended to make the most of her opportunity with Dez.

\* \* \*

Dez watched the flutter of Kimbra’s eyelashes and knew she struggled to keep them open. Her increased breathing clued him in to her excited state. The chef’s speech had wound down and Dez saw his expectant gaze center on Kimbra’s face.

From the look of her dazed expression, she had no idea what the meal choices were. He could at least throw her a lifeline. “I’m torn between grilled salmon and beef medallions.”

Her grateful glance was his reward.

“The salmon sounds wonderful, and I’ll have your delicious house

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dressing on my salad.”

“Excellent.” Ron turned to him. “And for you?”

“Texas beef is a must.” He lifted Kimbra’s hand close to his mouth and kissed each knuckle before continuing. “We’ll share, so we don’t miss out on these tempting choices.”

Ron’s eyes widened and then he smiled. A brief touch of his hand on Kimbra’s shoulder and he was gone.

Dez lowered their clasped hands to the table. “What’s the verdict?”

She turned her head toward him, brows furrowed. “Verdict?”

“By the hug, I’d say you know him well.” What was that tightness in his chest? He couldn’t possibly be bothered by the physical proof of her friendship with a man. He lifted his glass and tossed back the rest of his champagne. “Does he believe we’re a couple?”

“I’d say his suspicions are running high.” A mischievous glint flashed in her eyes. “He’s probably on the phone right now to his sister and my best friend Tara, feeding her every detail about you.”

“Your best friend’s brother?” Why did learning that bit of information shoot relief through him? *This is a job, Renato. Don’t get personal.* Forcing his thoughts back to the conversation, he cleared his throat. “Good choice of location.”

Their salads arrived, and the conversation went from specifics about their relationship to generalities about living in San Antonio. He kept his own answers brief, but encouraged Kimbra to elaborate, drawing answers from this interesting woman hesitant to talk about herself. Acme’s training kicked in and he listened for details that, when used at the proper times with others, would help reinforce the image of an established relationship.

By rote, he kept her wine glass full, stroked her hand whenever she rested it on the table, brushed hair back from her cheek and always held her gaze whenever she made eye contact. A couple of times he brushed a knee against hers and enjoyed the resulting flare of heat in her



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expressive eyes.

Her responses were definitely warming to the next step.

The waiter poured coffee and stepped back. “Will there be anything else?”

“Kimbra? Sure you won’t have dessert?”

With a shake of her head, she pressed a hand to her stomach. “Not tonight. I’m stuffed.”

Dez tipped the cream pitcher and poured a thin stream into the fragrant dark brew. His thoughts flipped between pressing for more intense physicality here, or waiting until they reached her house. Kimbra was a vibrant woman who might harbor a wish to be naughty.

Unable to resist testing her response, he pressed his right hand to the top of her thigh as he sipped his coffee.

“What?” Her head twisted, red hair flying in a curtain.

“Shh, don’t react.” With an elbow resting on the table, he leaned close and whispered, “Just enjoy.”

“But here...?” She stiffened and her brows wrinkled into a knot over her nose.

“Relax. Sip your coffee.” His fingers inched higher, dragging the fabric of her skirt upward. The thick napkin bunched and he flipped it to the side. “Yes, here, in public. That elderly couple six feet away will continue their mundane conversation.”

He made sure his tone stayed low and even, so anyone passing within earshot wouldn’t be clued in. His fingers delved between her smooth thighs, thankful the September weather was still hot enough that she was barelegged.

Kimbra gasped and set down her coffee cup, turning her head to gaze at the restaurant patrons.

At the sight of her trembling hand, he felt the first flicker of doubt. Was he pushing her too fast? Then he remembered what she’d said the previous night—that she wanted it all. After setting down his own cup,

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he brushed a knuckle down her soft cheek. “Don’t worry, Kimbra. The tablecloth is long enough on the other side to hide my hand. We wouldn’t want to be the cause of someone choking on their meal.”

She nodded, while pulling her napkin from her lap and dabbing at her mouth.

Sharing intimacies in a public setting was one of his personal turn-ons. He wanted her to know the same excitement.

When she braced a hand on the table edge and pushed her pussy against the side of his hand, he knew she was ready. Heat coiled in his groin, but he passed it off as the thrill at the potential risk of being caught. He focused his thoughts on her responses and turned his hand, urging Kimbra to spread her thighs.

The moment the space increased, Dez stroked a finger along her silky panties, feeling the moist fabric, knowing she was turned on. He repeated his action and was rewarded with her breathy gasp.

At her excited sound, his cock stirred. His movements stilled. This was not part of the plan.

Her hips flexed, wiggling her pussy sideways against his hand.

He took a deep breath, fighting his surprising reaction to her need. This was his show and he was the commander. With his pinky, he edged under the elastic band and ran his finger through damp curls to slide along her slippery heat. With lazy moves, he circled her engorged clit. “You’re so hot, Kimbra.”

In response, her other hand clenched the table and her hips rose to press harder against his movements.

The pressure behind his trouser fly grew to pleasure/pain. Damn, he needed a distraction. “Kimbra, see that dark-haired executive in the blue shirt by the window?”

He turned to watch her reaction and caught her short nod. “What would he say if he could see under our tablecloth?” He hooked a thumb on the elastic and pushed it to the side so his index finger could flick

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the tight knot and probe her heat. “Think he’d be shocked?”

Again, she nodded, her shimmery gaze hard on the man he’d pointed out.

Unfamiliar jealousy swelled in his chest. Suddenly, he wished he’d never started this game. The realization he didn’t want her looking at anyone but him while in this state of excitement was hard to accept. “Kimbra, look at me.”

Her eyes closed for a long moment, then she turned her head, green eyes luminous in the candlelight.

He withdrew his finger and re-inserted it, watching her eyes widen. A quick glance at her breasts confirmed pebbled nipples poking through the fabric. “Good. Now pretend we’re having a normal conversation. That we’re talking about the latest movies or a great book we read.”

“Normal?” She swallowed hard and clenched her channel around his finger. “How in hell do I do that?”

“Trust me, the excitement is heightened.” He angled his hand to brush against her clit, while inserting a second finger. At the flare of heat in her eyes, he increased the tempo, stroking dewy folds, then dipping inside, pressing along her inner walls. “Appearing calm against rising lust puts our basic natures into battle.”

“Philosophy at a time like this?” Her breath expelled in short pants and her eyes narrowed. A single circle of her hips against his hand and then her thighs locked tight around his hand, muscles quivering. Pulses from her pussy surrounded his fingers, pulling them deeper. His movements slowed to lingering caresses.

Dez admired her ability to keep her eyes open during her orgasm. As her emerald gaze calmed from exhilarated to dreamy, she bit her lower lip and her shoulders sagged.

