



A Much Younger Man

Veronica Wilde

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Chapter One

The envelope was waiting in the mail when Kristen came home from the gym that summer day.

Without even looking at the return address label, she knew who it was from—the nubbled, cream-colored stationery could only belong to one woman, her ex-husband's new wife. It was perfectly unmarked, as if even the post office wouldn't dare mar the perfection of Mrs. Victoria Stafford. Kristen stared at it for a moment, wondering what overblown social event she'd been invited to now. Well, she just wouldn't go. She'd tell Hal, her ex-husband, that she had vacation plans. Let him wonder who with.

Kristen poured herself a Diet Coke with ice before settling down with the rest of the mail. Catalogs, credit card bills, a letter from the school board about the new teachers hired on for the fall—but she couldn't ignore the envelope. She tore into it with a scowl.

Her eyes widened as she saw it was an invitation to a party celebrating her own son's eighth birthday. "For God's sake," she said irritably to the silent house. "Sean is a little boy. All he wants to do on his birthday is play video games, open presents and eat cake." But the stiff invitation indicated a much bigger event—something with a band, caterers and all of Foxdale's best society. Kristen leaned her head against the chair and groaned.

It had been a year now since Hal had left her for Victoria. The custody agreement stipulated that Sean spend his summers with Hal and Victoria—an arrangement that effectively removed her from planning the rest of his July birthday parties. She hadn't liked it, but it was one of the few points Hal had insisted on. He'd been generous about everything else, as he should have been, given his very lucrative practice as the most successful dermatologist in town. And now that he was living with the Black Widow—as Kristen's best friend Julia called Victoria—he could enjoy an even higher style of living. Victoria's deceased husband had been rich indeed.

The ring of the phone cut into Kristen's thoughts. She picked it up with a good idea of who it would be.

"Did you just get back from the gym? I called earlier but you didn't pick up. How was your workout? How were the guys? Are there a lot of hotties at your gym? I keep thinking that I should start working out," her best friend Julia boomed.

Julia never said anything once without expounding on it as much as possible. She seemed to feel that dialogue was a lost art and she was its savior.

Kristen smiled despite herself and pushed her long brown hair back. "Yes, and good, and they're okay. You know me, Jules; I'm just there to work out. I'm not exactly at my most attractive in no makeup and a baggy t-shirt."

"Bullshit," Julia said frankly. "I'm getting tired of these excuses, missy. When are you going to start dating again?"

"I am dating again," Kristen insisted.

"Don't even tell me that sorry excuse of a man was your idea of a date."

Kristen fell silent, repressing her shudder of recollection. Since her divorce, many of her friends had tried to fix her up with various bachelors. She was only thirty-three, after all, in good shape and still "a hot mama" in the words of Julia's husband—who was as frank as his wife. So it had been a bit of a shock when a fellow teacher had set her up

with “a great guy” who turned out to be anything but. Franklin James had been forty-nine, with a cavernous face and combed-over hair, and barely spoke above a whisper. When Kristen had politely declined a second date, their mutual friend had been frosty. “There aren’t a lot of single guys our age out there,” she’d said pointedly. “Maybe you should give Franklin a second chance.”

So she had, but Franklin had been even more repulsive on the second date than he’d been on the first. And really, how could any man compare to Hal? For eleven years she’d been married to a walking sex bomb of charisma, good looks and wit. Hal was the kind of man other women wished they had married—or at least bedded. With his wide smile and careless good looks, he never even had to try for female attention. It had just come naturally, especially from young women, from flirtatious college girls to waitresses, who pointedly leaned over to take his order, exposing the tops of their breasts.

And yet an older woman had stolen him away.

Well, older than *her*. Victoria Stafford was thirty-nine. She’d been a child bride to her rich dead husband, who had been almost sixty when he died. Hal must seem incredibly young and virile to her—a man of her own age. Kristen felt sick at the thought of their sex life. No doubt Victoria was making up for lost time.

“Kris? You there?” Julia questioned.

“I’m here.” Recovering her poise, Kristen said, “You won’t believe what I got in the mail today.” She told Julia about the birthday party invitation. “Honestly, Julia, it looks like some black-tie affair. For a little boy’s birthday? What is she trying to prove?”

“That she can be a good stepmother,” Julia hit the nail on the head, as always. “I’ve heard her own sons barely speak to her.”

Kristen frowned. “Was she abusive to them?”

“I don’t think that’s it; more like she was negligent. Never around, too many trips to Antigua, that kind of thing. The big story about Victoria is how she missed her oldest son’s high school graduation because she was recovering from plastic surgery and didn’t want anyone to see her.”

Kristen groaned. “Great. Now she’s going to try to make up for it by spoiling my son.”

“She might,” Julia said. “Or she might just want to prove a point and then she’ll forget about it. So, who are you taking as your date?”

Kristen’s jaw dropped. “Date? Are you kidding me?”

“You have to bring someone, Kristen. You gotta show that asshole Hal that you’ve moved on to juicier prey. How about Muffin Man?”

Muffin Man was the gym teacher at the elementary school where Kristen taught. They had nicknamed him that because he brought her a muffin every morning from the cafeteria.

“Are you kidding me? I can’t just ask someone out! Besides, he’s coaching at some football camp until August.”

“Okay, then it will have to be a hottie from the gym. Just grab one and go!”

“You’re crazy, Jules.”

“And another thing, you have to look hot-ta-ta for this party. Tomorrow we’re going shopping.”

* * * *

Kristen stared at herself in the dressing room mirror. The petite woman staring back at her was pretty enough, with long glossy chestnut-colored waves and dark doe eyes—but Kristen didn't see herself that way. Instead she could only compare herself to Victoria, the original tall cool blonde with eyes of ice blue. Victoria was all sharp angles and slim hips, possessing the perfect figure to wear the designer clothes she liked. Kristen, well, Kristen was shorter and softer, with rounded hips and even rounder 34D breasts. They threatened to burst now from their pink satin bra. Hal had loved her breasts, could barely pass her in the living room without squeezing or fondling them. Of course, Victoria had implants. He probably preferred her unnaturally firm silicone boobs now.

There was a knock on the dress room door. "Kristen?" Julia said urgently.

Kristen opened the door carefully, stepping behind it to conceal her bra and panties. "It's just me, no one's out here," Julia said. "I found this—what do you think?"

"This" was a transparent, wispy nightie. Its thin satin spaghetti straps melted down into a floating scrap of green chiffon. Julia rocked the hanger back and forth, making the nightie dance.

"Are you kidding?!" Kristen gasped. "I might as well wear nothing at all, it's totally see-through! Besides—we're here to shop for a halter bra for the party."

"This is for after," Julia said cheekily. "Just try it on." She tossed it at Kristen and shut the door.

They had been shopping all day. First Julia had helped her pick out a silky white halter dress that exposed way too much décolletage, in Kristen's opinion.

"Bullshit!" Julia had said frankly. "Honey, if I had your arms and shoulders—not to mention that amazing chest—I'd be showing them off every night of the week! This is a night you want to look sexy, Kris... Take some risks."

After that, they'd bought a pair of very high heels and then hit the cosmetic counters for new makeup. Finally. They had come here for the right bra to wear with that revealing halter neckline. Now Kristen stood in her bra and panties, blushing at the thought of trying on that transparent nightie. Another woman had just entered the dressing room next to her and it felt odd to be naked just a few feet from another stranger, but that was silly, wasn't it? She was a grown woman; there was nothing wrong with wearing something sexy. Quickly she unhooked her bra and her breasts bounced free. She slipped the nightie over her head and checked the mirror.

Wow. She looked sensational in this. "Julia," she hissed, swinging open the door, "take a look!"

But her eyes fell instead on a young man leaning against the wall. Shocked, she stared at him as his appreciative eyes settled on her breasts—which, she realized, were completely exposed in this sheer wisp of chiffon. Frozen with horror, she was unable to move. The seconds seemed to drag on as her nipples stiffened under his lustful gaze. "Very nice," he murmured.

A suspicious voice arose from the next dressing room... "Jeff? Who are you talking to?"

Embarrassment flooding Kristen's face, she quickly shut the dressing room door and leaned against the wall, her heart pounding. She had just exposed herself to a complete stranger; a complete *young* stranger. He couldn't have been more than twenty-two or twenty-three, and there she was—for all intents and purposes—topless in front of him.

She tried to catch her breath, realizing her thighs had gone weak and her pussy was

flooded with a warm, light liquid.

There was another knock on the door. She was both disappointed and relieved to hear Julia's voice. She opened the door a crack and peered out to see the stranger had gone.

"My God, you are being shy today," Julia said. "What is the big deal? I've seen you naked before."

"There was someone sitting out there!" Kristen hissed. "He was waiting for the girl in the next dressing room and I didn't know. I walked out like this and he—he *saw me!*"

Julia burst out laughing. "Oh honey. You don't mean that cute young guy up at the register right now with his girlfriend?"

"How would I know? He *saw* me, Julia—he actually said 'very nice' with this horrible leer!"

Julia couldn't stop laughing. "Honey, I'd be flattered to have a young thing like that admire me! I've always told you, you've got a gold mine under your top!"

Kristen silently changed back into her own clothes and coolly marched up her purchases to the register. With uncharacteristic sensitivity, Julia stopped teasing her. But as they walked out to their favorite mall restaurant for lunch, Kristen couldn't stop reliving the moments a handsome young man had admiringly ogled her almost-bare breasts.

Chapter Two

The rest of the week flew by. On Saturday night Kristen faced the fact that she would be attending her ex-husband's party alone. Even Julia was gone, having left for her annual trip to Europe right after their shopping spree.

She consoled herself with the fact that she looked damned good. Even she had to admit that. Julia had persuaded her to get caramel highlights in her lustrous brown hair, which played nicely off her new tan. She'd even gotten a pedicure, her toenails flashing a pale pink in her high heels. So why did she feel so nervous? Probably because she always did when she went to Hal's new home. It was more like a mansion than the comfortable home they'd shared.

A looming white Colonial at the end of a cul-de-sac in Foxdale's most affluent neighborhood, even Sean had been intimidated his first visit there. "I don't want to stay here!" he'd pleaded on the first visit. "I'll get lost!"

It would have been funny if her stomach hadn't been roiling with anguish. How could she compete with a rich widow like Victoria Stafford? Victoria might be a few years older than she, but thanks to a few nips and tucks here and there, she looked better than most twenty-five-year-olds, although in a frozen sort of way. Then there was the fact that she was loaded.

Kristen's mind wandered back to the fateful party last summer. It had been, ironically, at Julia's house. Julia lived in the same posh Foxdale neighborhood, though she often made fun of "The Plastic Wives" as she called them. "Put them next to a radiator and they'll melt," she'd crack. But she still socialized with them, even the most famous of them all—Mrs. Victoria Stafford, whose wealthy older husband had passed away a few years ago.

Kristen had actually been curious to meet these women, since they didn't travel in the same social circles. She and Hal had been chatting near the barbecue when a tall blonde in an aqua-colored slipdress entered the yard. As her cool gaze raked the crowd, Kristen felt her husband stiffen next to her. She glanced up to see a look she'd never seen on his face—a look of complete enchantment. Even more startling, the blonde's eyes had landed on Hal as well and had narrowed with intrigue.