With quick movements, he released her panties, eased her skirt down her thighs and wiped his hand on his napkin. Anything to keep

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his mind off his body's reaction to the emotions he'd just seen cross her face. Not since his first year in this business had his response been this urgent. At least not while still wearing his clothes.

A waiter carrying a coffee decanter approached. "Refills?"

Dez pointed to his cup. "I'd like one." Nursing another cup would allow enough time for his body to return to a condition that wouldn't embarrass them both while exiting the restaurant. "Kimbra, how about for you?"

Her smile was shaky. "No, I'll stick to ice water. Thanks."

Dez nodded and turned to the waiter. "Bring the check." When the man moved on to the next table, Dez glanced at Kimbra's flushed face. "How are you?"

"Peachy." Over the top of her water glass, she met his gaze and held it while taking several deep gulps. "I'm not sure of the protocol here. Am I supposed to—" Her gaze dipped to his lap.

"No!" His whole body jerked to attention at her words.

The gray-haired woman at the next table turned to stare.

*Okay, Renato, get control here.* Aiming a dazzling smile at the stranger, he shifted in his chair, trying to relieve the pressure in his crotch. He sipped at his coffee, but the heady tang of Kimbra's arousal invaded his nostrils. Before her scent drove him totally over the edge, he hastily set down the cup. "This was about your pleasure."

"That's nice to hear." Eyes flashing, she rested her elbows on the table and leaned toward him, brushing an arm against his. "Still...doesn't seem fair."

The husky tone in her voice sent his imagination into overdrive. He gritted his teeth and debated if he should dump his glass of water into his lap.

"If you'll excuse me?" Kimbra scooted back her chair. "I'll just be a few minutes while you're waiting for the check."

Rising as far as he dared, Dez eased back her chair, then watched

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her cross the restaurant, her steps a bit wobbly. In her absence, he could breathe deeply and not smell the sweet scent of raspberries. With his gaze unfocused, he could let his mind wander to mundane thoughts in hopes of calming his body.

“Well, did you enjoy the food?”

Dez jerked and turned to see the chef had approached. “Delicious. The beef had a tasty sauce.”

Ron stepped closer, his gaze narrowed. “Been seeing Kim long?”

After a sip of now-cold coffee, Dez let a grin slide over his mouth but registered a wary tightening of his chest. “Long enough.”

“Treat her nice.”

The man’s terse words set off alarms in Dez’s mind. Had he stepped into a loaded situation here? “And you’re saying this because...?”

“She’s a friend. You’re the first man she’s dated since her divorce.”

Kimbra was divorced? An interesting fact he hadn’t known.

“What am I interrupting here?” Kimbra eased into her chair.

Dez ran his arm along her shoulders and drew her close, surprised at how easy this gesture had become. “I was complimenting the chef on the excellent meal.”

Ron smiled and gave a mock bow. “And I was telling your friend that the meal is on the house. In honor of seeing you here in my restaurant.” He spread his hands in front of his body. “Both of you.”

Kimbra jumped up and gave Ron a big hug. “That’s very sweet of you.”

The chef’s thick arms enveloped her slender back and his narrowed gaze pinned Dez with a you-will-behave look.

*Enough of this bullshit.* Dez shot to his feet and grabbed his wallet, pulling out several bills to cover a generous tip. “Yes, thanks, Ron. Shall we go now, Kimbra?” With one hand, he grabbed her handbag from the table. With the other, he disentangled her arm from Ron and tugged her toward the door.

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“Goodnight, Ron, and thanks again.”

Her grip dragged at his hand and he slowed, allowing for her shorter strides. The moment they were through the door and the still-humid evening air enveloped them, the knot in his chest eased. He refused to identify the sensation as jealousy. For all he knew, it was the start of a bout of food poisoning.

Kimbra pulled her hand away. “What was that about?”

Dez dug in his shirt pocket for the valet number and tossed it to the approaching youth. He turned and caught sight of her standing a few feet away, hands on hips. The streetlight shone through her dress giving him a silhouetted glimpse of toned, slim legs.

The exact legs he wanted naked and wrapped around his body.

He groaned and took a deep breath. *Wrong thought here. Get your head back to business.* “I don’t react well to warnings.” He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. “From your friend, Ron.”

“He warned you?” Her hands dropped to her sides and she stepped closer. “About what?”

Did he tell her he suspected the man was a little bit in love with her? No need to make this messy. “Told me to treat you nice.”

She pressed her lips together and shook her head. “Why would he say that?”

Ignoring an overwhelming urge to take her into his arms, he forced a casual note into his voice. “Don’t you see? Because he sees us as a couple.”

## CHAPTER 3

Four days had passed since the visit to Reynaldo's and Kim still hadn't figured out Dez's abrupt change in behavior. One minute, he was giving her the most spectacular orgasm she'd ever experienced. The next, he was as prickly and stiff as a spiny cactus.

Even now, they'd traveled together in the sports car for over an hour and he'd said nothing of a personal nature. Only talked about the weather or her activities at work. She suspected he was using the bumper-to-bumper traffic as they maneuvered through downtown Austin as an excuse not to talk at all.

"What exit number is it?"

Shaken from her reverie, she looked around to get her bearings. "We're north of the university, so cut west on Koenig or Anderson, then head north on Highway 183."

Ten minutes later, a valet took command of Dez's keys and they entered the hotel lobby, walking a foot apart.

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Their business weekend together had officially begun. The nervousness she'd kept at bay during the drive by directing it toward Dez's behavior attacked in full force and her pace slowed. Vulnerability always churned her stomach.

Dez looked over his shoulder, one eyebrow raised. Awareness dawned in his gaze and he rejoined her. "Sorry. My mind is still battling those big rigs on the interstate. What's next?"

Her gaze darted around the room. If they could get upstairs without seeing anyone she knew, maybe they could talk about the situation. Their easy camaraderie was gone and she wanted it back. Needed it, in fact. "Registration first. I have to check the schedule for any meetings before tonight's dinner and ceremony. You get to relax."

His arm circled her shoulders and he urged her toward the marble-topped counter. "Piece of cake."

"Welcome to the Austin Arms. How may I help you?" The smiling clerk greeted them with a wide smile.

By habit, Kim reached into her purse.

Dez grabbed her hand and squeezed. "Registration for two under the name of Wilburt. Kim Wilburt." He flashed a smile and pulled out his wallet. "Use this credit card."

The fact Dez took care of the arrangements created the right impression of them being a couple. An occurrence Kim wished they'd discussed. She didn't want to do anything to jeopardize that image.

"Thank you, sir." The clerk tapped on the keyboard and a nearby printer started clacking. "Your suite number is seven-twenty. The valet will deliver your bags in a few moments."

Dez signed the form she placed on the counter and accepted back the return of his credit card.

The process was almost finished. Her tension eased. From the right, a chime rang and she turned toward the opening elevator door.

"Kim Wilburt?" A thin blonde wearing a white silk suit, too much



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gold jewelry and red pumps stepped out.