Hal later claimed helplessness. "It was just one of those things, Kristen—I'm sorry. Sometimes you just know that it's right." He had never been the same with her after the party and after a secretive and brief affair with Victoria, he had packed up his clothes and files and moved out. That quickly, eleven years of marriage had gone out the window. Just as quickly, she had been left to sob her way through nights alone.

Now it was a year later, and she was expected to put a brave face on and attend her son's birthday party. What else could she do? She looked at herself again in the mirror, touched up her makeup, and dabbed her throat and cleavage with perfume. Then she turned out the lights and left.

The cul-de-sac was already lined with cars when she arrived. As she parked and walked toward the house, a popular tune danced on the light summer air. The band was already playing. She slipped around through the side gate, as a sign directed, and viewed the spread of party guests, ice sculptures and buffet table that was supposed to be for her

son.

“Mom!” Sean ran toward her with an ecstatic face. He must have been watching for her. She bent down to hug him and at the feel of him in her arms, their first hug in two weeks, tears began to swell in her eyes. Oh no, don’t let the mascara run. She quickly blotted her eyes and smiled at him.

“Quite a party you’ve got here,” she said.

He made a disgusted noise. “I don’t care,” he said.

Of course, he didn’t. He was only eight, for God’s sake. What did he want with a beautifully carved swan made of ice, or artfully changing colored lights swimming over the lawn? The band was playing under a pavilion, on a small stage, and she could see right away they were the kind of group to play at adult functions, not a child’s birthday party. In fact, there didn’t seem to be many kids here at all.

“Are all the kids inside?” she asked.

Sean shrugged. “I dunno.” He looked a little sad and she knelt down.

“Listen, honey,” she began. “You know that though you’re spending the summer with your dad, you and I still get to spend one night a week together. Well, that’s tomorrow and I was thinking you and I could celebrate your birthday our own way. How does that sound?”

Sean’s face lit up. “It sounds awesome!” he yelled. “Just you and me?”

“Sure—or you can invite some school friends, if you want.”

“What can we do?”

“Whatever you want. We can go to the movies, the video arcade, or we could even go down to the softball field...”

“Dylan plays softball with me all the time.”

Ah yes, Dylan. That must be one of Victoria’s teenage sons. Supposedly they were both hell on wheels and Kristen hadn’t liked the idea of their influence on Sean.

“Oh, it’s Kristen! Hello!”

Kristen looked up to see Victoria and Hal bearing down at her. Great, she thought, of all moments to be on my knees. She got to her feet, brushed the dirt from her heels, and prepared a welcoming smile.

“Kristen, you look lovely!” gushed Victoria. She carefully embraced her in what Kristen thought of as society-woman hugs—the kind where no one actually touched much at all. Victoria patted her back as a cloud of perfume engulfed her. Kristen tried not to cough.

“You look great,” Hal said. He didn’t dare hug her, not around Victoria. Kristen wondered if this was awkward for him, his ex-wife and present wife together, but he didn’t look disturbed. Instead he just smiled vaguely. “Hey there, sport!” he said to Sean. “Did you show Mom your presents?”

“No, they’re inside. Come on, Mom!”

Kristen followed him into the immaculately decorated home, relieved to escape them. Passing by the African sculptures and Chinese vases Victoria liked to collect, all perfectly arranged on heavy stone tables, she tried to squelch any flickers of envy. She would not let this party destroy her confidence. She would not.

Keep telling yourself that, she thought, and then they passed by an open door that startled her out of her reverie.

It was a boy’s bedroom obviously. Boxer-brief underwear was scattered on the thick

carpet, next to beer bottles and magazines. A soccer ball lazily rested in a corner and the sheets were kicked to the floor. The bed itself, what she could see of it, was massive, dark, and somehow dangerous-looking. Scattered around the dresser were an array of trophies—athletic ones, probably. Just as she let her mind wander to who might occupy the room, Sean pulled her on to another room, where a pile of gifts dominated an oak dining table.

Here Sean showed no sadness. “And this is the video game I wanted, and this is the lacrosse stick—Dylan said he’d teach me—and this is that truck that goes with my other truck...” He recited the presents in a glow of excitement and Kristen wondered how her own gifts would go over tomorrow night. Certainly they wouldn’t compare to this.

“Come on, honey,” she said. “Let’s go back outside. I want some cake, don’t you?”

Sean frowned. “We’re not having cake.”

Kristen paused. “What?”

“We’re not having cake. We’re having something called—called...” His small brow wrinkled as he thought. “Tear a miko?”

Kristen laughed. “Tiramisu? That is cake, honey, or it’s like it at least.” Kristen knew it wasn’t the birthday cake Sean would have requested. She felt another flash of anger.

The back lawn was filled with even more people as they slipped outside. Sean found a neighborhood boy he knew and the two of them disappeared behind the buffet table to conjure up some mischief, she was sure. She made polite conversation with the neighbors who approached her, but she really knew no one at this party. Julia was out of town with her husband. She could tell from the curious glances directed her way that she was known as Hal’s ex-wife; probably she was something of an enigma. Some of the other glances were more admiring, but all of the men here seemed married. She was about to let a yawn escape when the back of her neck prickled, and she turned to see an apparition standing on the lawn about twenty feet away.

At least he seemed to be an apparition. He certainly didn’t belong at this party. About six-foot-three, with tousled blond hair and deep blue eyes, he was far too young to be friends with the other guests—he couldn’t be more than twenty-seven. And he was dressed inappropriately in faded jeans and a gray t-shirt. Didn’t he know what kind of a party this was? His eyes bore into her as he smoked a cigarette, and she realized that he must be some kind of employee here—perhaps one of the caterers or someone with the band.

“Hey there,” he said. He ditched the cigarette and sauntered toward her, his crystalline blue eyes taking in every detail of her. They descended from her face to her skimpy halter dress, then down to her hips, finally taking in her legs. There was insolence in his gaze, as if he had all the right and all the time in the world to appreciate her body, and as if he wasn’t a party-crasher or employee on this elegant night. His gaze returned again to her ample cleavage and lingered there. To her horror, she felt her nipples stiffening. He smiled at her very confidently—too confidently, she thought. “Haven’t seen you in this neighborhood before.”

“I don’t live around here,” she told him. On one hand, she was appalled that he would approach her and was afraid to be seen talking to someone who so obviously didn’t belong at this party. On the other hand, she wanted Hal to look over and see what a gorgeous man had sought her out. “Are you—friends with Victoria and Hal?”

He uttered a brief laugh. “Friends with Victoria and Hal. You could say that. We’re

civil at least.”

She raised her eyebrows. “That doesn’t sound too friendly.”

He leaned closer to her and she could smell the scent of the clove cigarette he’d been smoking. She actually had the urge to close her eyes and take in his wonderfully manly scent, and she was acutely aware of the fact that she was becoming very unsteady on her feet. “I’m actually more interested in hearing how *you* became friends with Victoria and Hal.”

Something lazy and powerful in his eyes took her aback. This guy is more than he seems, she thought. She fought for control and balance as she said, “Look, I don’t know if you’re working here or if you just wandered in...”

In a flash, his gaze left her and his face turned hard. She followed his look to see Victoria marching across the lawn toward them. Oh good, here it comes, she thought. Victoria is going to toss him out, then make fun of me for hobnobbing with the rabble.

“Dylan,” Victoria hissed. “What are you doing in jeans? I told you to wear a tie tonight...”

He spread his hands. “Hey Mom, good to see you, too.”

Mom?

It was Victoria’s son. She had been flirting with one of Victoria’s young sons.

Chapter Three

Kristen fought for control as a blush flushed her cheeks and sweat collected between her breasts. It was a humid summer evening, and she felt almost dizzy as Dylan and Victoria began to spar.

“Dylan, I told you exactly how I wanted you dressed tonight...”

“Yeah and I really appreciated that, seeing as how I’m twenty-two years old and can dress myself.”

Twenty-two years old? Oh my God. She had thought he was at least twenty-seven. He was only a few years out of high school. Oh my God, she thought again. Did anyone see the way I was looking at him?

“Well obviously you can’t, or you wouldn’t show up looking like a—like a janitor or something!”

Dylan seemed to remember Kristen then. He looked back at her and a lascivious smile spread over his tanned face. “Yes, I think your guest here made that assumption.”

“Guest? Dylan, this is Kristen—Sean’s mother. Didn’t you at least introduce yourself?”

Dylan stuck his hand out with a charming smile. “Hi. I’m Dylan Stafford. I’m a pre-law student at State and when I’m not hitting the books, I like sailing, skiing and playing soccer.”

Kristen couldn’t help but stifle a laugh as Victoria snapped, “Do you think this is a joke, Dylan? I brought you up to have manners. You show up here in that ratty t-shirt acting like you’re at a keg party...”

“All right, all right, Mom—I’ll go change! Sheesh!”

Dylan sauntered across the lawn. She watched him go, noting that several of the other women followed him with their eyes. But she carefully concealed her expression as Victoria turned to her. “I’m so sorry. Dylan’s a good kid, he really is, but ever since their father died...” She sighed. “I guess that’s something you haven’t had to deal with yet, teenagers. Believe me, it seems to happen overnight. One day he’s your sweet little boy, and the next he’s moody and rebellious.”

Kristen didn’t know what to say. She and Victoria had never really had a personal conversation before. “He seems like a good kid,” she ventured. “Does he still live at home?”

“He does. Originally he lived on campus but there was an incident where—well, it was just a drunken prank, but it got him kicked out of the dorms. So he moved back in here. It’s not like he’s not spoiled rotten,” she added.

Kristen smiled. “Boys are a handful.”

“Aren’t they? Funny how you and Hal had a son, and I have two sons...” She seemed about to say something else but stopped. “Oh, there’s Beth. I was hoping she’d come. I’ll talk to you later, Kristen.”

So she was on her own again. On her own and left to fight the rising lust she now knew was so very wrong. Dammit, why couldn’t he have been a neighbor or something, and at least in his late twenties? Here she was at thirty-three years old, getting flushed and dizzy over her ex-husband’s new stepson—her son’s stepbrother, she realized. Oh

yuck, that sounded even worse. Twenty-two, he was. Twenty-two years old. Twenty-two years old with blue bedroom eyes, that thick tousle of dirty blond hair, and those strong tanned forearms that hinted at all sorts of—

“Stop it!” she hissed at herself and whirled around toward the buffet. She did so just in time to collide with another guest, whose whiskey sour went down her front.

“Oh no—oh, I’m so sorry!” cried the woman.

“Don’t worry about it,” she said quickly. She grabbed some napkins and dabbed at the wet stain soaking the front of her dress, then hurried into the house.

* * * *

The harried caterers in the kitchen recommended soda water. She wasn’t sure if that would work, but she didn’t really care. Her heart was pounding too quickly as she asked for directions to the first floor bathroom, then slipped down the hall.

“Kristen?”

And there it was, just like she had hoped. She stopped in front of that same boyish bedroom she’d seen earlier to find Dylan inside. He was shirtless now, though in the same jeans as earlier.

“What are you doing?” she said weakly. It wasn’t her most clever remark, but she couldn’t stop staring at his bare chest. He was tanned dark golden and smooth, and his defined pecs topped off a luscious expanse of narrowing torso. God, she wanted to trace one naughty finger down the center of that torso to the very tip of his jeans.