At the sight of her ex-boss, Kim cringed. If she had to run into someone she knew within ten minutes of arrival, why did that person have to be a woman Kim detested? “Melba Forester, how are you?”

Melba stretched out her hands and grabbed Kim’s, bobbing forward to make kissing sounds on either side of her face. “Fine and dandy.”

“Last I heard, you’d transferred to the San Diego office of that new company.” Kim felt Dez move beside her, but hesitated about extending the conversation with introductions. “Sorry, don’t remember the name.”

“After only six months, I got bumped to Tri-Comp’s Houston office.” Her gaze slipped sideways and gave Dez a thorough once-over. “You know me...I’m a corporate gadfly.” She turned and stuck out her hand. “My name’s Melba. Have we met?”

At Melba’s question, Kim froze, her stomach tumbling. What were the chances he would be recognized? She’d figured the ninety-mile distance from San Antonio would have lessened the risk.

“No, ma’am, I don’t believe I’ve had the pleasure.” Dez shook hands and stepped back, brushing his arm against Kim’s. “Dez Renato.”

She laced her arm through his muscled one and nestled against him, taking comfort from his warm, solid body.

Melba’s gaze lingered on their closeness, then snapped up. “Kim, let me buy you a drink and we’ll catch up. Bring your friend along.”

The elevator chimed again.

“Thank you, Melba.” Kim smiled while pulling Dez sideways, toward their avenue of escape. “We’ve barely arrived and I want to get settled.”

Just before they stepped into the elevator, Dez cupped her ass, then pulled her tight against his body. He turned to address the gaping woman standing five feet away. “Sorry, but there’s a bed upstairs just

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waiting for us.”

Kim gasped just before his head descended and his warm lips covered hers. At the back of her mind, she registered the muted clunk of closing elevator doors. The sensations excited by his cajoling lips ran through her entire body, peaking her nipples and curling tension between her thighs. She gripped his back, reveling in the hard muscles between his shirt.

What started as a teasing show flared into something hot and primal. His hands gripped her hips and walked her backward until she bumped against the wall. A hard thigh pressed between hers and his hands rose to cup her jaws, thumbs caressing her cheeks.

Excited, she whimpered at his forceful moves and ran her hands over every inch she could reach of his muscled back. With a rocking of her hips, she pressed her mons against his leg and moaned at the tingles shooting through her pussy.

A bell sounded and the doors whooshed open. Dez released her face and eased behind her.

Kim opened her eyes and blinked in the harsh light, realizing the car was still at lobby level. Her body still pulsed from the sensations from their first real kiss. The lips on that man sure packed a punch.

The valet waited, his hand on the gold upright of a luggage cart. His wide-eyed gaze flitted between them, his face reddening. “I, um, have your bags, but I can take another elevator.”

“Now’s fine.” Dez waved him inside. “Come on in.”

No one spoke as the doors closed and the car started upward. Kim wondered what Dez would do if— The thought heated her face, but she rationalized that she owed him for his earlier actions in the restaurant. Shifting her weight to her left foot, she let her right hand drop from the railing and trailed it along his thigh to clasp the bulge pressing against the front of his trousers.

An expelled breath ruffled the hair on top of her head and he

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cleared his throat.

With a wide smile, she ran her fingers along both sides, pressing its length with her palm.

The luggage cart jerked.

Kim stilled, wondering if the bellboy could see what she was doing.

Dez rested his forearms on her shoulders and leaned forward, trapping her hand between their bodies. His hips flexed, grinding and pushing his hard shaft against her fingers. “Careful what you’re starting, darlin’.”

What had she been thinking? The public exposure was crazy. The risk of smearing her professional reputation was too great. She loosened her grip and withdrew her hand, but slowly, dragging it along his thigh. One thing she’d learned—he wore briefs, the low-cut style.

The bell chimed and a mechanical voice announced, “Seventh floor.”

When the door opened, Kim moved to step out, but a hand on her shoulder held her back.

“Let the young man lead us to our room.”

The valet shoved the cart over the elevator threshold and disappeared to the left.

“Stay right in front of me until we’re in the room.” Dez’s tone was rueful and spoken close to her ear.

His hot breath tickled her neck and goose bumps prickled her skin. Was this any way for a computer professional to act? One who would soon receive an award recognizing her dedicated efforts? By pressing her lips tight, she stifled a rising giggle. *Why not?*

“You better not be laughing at me, lady.”

She moved into the hallway, careful to let Dez match his strides with hers. “I’m actually laughing at myself. I can’t believe I’m here”—she looked over her shoulder and smiled—“with someone like you.”

His grip on her shoulders tightened.

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They turned the corner and slowed as they approached the valet waiting next to their room.

Dez passed the plastic room key over her shoulder.

A quick slide into the lock, a yank on the door handle and Kim stepped into the luxurious room, Dez right behind her. Her gaze took in the sitting area with sofa, chairs and a large floral arrangement on the built-in desk. *Such luxury.*

“Would you like the bags in the bedroom?”

“Sure, thanks.” Dez strode to the sofa and dropped onto it, immediately crossing his right leg with the ankle on his opposite knee.

The cart rumbled through the doorway and the valet paused.

Dez turned to the young man and waved. “Your tip will be added to the closing bill.”

“Enjoy your stay, folks. If you need anything, ask for Tony.”

The reality of being here in a hotel room with a handsome younger man who’d just kissed her silly in front of her old boss had dazzled her thoughts.

The minute the door clicked closed, Dez stood and strode toward her, blue eyes burning. “You need to pay for that stunt in the elevator.”

Surprise made her jump, but the blazing look in his eyes straightened her spine. She couldn’t keep a grin from her lips. “I’d say we’re not quite even from the other night. My hands were only on you—through clothes, I might add—for a few seconds.” Instinct backed her steps until she was flush against the wall. Why did she think she could hold her own with him? A man who obviously held sex to a different standard. “While yours were in, I mean on, me for much longer.”

“Nothing wrong with what happened.” With hands on the wall near her ears, he leaned down until their foreheads touched. “Say the words, Kimbra.”

Every time she’d thought of that night—and she’d envisioned it

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often in the intervening days—she couldn't believe her wanton behavior. Heat flamed her cheeks, but she looked him straight in the eye. "Your hands were inside me."

"You did it." A grin lifted one side of his mouth. "Great."

Now was the time. She raised a hand to his chest, covering his heart. "Your fingers were deep inside me, arousing me, bringing me to orgasm. You watched me at my most vulnerable." She swallowed against a dry throat, aware her breathing had shortened. "You rocked my world, then you walked out of the restaurant like nothing out of the ordinary had just occurred."

He pushed off the wall, stepped back a foot, and shoved his hands into his front pockets, looking from under lowered brows. "But this gig isn't about me. I'm here to provide support and make you feel good."

Words from their initial conversation ran through her head. "The deluxe package, Dez. Remember? I want more of what you started in the elevator. That sure felt good."

At her words, his eyes blazed blue fire and his gaze swept her face. "You're sure?"

Awareness curled low in her belly. This might be her only chance to grab the raw heat Dez represented. For right now, the differences in their professions or their ages didn't matter.

Nor did the fact they'd met because of an ad in a magazine.

With a shake of her head, she kicked off her flats and stepped across the thick carpet to stand in front of him. "The last time I was dating, I don't remember having to convince the guy sex was an option. Of course, I didn't mean to insinuate we're dating." She walked her fingers up his chest, his neck and tangled them in the hair at his collar. "Did that statement just expose my age?"

"You're the one hung up by the age difference." His hands slipped around her waist and tugged her close, right against his rigid cock. "Not much convincing needed here. I'm still hard from the kiss in the

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elevator.”

Relief they were finally communicating washed through her. As long as she was being honest, she might as well tell him what she really wanted. “Great, because I want our first time to be fast and hard.”

Eyebrows raised, Dez stared, a slow grin stretched his lips. “Are you the same woman who didn’t know how to fill out the initial questionnaire?”

“Same woman.” She stretched to brush a kiss on his lips, teasing his lower lip with the tip of her tongue. “With one of the security barriers breached.”

“I discovered the password?” He leaned over and captured her mouth, plunging his tongue into her mouth.

She moaned at his invasion and grabbed his shoulders. Hard was exciting. She parried and gave in to the experience of being mastered, savoring the sensations created by his probing tongue running along her teeth, then the edges of her lips, then back along her own tongue.

With a tug, she pulled his shirt from the waistband of his slacks and ran her hands over his taut muscles and skin, from the ridges of his abdomen to the rounded bulges along his back. The man was in such fine shape.

She wanted to see him—all of him. Her hands dropped to his belt buckle and she fumbled, impatience fueling her movements.

Dez’s hands cupped her jaws and he planted soft kisses on her cheeks, her nose, her eyelids. “Let’s move to the bedroom.”

Kim shivered at his husky tone and gentle touches. She snuggled her head against his chest and let him guide her through the doorway. The rest of the furnishings weren’t important because all she saw was the king-sized canopy bed with piles of pillows.

The destination.

He chuckled. “Great playground.” At her back, Dez grabbed the hem of her knit shirt, trailing his fingers along her skin. “You’re so

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soft.”

Finally, her hundred daily laps in the swimming pool would pay off.

In a single, fluid motion, he unhooked her bra and pulled both garments over her head. His hands smoothed over her body, tickling her stomach, running up and down her sides, caressing the column of her spine—everywhere but where she ached for his touch. Her nipples tingled and tightened to pouty points.

Then he eased her back against his warm, bare chest and slid his hands around her ribcage. His palms cupped her breasts, his thumbs rubbing narrowing circles until they reached her nipples.

A shot like electricity zapped to her pussy and heaviness centered in her feminine lips. The first drops of her arousal dampened her panties.

Hot kisses inched along her shoulder and up her neck.

She stepped out of his embrace and turned, loving the flare of his blue eyes when he gazed at her breasts. “Not exactly my definition of fast and hard.”

His hands went to his belt buckle. “Then get naked.”

Words she’d been waiting to hear since his hand had landed on her backside in the elevator. The next few seconds were filled with rasps of zippers, rustles of fabric against skin, and jingling of coins and keys.

With the protection of her clothes gone, Kim hesitated about what to do next.

Another zipper rasped and plastic crinkled. “The bed or the valet bench?”

She peeked over her shoulder to where Dez stood, gloriously naked, his cock hanging thick and heavy from the thatch of dark brown hair. Her breath caught on a gasp and she whispered, “Bed.”

“Climb up. Because I’m ready, Kimbra.”

The sound of her name spoken in his deep voice, a voice roughened with desire, propelled her onto the silky duvet and scrambling to the nest of pillows.

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“Nice ass. Feeling it was great, but watching it in action is inspiring.”

In amazement, she watched his cock lift and fall as he talked, then swing toward each thigh as he walked the few feet to the bed. With clothes on, Dez had looked like a civilized man. Naked, he looked like a marauding warrior or a medieval knight.

Today, he was her warrior.

He started a trail of kisses at her right ankle and moved upward, along the inside of her calf, a hand gently caressing her other leg. Alternating between grazes of his lips and nibbling kisses, he reached her knee and circled it, then inched along her thigh.

Excitement pumping through her blood, Kim watched his progression, her fingers caressing her stomach.

Dez slid his hands under her legs and grabbed her hips, his mouth reaching her pussy. His hot tongue edged the length of her folds, licking and probing her moist lips.

Kim inhaled with a gasp, nipples pinching tighter in response to his intimate touches. Maybe fast and hard wasn't how she wanted their first time. The thought surfaced about how many other women had been in her position, but she pushed it away. Both of them knew this was nothing more than a weekend fling.

Each lap of his tongue approached her aching clit, then retreated. She eased one foot from under his chest and placed it on his shoulder, then flexed her hips down, hoping to catch the motion of his tongue.

He chuckled then mumbled, “Uh, uh, uh.”

The vibrations jolted along her pussy, releasing dewy juices. Heat built deep in her womb. God, she was so ready for him. Short gasps blew past her lips and ended on a low moan. Moving to achieve a better angle, she freed her other foot and laid her calf on his upper back. The little pinches she gave her nipples kept them tight and tingling.

Dez's gaze followed the actions of her fingers. His mouth



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enveloped her clit, lapping, sucking and tugging.

“Oooohh.” Pulses swirled in her belly and centered in her pussy. Kim pinched harder and rocked her hips against his mouth.

A thick finger entered her slick vagina and probed with quick thrusts, pressing against the walls. The edge of his teeth rubbed along her clit, creating wonderful friction.

Kim wanted to pull him on top of her, to feel him inside her, but the magic created by his mouth was too delicious. She was selfish and enjoyed his warm lips and hot tongue, letting him take her over the top. Her pussy convulsed and his caressing finger kept the sensations rolling through her body until she was breathless.

“Dez, wait.” She gasped and ran her tongue over her dry lips, stretching out a hand toward him. “I want to feel you inside.”

He raised his head and licked his lips. “Mmm, tasty.” Bracing his weight on an elbow, he gazed at the length of her body. “Next preference. Missionary or from behind?”

She bit her lip. Did she dare tell him her long-held fantasy? Why not? This was an once-in-a-lifetime deal. Rather than say the words, she rolled to her stomach.

“Another glimpse of that luscious ass in action.” He ran his hands up her legs, kneading and caressing. Then he grasped her thighs at the knees and tugged her toward the side of the bed.