“Changing like a good little boy. What are you doing?” He stepped forward and pulled her into the room. “Oh, you got spilled on. Well, we’ll have to fix that.”

No. This couldn’t be happening. It just couldn’t. He was only twenty-two. She knew she shouldn’t be standing in his bedroom in a wet dress and she definitely shouldn’t be gazing at his perfect abdominal muscles that were as sculpted as a statue’s. Yet it was as if his body was a magnet drawing her closer ... and besides, why shouldn’t she experience a little excitement for once? It wasn’t as if anything was really going to happen.

Dylan seemed very confident as he took the paper towels and soda water from her hands. “Here, let me get it...” he said huskily as he wet one of the paper towels. “We don’t want to ruin a dress that shows off your cleavage so nicely...”

Oh God, he had actually said that right in front of her. He began to dab at the wet part of her neckline, ignoring her deep blush as his hand brushed the exposed swell of her left breast. How long had it been since a man touched her there? Let alone a young good-looking one whose excitement was stiffening in his pants? Unable to help herself, she glanced down and saw the pronounced outline of his hard cock through his jeans. With a flash of guilt, she wondered what his cock looked like and how it would feel brushing against her thigh or throbbing inside her. If the golden smoothness of his chest was anything to go by, his erection was probably a silky shaft of heaven...

“Lift up your arms,” he ordered. “Straight up.”

She obeyed, aware that it lifted her breasts higher. He pushed her back against the wall and began to work at the stain again, his hand resting casually in her cleavage. As his fingertips brushed her skin, she swallowed hard. He continued deliberately brushing against her until she had to bite her lip to contain a gasp of pleasure. Then he shook his head. “This isn’t working. I think you’d better take it off.” Before she could protest, he

reached behind her neck, undid the halter straps, and let the dress fall to the floor. Leaning down, he picked it up and casually he tossed it on the bed.

Kristen swallowed nervously. She was standing in a twenty-two-year-old's messy bedroom, amongst the discarded beer bottles and soccer trophies, in just her bra and thong. A pink lace bra that didn't quite conceal her protruding nipples. He touched each of them, bringing a flame to her cheeks, and then ran his fingers along the top edge of the cups. "Nice," he said. "But it looks like it got wet too." He reached behind her to unhook it.

"Wait," she said. Her voice sounded faint to her own ears. "I can't—I can't just stand here exposed... The door is open." His fingertips were setting off a storm of sensations in her skin and she was finding it hard to think clearly.

"Why not? Don't you like to show off your tits?" His breath was warm in her ear and she felt just the faintest tickle of something, his tongue?

"No! No one's ever—I mean, I've never..."

"Haven't you ever been to a topless beach? Or flashed someone at Mardi Gras?"

"No! No, I'm—shy. I mean, I'm not a prude." She blushed again. His warm strong hands were stroking her sides and it was all she could do not to tear off his jeans. "But you're—well, I'm..."

"Yeah, I know. Kristen, it's okay. It'll be our little secret."

She felt the clasp of the bra unsnap against her skin and closed her eyes as it fell away from her. Her breasts felt unbearably alive and prickled with heat, but at the same time exposed in his air-conditioned bedroom.

"Keep your arms up," he ordered roughly. Then gently, he began to fondle both bare breasts, tweaking first one nipple then the other. She moaned softly.

"You like that, don't you?" he asked. "You like having your breasts played with?"

She murmured something intelligible. Her dark pink nipples thrust forward, begging for his tongue but he merely laughed, circling them teasingly with his fingertips.

"Maybe you like having other places tickled as well," he breathed and with her eyes still closed, she felt a teasing hand slip between her legs and gently fondle her pussy through the silk. Moaning, she spread her legs, allowing his hand deeper access between her thighs. He gently squeezed her lips together through her panties, then rubbed his knuckle against her clit. She sucked in her breath, an incandescent wave of heat rolling through her body as one of his fingers snaked beneath her panties and began to lightly explore her folds. Unable to stop herself, she pumped her hips into his hand, her body begging him for more.

"Dylan? Are you in here?"

It was Victoria coming down the hall. And the door was open! In a flash, Dylan swung open his closet door and shoved Kristen, topless and panting, inside. She grabbed onto a rack for balance. There was a masculine smell in the closet, the scent of cologne and a faint suggestion of sweat. Turning, her nipples brushed a soccer jersey on one side and a soft cotton t-shirt on another.

Victoria's heels clicked down the hall. They stopped in front of his door. "Dylan, are you still not dressed? The party's half-over, you know. People are expecting to see you."

Dylan grabbed his discarded t-shirt and casually pretended to shake the wrinkles out, concealing his hard-on. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm coming."

"Well, what the hell is taking so long?"

"I'm almost done, Mom," he said. Stepping in front of his ample walk-in closet, he pretended to paw through the shirts until he found Kristen's warm skin. He began to play with her breasts as he told his mother, "Just give me five minutes. I'll be right out."

"Five minutes or five hours? And I want you out of those jeans, remember."

"I will definitely be out of my jeans," he said. "Hmm, maybe these pants." He stealthily lowered the silk thong down Kristen's hips and they fell silently to the ground. She gulped, knowing only the open closet door blocked his mother's view of what was really happening.

"A tie, Dylan. I want you in a tie."

"Okay, Mom, you made your point. Sheesh." Very carefully he began to trace a light finger through Kristen's pubic hair.

Victoria stared at him in irritation for a moment, then strode off.

"Goddamn!" Dylan muttered. He strode forward and kicked the bedroom door shut, then returned to the closet to pull Kristen out. But she was already out, pulling on her panties and groping for her bra. "Hey, don't go," he said anxiously.

"I have to, Dylan. Oh my God. Your mother—your mother was *right there*."