“Oh.” The dragging rubbed her sensitive nipples along the sheets, shooting pleasure through her breasts. With her feet braced on the floor, she grabbed handfuls of the duvet to steady herself. The rip of cellophane and the snap and crinkle of stretching rubber let her know Dez had protection.

Then his hands clamped onto her hips and his hardness probed her pussy, then eased partway into her feminine heat. A muffled groan sounded. “You ready for fast and hard?”

Kim bit her lip against the delicious feeling of being stretched by

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his cock. “That’s right.”

“Hold on to something.”

*Uh, oh.* She reached for the wooden foot rail, wondering what she was in for.

The first few strokes were slow, as if he tested her readiness. His length filled her, his thighs barely brushing the backs of hers. Then he flexed his hips hard, thrusting deep, pushing her body forward with each movement.

Her lust flared again and she circled her hips in tempo with his next thrust. With each move, her swollen clit zinged.

The rasp of his breathing grew louder. He clamped a hand on her shoulder and pumped hard, his strokes coming at a faster pace.

Kim could barely catch her breath. When her orgasm hit, she arched her back, crying out her pleasure on a long wail.

\* \* \*

The sound of Kimbra’s cry filled Dez’s ears. He thrust himself inside to the hilt and slid a hand along her side to cup and massage a breast. He was close, but he wanted to touch her orgasm. Dropping his hand from her shoulder, he moved it across her stomach, edged his hand along the mattress, teasing her damp curls, then circled her dewy clit. At the feel of her throbbing bud, his cock pulsed, releasing his seed. He groaned low in his throat and collapsed over her willowy back.

Ragged breathing filled the air. He had only enough energy left to snuggle her close and drag the covers over their still entwined bodies. He nuzzled her neck and smelled the sweet scent of raspberries. He’d forever associate the ripe fruit with Kimbra—and sex.

## CHAPTER 4

The warm, curvy body beside him stirred. He tightened his embrace, not wanting to relinquish his hold on Kimbra. Something was wrong with that hazy thought, but he was too distracted by the sexy woman in his arms.

“Why is the room dark?” Kimbra stiffened, wiggled against his hold and pushed at his arms. “Shit. What time is it?”

Maybe he could convince her to play some more. He slid a hand between her breasts and stretched his fingers, flicking her nipples with a thumb and pinky.

“Dez, wake up. We slept too long.” Her hands pried open his hug and she scooted off the bed. “Where the hell is a clock?”

With an irritated groan, he rolled onto his back. “Don’t turn on a—”

A switch snapped and bright light flooded the room. “Damn, look how late it is. I’ve missed the afternoon sessions.”

“Oww.” He threw an arm over his eyes. When that didn’t block

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enough, he lifted the duvet over his head.

“Dez, come on. The cocktail party before the ceremony starts in forty-five minutes.” She bounced the bed. “Hey. Are you awake?”

“Kimbra.” His tone was more of a growl than he intended. “Shower or do whatever you need to do. I can be ready in fifteen minutes.”

The mattress next to him sagged and the edge of the cover lifted. “We need to have a story for how we first met. Let’s keep it simple and say our first date was at Reynaldo’s. Hey, we could even say we met through Ron.”

“Sure, whatever.” He scrunched his eyes closed and hugged the pillow tighter, hoping for a few more minutes of sleep while she got dressed.

She gave him a quick kiss, her mischievous eyes glinting. “Not a quick riser, huh?”

He chuckled and lifted the cover from his lower body. “I wouldn’t say that.”

One glance at his engorged cock and she backed away. “You stay here. In fact, I’m locking the bathroom door. I have to make an appearance at this cocktail party.”

With a chuckle, he watched her turn and walk to the suitcases, each stride causing sinuous movements of her thighs and ass. Sexy movements. Ones that made him want to haul her back onto the bed and repeat the activities that had tired them out earlier.

Where had that thought come from? That was opposite of his usual routine of letting the client lead the sex play. Why would he want to change the pattern? Scooting upward toward the headboard, he punched at the mound of pillows, wishing he could punch his wayward thoughts into shape as easily. With effort, he forced them away from the images created by the sluice of shower water.

Once a client was gone from his sight, his mind cleared of her image. If asked, he probably couldn’t answer correctly about their eye

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color. This time, he could name the different shade of green when Kimbra was angry or when she was in the throes of passion. He sat upright, chest tight and his breathing comes too fast.

What the hell did this mean?

An hour later, he guided Kimbra off the elevator and into the lobby, his hand spanning her warm lower back. Her dress, a clingy, knee-length black number, left lots of skin bare to his touch. He definitely approved.

Her steps slowed.

“Forget something in the room?”

“Yeah, my courage.”

The phone at the reception desk rang.

He glanced around the area, clasped her elbow and walked her to a secluded area overlooking the courtyard. “Okay, talk.”

“I’ve always hated these events. Did I tell you I’m not really a people person? I’m much more comfortable working solo in the computer lab, testing new code.” She fidgeted with one of her silver dangling earrings. “Now that I’ve had time to think, that elevator kiss spells disaster.”

“Don’t worry. Melba probably holds you in higher esteem because of what she witnessed.”

Eyes wide, Kimbra snapped her head around. “What?”

Hands raised to ward off her anger, he laughed. “Just kidding. But now that you’re fired up, listen to this.”

He rested his hands on her shoulders and looked her straight in the eye. “Kimbra, you are a beautiful, warm, sensitive, and intelligent woman. You have to believe all those things about yourself. You have to act like you don’t care that the Melba Foresters of the world might see you kissing someone on an elevator.”

Circling behind, he leaned close, making sure his words puffed breath against her neck. “Or see you with widened eyes and flushed

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cheeks at a downtown restaurant.”

Her breath whooshed out and she turned. “But I do care.”

“Why?” He spread out his hands. “I researched you, Kimbra. Do you know how many entries came up when I Googled your name? I read about the program you developed, which other projects you’ve been involved with at SyncroComp and the award you’re getting this weekend. For a matchmaking program with an eighty percent success rate. That’s awesome.”

“All the more reason to have an alternate story for how we met. My credibility might take a beating if anyone knew I had to hire a date.” Her gaze skittered to the side before rising to meet his. “Besides, I work with a team.”

“Hey, don’t downplay your role. You supervise a team and directed the main thrust of the research.” With a knuckle, he tilted up her chin until he connected with her gaze. “Someone at your company posts comprehensive project reports on the website and gives appropriate credit. Kimbra, you do the work, so claim the reward.”

“Not many women reach this level of programming. The few I’ve met aren’t interesting in becoming instant friends.” She rolled a hand in the air. “Company secrets and all.”

The sadness in her voice got to him and he reached out to tuck a tendril of hair behind her ear. “Sounds rough. I’m amazed at what you’ve accomplished.”

“But accomplishments don’t keep a woman warm at night.” She rested her hands on his sides and stepped closer, her breasts pressing into his chest. “And accomplishments don’t give a woman a thrill under the table at Reynaldo’s. Or a sexy ride on a canopy bed she’ll not soon forget.”