"So what? We didn't get caught." He cackled with delight, and then saw her face. "Look, I'm sorry, but don't run out like this." He reached for her breasts and began to fondle them again. She slapped his hands away.

"Dylan, are you crazy? This is so wrong. I am half-naked in my ex-husband's stepson's bedroom..." Her voice trailed off as she watched him take off his jeans.

"And looking pretty hot too." A naked Dylan slipped under her and collapsed on the bed, pulling her down on top of him. She struggled for a moment, her breasts swinging back and forth.

"Yeah baby, bounce for me," he muttered and caught a taut pink nipple in his mouth.

"Dylan—oh God," she began to say, and then moaned as his warm tongue circled her nipple. Unable to stop herself, she ground into him and felt his hard dick pressing between her legs. She dropped her head so that her hair fell forward and moaned again helplessly, feeling as out of control as an animal.

She looked down at the tanned muscular body beneath her. Every inch of Dylan was smooth and taut and beckoning her toward an act of lust from which she could never return.

His skin was flawless and glowing with youth. Admiringly, she ran her hands up his tight abs to his pectoral muscles, pinching his nipples until he groaned. Then with both hunger and shyness, she traced the lean lines up of his hips until she came to the hard and silky erection straining beneath her.

Dylan's cock was as gorgeous as the rest of him—golden, smooth and throbbing with heat. She slid backward on his thighs and took his tight balls in her hands, lightly running her fingernails over them until he shifted his hips in frustration. Guilty as she felt, she couldn't stop touching him or marveling at the taut perfection of his body. He looked like something out of a dream. When she took hold of his cock again, she rubbed it against the crotch of her panties, consumed with the need to know what he would feel like pumping inside her.

The silk of her panties cling to her wetness.

"Don't tease me," Dylan muttered. His cock was straining in her hand and glistening with pre-cum. "I have to be inside you, Kristen..."

She pushed his swollen head against her clit and began to grind against him, excited by the yield of her own soft flesh to his hard-on. Was she really doing this—she, Kristen Tilden, respectable teacher and mother? It seemed so naughty and taboo and yet one look down at the gorgeous young man beneath her and she only ached for the hot thrusts of his cock. Wordlessly she ground against him faster and harder, her breasts bouncing with excitement.

“Yeah, fuck me,” Dylan moaned. “Oh, Kristen...” He reached for her panties then, slipping them down her thighs. “Let me lick your pussy.”

“What?” Suddenly an inner alarm of warning went off as the cool draft from the air-conditioner danced across her bare vulva. As Dylan slid her panties down to her knees, she felt dangerously exposed—and on the verge of doing something irrevocably stupid.

“Dylan, no.” Futilely she tried to pull up her panties and cover her naked breasts at the same time. She scuttled backward off his legs.

“Kristen, it's okay. Just relax, my mom's not going to come busting in.”

At the mention of Victoria, she felt even more panicked. What was she doing? “Oh God, I should never have let this get so out of control.”

She hurtled backward onto the bed, trying to cover herself, but Dylan was faster. Sliding between her legs, he kissed her pussy then wiggled his tongue into her slit, making her gasp with delight. “Just let me make you come,” he begged. He swirled his tongue around her clit in delicious circles until she felt as if she would explode on his mouth right there.

Then she thought of the party outside, and Hal and Victoria and Sean.

“No—no—we'll get caught!” She hurled herself off of him and quickly slipped into her still-wet dress.

“Kristen, please,” he pleaded. “I'm sorry I left the door open. Next time we'll be more careful.”

She couldn't even look at him kneeling on the bed, at his perfect tanned twenty-two-year-old physique. “There isn't going to be a next time,” she said and slipped out the door.

But in her heart, she hoped there would be.

Chapter Four

At home, Kristen dropped her keys onto the front foyer table, kicked off her heels and collapsed onto the big stuffed sofa. Her mind and her body both were a whirlpool of clashing, conflicting emotions.

Tonight she had successfully faced off against her ex-husband and his new society wife. Then she had allowed herself to be undressed and fondled like a toy by the wife's twenty-two-year-old son. Kristen Tilden, respectable wife and mother, in the bedroom of a college kid. What had she been thinking? What if he told someone? Wait a minute—of *course* he would tell. All young men that age liked to brag, didn't they?

Her cat jumped onto the sofa with a warm purr and she stroked his head absently. Hal had been her only man since meeting him her sophomore year of college, but she'd had a few experiences before that. Encounters that hadn't turned out well. Specifically, her high school boyfriend, whom she'd dated for almost a year before agreeing to "go all the way," as they said then. He had seemed so sweet, so caring. And yet, what was the first thing he had done after taking her virginity? He'd called every one of his friends to boast about it. On Monday morning, the news was all over school that Kristen was a slut. It even reached a few of the mothers' ears, one of who called her own mom to warn her that her daughter was out of control. After exploding with wrath, her mother had calmed down enough to give her this advice: "Boys boast, Kristen, all of them. It's competition with them, seeing who can score with the most girls, and that's all you are to them."

Yes, her mother had been full of advice. She remembered when she brought Hal home; her mother had been reserved in her affection. When Kristen asked her if she sensed anything wrong, her mother merely shrugged. "A man like that is going to have women chasing him his whole life," she said. "If you're prepared to accept that, go on and marry him, but expect to have a lot of competition."

Okay, so her mother had been right about some things. Hal had a magnetism that women found irresistible. Even after his hair began to thin, he retained that thousand-watt smile and warm charm that made his female patients melt. She'd often worried that he might have had affairs with some of them; he certainly had enough "evening appointments." Her worries never became a reality because his behavior toward her had never changed. So what did she know? All she knew was that she'd had two lovers in her life and they had both betrayed her. Now, here she was in lust—in *heat*—over a college kid and apparently heading straight for betrayal number three.

Dylan's sultry blue eyes flashed into her mind and a warm wave of desire washed through her body.

No, it couldn't happen. She just wouldn't see him again. Whenever she had to pick up Sean this summer for their once-a-week overnight, she would stay in the car. Seeing a shirtless Dylan in his messy bedroom again was just too much of a risk.

Yet that tanned, muscular torso... The way his hard-on had throbbed in her hands, so hot and straining with a hunger she knew just how to fulfill...

She threw herself on the sofa cushions and groaned with frustration. After such a long sexless year, passing up a gorgeous young man like Dylan was a sacrifice that bordered on painful. But there was nothing to be done—seeing him again was a risk she

simply couldn't afford. Sighing, she climbed off the couch and walked into the bedroom, where she pulled off her ruined dress and prepared for bed.

* * * *

The next day was Sunday, her day with Sean. She'd agreed to pick him up at eleven but now she wished she'd picked an earlier hour, when a lazy twenty-two-year-old was likely to still be asleep. Still, she would just go in and out. She put on minimal makeup and deliberately dressed casually in jeans and a lavender t-shirt. Let Dylan see her as she really was—for if he thought she always dressed like the sexy glamourpuss of last night, he was in for a rude shock.

Her stomach was squirrely with tension as she knocked on the massive front door of the Stafford home. Sparrows tweeted behind her on the branches of the flowering crabapple trees and on the side lawn, a gardener clipped shrubbery. It was a beautiful summer morning, fresh and clean. For a moment, she appreciated the beauty of Victoria's—well, Victoria and Hal's—home. At least Sean would have fun here.

"Mom!" Sean had opened the door. His little face was beaming as she bent down and swept him into her arms. "Aw..." he scoffed.

"Oh, let your mom give you a hug. Are you all ready to go, sport?"

"He's ready." Hal was sauntering down the front hall with a smile. My God, the front entrance of the house was huge. "Can you have him back by nine tomorrow morning? He's got a swimming lesson at ten."

"Sure, Hal."

Victoria was rushing up the hall behind him—no doubt afraid to leave her darling unguarded for even a moment. "Kristen!" she said sweetly. "Don't you look cute today. Won't you come in for a mimosa?"

"No, thanks." Her heart was still pounding. Why? Was she disappointed that Dylan wasn't even trying to make his presence known?

"Well, have fun, you two! See you tomorrow."

She walked Sean back to the car. Okay, that was a disappointment. She glanced over her shoulder back at the looming house. Was he even there? Maybe he had gone out last night after the party and picked up some girl in a bar. Who knew?

"Hey sport—aren't you going to say goodbye?"

They both looked behind them to see Dylan walk around the side of the house clad in nothing but a pair of swim trunks. Kristen involuntarily sucked in her breath at the sight of that bare, golden chest and those muscular legs. He had the body of a Greek god, this guy did. Apparently he knew it, because now he lazily walked over to the car and leaned his head in Kristen's window. "Hey sport," he said to Sean. "Don't forget we're on for softball tomorrow, okay?"

"No way would I forget, Dylan!" Sean adored him, that much was obvious.

Dylan had casually slipped his hand into her long brown hair. He stroked the back of her neck as he said, "Well, have fun with your mom. Don't get too crazy, little guy. I want you in top form tomorrow for when we kick Davey's butt."

"We're gonna kill him!" Sean shouted.

Kristen squirmed, trying not to melt under his fingers. Dammit, how did he know just where to touch her? She'd always loved having her neck massaged in the precise manner he was rubbing it at that moment. "We have to go," she said quickly and backed

out of the driveway.

As they drove down the road and away from temptation, she glanced at Sean. “You really like your new stepbrothers, don’t you, sport?”

“Well, I like Dylan. Davey—he’s okay. He’s not around that much.”

“So why do you like Dylan so much?”

Sean shrugged coolly. At only eight years old, he was already acting like a little teenager. “He plays ball with me... He taught me how to play soccer too... Did you know his basketball team won their high school championship?”

Kristen suppressed a smile. Sounded like a case of hero worship to her. “No, I didn’t, sport.”

“Well, he’s pretty much good at all sports... I dunno, he’s just cool.”

For their day out, they went to the movies, and then the video arcade. As Sean shouted and groaned over the various video games, Kristen’s mind returned again and again to the memory of those warm fingers massaging her neck. She could and should put a stop to this right now. She wouldn’t encourage Dylan again, not that she had this morning. She would be cold the next time she saw him. It was really the only solution. What else could she do—have an affair that would not only turn the whole town against her, but jeopardize her teaching job as well?

The day flew by too quickly. She dreaded the thought of the rest of the summer—missing Sean six days a week and only having him on Sundays. Then again, to be fair, this was how Hal must feel the rest of the year. Still, darkness fell too soon that night.

“Time to get ready for bed, sport,” she said. Pawing through his overnight bag, she was unable to find his lotion for his eczema. Oh, now that was too much. Hal was a dermatologist, for God’s sake, and he couldn’t remember to send along his own son’s medication? Suppressing her irritation, she dialed him up.

Victoria answered. “We forgot to pack it?” she asked, sounding surprised when Kristen reminded her. “Hmm, I didn’t even notice it...”

No kidding, Kristen thought.

“Well, look, we’re already in bed.” She giggled coyly and Kristen wanted to reach through the receiver, grab her blonde hair, and yank it out by the root. An old surge of possessiveness came back, a jealousy she thought she had conquered. *That’s my husband you’re in bed with!* “Will it kill him to skip one night of the cream?”

“For God’s sake, ask Hal,” Kristen snapped. “He’s the doctor!”