He cupped his hands around her elbows, fighting the pull he felt toward her. Kimbra was the opposite from the few women he dated between assignments. She’d established her identity versus the ones

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finding themselves. Earning a substantial income versus eyeballing his bank account. Self-sufficient versus clingy. Intelligent versus superficial.

He shook away those thoughts. They weren't dating. She was nothing more than a job, one that ended in a little over twenty-four hours. Why did that thought bother him so much?

Her hand stroked his jaw. "Hey, where did you go?"

"Just thinking."

"Thoughts that produce those scowls?" She started to nestle against him, then glanced around and dropped her hands to her sides. "I can't believe you researched me. If anyone else told me that, I'd feel creepy. But hearing those words from you makes me feel special."

The brush of her curves against him had his thoughts heading south. "You are special." He raised his hands to her face and stroked thumbs across her cheeks, careful not to touch her shiny, bronze lips. "And smart.

"And beautiful." He leaned forward and kissed her forehead. "Now, go into that room and mingle. Talk up your project, answer their questions, and smile and accept your award."

A smile spread over Kimbra's face. "Wow. Do you hire yourself out as a pep coach? After that speech, I feel like I can conquer something."

"Great." He grasped her elbow and walked along the hallway toward the meeting room. "I'm glad you liked my speech. Remember two things, okay?"

She nodded, indicating with a jerk of her chin the room they wanted was just ahead. "I'm listening."

The double doors of the Travis Ballroom were propped open. Music from a small jazz trio could be heard in the short lulls of the conversational murmur of several hundred people.

He ran his hand up and down her back. "Everything I said is true. I

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believe every single statement.”

A couple approached and entered the room ahead of them, and the thin blonde woman eyed Dez carefully.

She looked vaguely familiar, but he focused on Kimbra.

“Thanks.” A grateful smile lit her face. “You said two things. What’s the other?”

He stepped close and leaned down. “Under my trousers, I’m naked.”

She gasped and whirled, mouth wide. Her gaze traveled down to below his belt, then jerked up. “How can you put that sexy image in my head and expect me to go inside and talk business?”

“Wanted you jazzed and with a bounce in your steps. Let the party attendees think you’re happy to talk with them.” He brushed a light kiss across her lips. “Only I’ll know the difference.”

A laugh burst out and her eyes flashed with delight. “What a rotten trick.”

He winked. “Only if it doesn’t work.”

They walked into the room, assaulted by the mixture of floral arrangements and a multitude of expensive perfumes and after-shave scents.

“What do you want to drink?”

“I’d love a margarita, blended with no salt. If frozen drinks aren’t available, then a vodka collins with three limes.”

“This is Texas, babe. I guarantee you a margarita.” He ran his hand from her shoulder to her lower back, more for the silky sensation, and pressed her forward. “Go, schmooze. I’ll find you.” His gaze followed the sway of her hips as she disappeared into the crowd. Confidence filled her sensuous walk.

*Nice moves on that woman.* With a pang he couldn’t ignore, he admitted to being proud he’d helped put them there. He turned and walked to the bar at the side of the room. While he waiting in line, he



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kept Kimbra in sight, enjoying watching her move among the other guests. Just past where she talked with a distinguished couple was the hors d'oeuvres table. Beside it stood the blonde woman from the entrance, huddled together with Melba.

Both women shot glances at Kimbra, while Melba talked and gestured with her hands.

Uneasiness crept up his neck and made his scalp crawl. Although he couldn't be sure, he suspected the blonde knew him and his connection to Acme. That pointed gaze she'd given him at the ballroom entrance came back to him. Possibly he'd interviewed her or attended a function with other escorts. He knew for a fact she'd never been his client.

Kimbra walked to within twenty feet of where he waited and looked past the elderly woman she spoke with. Her gaze warmed and she smiled.

Widening his stance, he rested his fists on his belt, hoping she'd get his hint about his attire. When her gaze dropped to his crotch and her eyes shot wide, he knew he'd made his point.

Within five minutes, he was at her side. "Your vodka collins, Kimbra." He passed her drink to her waiting hand. "Sorry, no frozen margaritas. I'll owe you one."

"Thanks, Dez."

"Kimbra! What a lovely name." The gray-haired woman's voice rose. "I didn't know your name was short for something else."

"I generally prefer Kim for business. Mrs. Van Delden, I'd like you to meet Dez Renato." She turned, her warm look intent. "Dez, Mrs. Van Delden is on SyncroComp's board of directors."

Dez gingerly shook the woman's small, wrinkled hand. "Then you know better than most what a successful developer you have in your employ." He slipped his arm around her waist and pulled her close. "Did you know, Mrs. Van Delden, Kimbra and I met as a direct result of her program?"

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“Really? I didn’t know that.” She patted Kimbra’s arm and beamed. “Kimbra, you should definitely have mentioned that. The board loves hearing of such successes.”

Kimbra blushed and elbowed him in the side. “Some happy news you prefer keeping to yourself.”

Mrs. Van Delden grasped both their hands and squeezed. “Congratulations on the award, Kimbra, and best wishes to you both. I must share the news with other board members.” She toddled away with shaky steps.

Kimbra smiled after her and then spoke from the side of her mouth. “What about Reynaldo’s?”

“We can still use that. But this new twist helps your professional image.” He leaned close, nuzzling her neck. “And it’s not a lie. If you hadn’t developed the program, you wouldn’t have had a reason to respond to the ad.”

She pressed against his arm for just a moment, then eased away. “You do look on the positive side.”

His gaze caught sight of the two women still scrutinizing Kimbra’s movements. Trouble was definitely brewing. Damned if he didn’t feel like he’d brought it to Kimbra’s feet. One woman had seen them acting indiscriminately, the other might know his connection to Acme. One statement from either would hurt Kimbra’s chances at her share of project funding and possibly her career. Resorting to hiring a male escort wouldn’t inspire confidence in her abilities to write matchmaking programs.

“More mingling for you. People to greet and impress.” A squeeze on her elbow out of sight of the women in question conveyed his encouragement. He needed to figure out his next move—and fast. “When your drink gets low, I’ll bring you another.”

“How will you know?”

*Give her a broad wink and a grin.* Don’t let on that he’d screwed up

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big time. "I'll be watching."

She took a couple steps away and then looked over her shoulder. "A woman could get used to this spoiling."

Better to just smile at a loaded statement like that. As soon as she was engaged in conversation, he found the closest exit and flipped open his cell phone, punching his thumb on the buttons.

## CHAPTER 5

The man standing too close was boring, and had obviously eaten every garlic-flavored hors d'oeuvres possible. Her nose wrinkled at the rank smell and she pretended to stifle a sneeze. "I'll take your ideas for new questions back to the group." Her gaze strayed to the area of the room on either side of Gerald's shoulders.

*Where's Dez?* Her glass had been empty for several minutes now. "Thanks for your interest in my project."

"Better questions will get better matches. Simple, really." He nodded once before he eased away.

Her toes were pinched and the balls of her feet ached. The pain reminded her why she never wore heels to the office. When would the announcement come to be seated for dinner?

"Excuse me, Miss Wilburt?" A feminine voice inquired from her left side.

Kimbra pasted on a smile and turned to the stranger. "Yes?"

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“I’m Bethanne Granville...Mrs. Wainwright Granville.”

*The chairman’s wife.* A woman reported to steer her husband in the majority of his decisions regarding company projects. Kimbra grasped the woman’s limp hand and shook. “We’ve met, but the occasion was a couple years ago. I’ve been admiring your dress from across the room.”

“Oh, you have?” She made a half turn and dipped first one shoulder, then the other to display the cut of the dress’s back. “I normally use a designer in Dallas, but this one was done here in town.”

“This green is great with your coloring.”

“Actually, the color’s teal.”

“I’m so sorry you had to wait.” Dez’s voice was too full of apology. “I didn’t account for how long the line had grown.” He leaned close and whispered something only for her hearing.

His words tickled her ear with expelled breath and sounded like, “I quit,” but she couldn’t be sure. An icy glass filled her hand and she looked up at his smug expression. Confused, she mouthed, “What?” but he didn’t respond.

“Dez, this is Mrs. Granville. Her husband is the chairman of SyncroComp’s Board.”

“I’m glad to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Granville.”

Their hands clasped in a brief handshake.

“I don’t believe this is our first introduction.” She shook her head, then immediately raised a hand to smooth her cap of hair.

Dez frowned and made a show of shaking his head. “I’m not aware of meeting you before, ma’am.”

“No, no, no.” Her forefinger flicked like a metronome in front of Dez’s face. “I believe you attended the chamber’s Casino Night last fall.”

“I was there, but I don’t remember you.”

Kimbra’s stomach dropped at the sound of Dez’s clipped words. The only other time she’d heard him like this was with Ron. She sensed

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building tension and didn't know how to change the subject.

"Well, you must. The men were off deer hunting and some girlfriends got together and arranged for escorts."

Dez didn't respond. He just stared. Then the moment passed and he smiled. "Really?"

Kimbra cast him a sideways glance, wishing she could touch him to gather support.

A muscle clenched and unclenched in his jaw.

Mrs. Granville's hard stare worried Kimbra. She gulped against a suddenly dry mouth, seeing her future at SyncroComp unraveling by the second. The names of other companies that might need an experienced programmer flashed through her thoughts.

A thin finger pointed at his chest and she inhaled a deep breath. "Are you denying you're employed by Acme Escort Service?" After a long look around the immediate area at several faces now turned in their direction, she smiled and crossed skinny arms in front of her chest.

"Is that a question or an accusation?" His hands fisted at his sides. "Does your husband know about your escorts? Or maybe you know he'll be understanding when he hears."

"Dez!" The implied threat in his words shocked her. Kimbra turned to Mrs. Granville. "I'm so sorry for my friend's behavior."

"Shouldn't you be apologizing for your gigolo's actions?" A bejeweled hand waved in the air. "What does that say for the success of your matchmaking program if the designer has to hire a date? That is the sum total of your relationship, isn't it?"

"You're confused." Dez squared his shoulders. "I don't work for Acme, Mrs. Granville. I'm a carpenter and I restore historic houses."

*He'd quit?* That's what he'd whispered? *But why?* Unable to react the way she wanted, Kimbra dropped a hand to her side and let her knuckles brush his thigh. Her thoughts raced through the possibilities

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and came up with only one answer.

He was helping her. Her breath caught in her throat at that realization. He wouldn't have made this decision if he intended to walk away.

Armed with this new information, Kimbra faced the thin blonde woman who was attacking something of hers that was becoming more precious with each passing second. "Mrs. Granville, why are you haranguing him with this insinuation of being an escort? How does that bit of information affect you?"

For an instant, she fretted about her future with the company, but knew which was more important. Dez had quit his job to avoid causing trouble for her and she could defend him. "What about our relationship concerns you?"

"Well, you're posing as a couple, when he's obviously much younger and probably less educated." Her eyes narrowed and her nostrils flared. "I suspect you're paying him."

Kim almost laughed at Mrs. Granville's description of her own situation. With degrees in economics and business, Wainwright was older by at least twenty years, and Kim knew Bethanne had never finished college. "Any other concerns?" Her tone was frosty. Why had she worried about such trivial matters in the past?

Dez leaned forward. "I hold a—"

Her realization came like a flash of summer lightning. The only opinions that mattered were the ones of those involved in the relationship. She rested her hand on his arm and squeezed, flashing him an encouraging smile. "Dez, don't give her the satisfaction. Her comments are out of line and just plain rude. The circumstances of what brought us together shouldn't concern anyone but us."

With a feeling that she'd reached a crossroads, Kimbra turned to the older woman, fighting hard to ignore the avid glances of the group of bystanders. "Mrs. Granville, I mean this with the utmost respect, but I

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do mean every word I'm about to say." She swallowed hard and shot a quick glance at Dez—for courage.

His brows were wrinkled and he jerked his head toward the door.

She wasn't going to let Dez talk her out of this. "You don't hold a position with the company that issues my paycheck."

"Well, but I'm married to—"

Unwilling to allow this shallow woman any opportunity to sling more hurtful statements about Dez, Kimbra launched into the rest of her speech. "Who I date shouldn't be the topic of conversation at an industry event like this. For that matter, my personal life is really none of your business. Ever." She felt the heat of embarrassment climbing up her chest and neck, but needed to finish. "Stop using me as a target of your gossip."

"Excuse me, folks." An amplified voice interrupted. "Time to find your tables so the wait staff can start meal service."

The crowd around them dispersed in all directions. Mrs. Granville glared, then spun on her heel and stomped off.

At the woman's departure, Kimbra's posture sagged for a few moments, then she squared her shoulders and turned to Dez. "Probably our table is toward the front with the rest of those receiving awards."

"In a minute." Dez grabbed her hand and tugged her toward the back of the room. "Right now, let's go out into the hall."

Kimbra thrilled at his masterful action, but he didn't have to know. "But I really should..."

"Forget it." He strode through the doorway, his head moving right and left. "We need privacy."

With wobbly steps, she followed for a few feet. "Wait, let me take off my heels."

"Sorry." He paused and held her steady while she removed them and wiggled her feet in the lush carpet.

Double doors lined the wide hall, each with the name of a famous



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Texan over the lintel. King, Austin, Crockett, Bowie. Dez walked down the carpet and turned at the end, stopping in front of a single door marked Housekeeping. He pushed the door inward. "This is good."

Once inside, he shut the door and leaned against it, pulling her into his arms. "Quite a speech back there, pretty lady."

Kimbra nuzzled her cheek against his, unable to slow her wide smile. "Yes, it was. I was amazed those words came from my mouth."

"Let me see you." His hands cupped her jaw and he eased her head back.

She looked into his honey-brown eyes and melted at the pride she recognized there. "Dez, you really quit?"

"Been considering it for a while." He shrugged and looked away. "Tonight, the time seemed right."

"Well, whatever your reason, that gave me the courage to say what I did."

"I'll tell you my reason. You. Spending time with you showed me what I've been missing. With all the other assignments—"

She pulled from his arms and moved across the small space. "I don't want to hear about those women."

"No particulars, just this. With all of them I held back, kept my feelings detached. From our first night, when you were debating over the questionnaire, I knew you were different. Even though you were hiring my services, you treated me better than just arm candy. Hasn't always been like that."

With her heart full, she moved to him and stretched to brush a kiss against his chin. "That must have been horrible."

His gaze narrowed and then flicked down to her lips. He reached to his side and grabbed a towel off a shelf. "You might want to wipe off that lipstick."

"Why?"

"Because the kissing I've got in mind will smear it over both our

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faces.”

“Sounds like fun.” She dabbed the towel against her lips, keeping her gaze locked with his, wondering about the difference in their changed circumstances. “Dez, being with you has been a lesson I won’t soon forget.”

“That’s what I like to hear.” His hands rubbed along her shoulders and played with her hair.

“You helped me connect with the my sensual side. And I like that part of me.” She gave her lips one last swipe and tossed the towel over her shoulder. “No more rule books for this lady.”

His eyes widened and he tugged her close. “Great.” His lips descended on hers, tasting and suckling.

Kimbra tilted her head and stretched out her tongue to tease his, slowly withdrawing it until she could suck his tongue into her mouth.

He groaned and spread his legs wide, urging her closer.

Their kiss was wild and passionate, with intimate touches.

Kimbra couldn’t get enough of his hands running along her back or grasping her hips. But a practical part of her still existed somewhere in her lust-filled body. She had a responsibility to be at that awards ceremony and accept the award for all the hard work accomplished by her dedicated team.

Dez’s pelvis rocked against her belly.

A not-so-subtle reminder. She eased away, unknotted his tie and unbuttoned the top two buttons.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“Relax, Dez.” Planting kisses along his neck and chest, she unhooked his belt buckle and unzipped his pants, letting them fall. “Enjoy.” In a swift move, she lowered to her knees in front of him and gazed at his swollen cock, the head reddish pink and a bluish vein bulging along its length. She cradled his balls and rolled them between her fingers.

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“Kimbra, we should...the dinner...ah.”

Moistening her lips with her tongue, she kissed the tip of his penis and smoothed her lips along the head. The swirl of her tongue eased his cock deeper into her mouth. Inexperience made her hesitate—so much time had passed since she’d last done this.

Dez’s hand cradled the side of her head, his fingers ruffling her hair. “Feels great.”

His words confirmed she was doing this right and her moves grew bolder. She squeezed her lips tighter and inched more of his length into her mouth, loving the feel of his silky shaft. Her head moved back, she swirled the end of his cock and then plunged her head forward, feeling the tip tickle the roof of her mouth.

Bracing his feet wider, he groaned and flexed his hips, shoving his cock against her throat.

The pressure shocked her and she pulled back, enough to wrap her fingers around the base of his cock. Her mouth sucked and tongued the tip, while her hand stroked the shaft with pumping motions. Bristly hair tickled her fingers and the musky scent of his growing arousal filled her nose.

“Oh, yeah.”

The hand holding his balls shifted and her knuckle rubbed a circle on the skin behind his scrotum.

“Kimbra.” He clasped the sides of her head and flexed his hips faster.

Kimbra loved that her actions caused this laid-back man to grapple for control. Dewy moisture wet her pussy and dampened her panties, but she ignored her own growing arousal to concentrate on the man before her. She scraped her teeth the length of his cock from the base to the tip.

His grip tightened and she felt him thrust one more time, deeply. Heat bathed the back of her throat as he orgasmed and she swallowed.

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Her hands stroked his rock-hard thighs, while her tongue moved lazily along his still-pulsing cock until it stopped.

His hands moved to her shoulders and urged her upward. "I can't believe you did that."

"Just paying you back."

He blew out a breath and shook his head. "What?"

Grabbing a towel, she wiped it across her mouth, and then lovingly wiped the moisture and remnants of her lipstick from his reddened cock. "I've owed you that since the restaurant." She smoothed the bunched fabric down her hips and adjusted the neckline across the tops of her breasts, chagrined at how her pointy nipples displayed her aroused state.

With a hand resting on his chest, she looked into his warm gaze. "Now we need to get your glorious penis covered and our bodies back into that ballroom for the duration of this event."

"Give me a minute here." His chin dropped to his chest.

Stretching out her arms, she started to bend over. "Shall I help?"

He scooted sideways and turned his back to her. "Stay over there. The only way I'll get control is by doing this myself."

The view was great as he bent over and grabbed his pants. His tight ass was a lust-inspiring sight and too soon his pants covered it.

She barely kept from laughing out loud. Little did he know she wasn't done. With a quick check of her hair in her compact and a swipe of fresh lipstick, she felt prepared to face anyone. "Presentable?"

When he turned, he was still maneuvering the ends of the tie into a fashionable knot. "I'm ready."

"Oh, my shoes." She leaned over and slipped on her heels, flexing her toes into their constrained position. In a flash, she reached up under her skirt and stripped off her damp silk panties. "These will certainly give away what we've been doing." She tossed them into a nearby trash bin and reached for the doorknob. "Now, we're even."

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Dez slapped a hand to his chest. “Kimbra, you’re killing me.”

She opened the door and turned to him with a devilish grin. “How about a little foreplay under the tablecloth?”

“What has happened to you, Kimbra?”

“I’m embracing the vibrant, sensual female inside. Care to join in the fun?” She winked and sauntered off down the hall, putting a definite come-hither swing in her walk.

Dez chuckled. “Wouldn’t miss a minute.”

## LAYLA CHASE

Layla Chase writes contemporary stories as well as historicals and is published in short romantic fiction. Years spent in the business world prompted her to seek out her more creative side. There, she discovered all sorts of characters whose stories she needed to share. A native of California, she now lives in Texas with her husband and the youngest of her three children.

\* \* \*

***Don't miss Stagecoach Capture by Layla Chase,  
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*Boarding a westbound stage in San Antonio, US Marshal Slade Thomas realizes all three female passengers resemble the wanted poster for a bank robber. The audacious and playful behavior of one passenger, Jessimay “Jazzy” Morgan, especially draws his attention—and suspicions.*

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