“Right,” Victoria said, chastised. “Hal...” Her voice faded as she covered the receiver, but after only a moment, she was back on. “He’ll bring it right over.”

“Is he coming?” Sean asked after they hung up.

“Yes, sweetie.” Suddenly she wondered if Sean had deliberately taken it out of his bag as a way to get his father over here. No, he couldn’t be that calculating. Still, it might feel awkward, just the three of them together in this house for the first time since the divorce. “But in the meantime, you need to get in the tub.”

Sean was already dried off and in his pajamas when the knock came at the front door. Kristen raced downstairs. Through the frosted glass panes she could see a dark t-shirt and blond hair: Dylan. She opened the door to his cocky smile.

“You ordered something?” he asked, handing over the tube of eczema cream.

“Why are *you* bringing this?” she asked, suddenly sarcastic.

He shrugged, his blue eyes innocent. “Just helping out the old folks...”

“Cute,” she said. “Well, thank you very much.” She began to close the door.

“Kristen!” He looked stunned. “Can’t I come in for a while?”

“No!” she hissed. “Are you crazy? Sean is upstairs!”

“I know that,” he said. “I meant that I’ll wait until he’s asleep.”

She looked at his wounded expression. God, what a face this kid had—taunting and naughty one moment, wounded puppy-dog the next. She summoned her strength. “No. No, I’m sorry. Goodnight, Dylan.” She slammed the door, seeing his stunned expression.

Upstairs she rubbed the cream on Sean’s eczema with shaking hands. “Time for bed, sport,” she said. After prayers and a kiss goodnight, she closed his door and walked to her own room.

Help me, she thought. Every bone in her body longed to be held in Dylan’s arms, caressed by those expert hands. Her heart jumped at the thought of it, but she shook her head as she washed up. No, it just couldn’t happen. Last night was bad enough.

She took a quick shower and powdered herself down with the silky French bath powder Julia had given her for Christmas. Then, after a moment’s thought, she slipped on her new transparent nightie. After brushing out her hair, she admired herself in the mirror: her firm breasts with pink nipples, the curve of her waist and her relatively flat stomach. She might not have a perfect body, but it was still pretty nice, nonetheless. She was thirty-three and still got her share of whistles on the street. She shrugged on a silk robe in case Sean woke up, and then padded downstairs in her bare feet.

She’d made quite a sacrifice tonight. She deserved a glass of wine before bed.

“Cheers to celibacy,” she said bitterly as she took her first sip. Then she looked out the window at the July moon rising over the woods and thought of all the summer romances occurring right now. On beaches, in meadows, on satin sheets, other couples were celebrating their love. Why couldn’t she be one of them?

And as if in answer to her question, there was a soft knock at the back door.

Chapter Five

She jumped up, a splash of cold wine landing on her knee. Could it be—well, of course, it had to be Dylan. Damn him! Why was he so persistent?

He knew she wanted him as much as he wanted her.

She should go upstairs, of course, and ignore his knock. Instead she went to the back door and opened it up to his hopeful smile—this time, not as cocky. “Funny how you seem to keep knocking on my door,” she said.

He leaned against the doorjamb. He was so tall he barely fit. “Knock-knock-knocking on heaven’s door,” he sang softly.

Despite herself, she laughed. “That was really cheesy.”

He touched her wineglass. “Don’t I get one?”

“No,” she said. “You’re barely old enough to drink, as I recall.”

He rolled his eyes. “I’ll be twenty-three in September. Then how about some water? It’s thirsty work, waiting around for you.”

The moon was shining behind him, casting his face in shadow. “I don’t know,” she said, hesitating.

He ran a finger down her robe. “Sexy,” he said. “But somehow I pictured you walking naked around your house in just a pair of high heels.”

She blushed furiously. “My son is upstairs!” she said.

“Oh right. So if I come back tomorrow night, you’ll be naked? In the heels you were wearing at the party?”

As he spoke, he deftly untied the knot of the robe. Before she could stop him, he parted the silk to gaze at the new see-through nightie. Bathed in moonlight, the chiffon was even more transparent, outlining the twin pale mounds of her breasts.

“Damn,” he breathed. “Have you got a set of tits on you.”

She knew she should yank the robe closed and slam the door in his face, but she didn’t want to. Instead, she was paralyzed with pleasure as he began to stroke her pussy through the sheer nightgown, staring at her nipples. “Tell me everything,” he said. “Tell me how much you liked it last night when I was feeling you up in my closet. Tell me how much you were hoping I’d come over tonight and how you started getting excited—right *here*...” He tickled her clit...”when you heard the knock on the door.”

She could barely breathe for his audacity. Who did this guy think he was, coming over here and announcing himself like some kind of grand sex gift? But as she raised her eyes to his, she saw instead a look of doubt, of fear. It had taken courage for him to knock on her door. All the rest was just a brazen cover-up.

“I want you,” she admitted helplessly. “I thought about you all night and all day. But my God, Dylan, you’re only twenty-two years old. I’m thirty-three. You’re just a...”

“Man,” he finished, putting a gentle finger on her lips to stifle the word *kid*. “I’m a man who knows what he wants. That happens to be a gorgeous, intelligent woman and not some drunk college bimbo.”

Oh, he was good. As his warm mouth oh-so gently kissed and nibbled her neck, she had to hold the doorjamb to keep from swooning. No, she had to stop this. She had to stop this *now*.

“Say what you want, but you are still twenty-two,” she reminded him, pushing him away. In the shadows she caught just a glimpse of the fire in his eyes and it was all she could do not to draw him back to her.

“I’m practically twenty-three. Age is just a number, Kristen. How old were you when you got married?”

She frowned. “Twenty-two, but girls...”

“...mature faster than boys, yes, I’ve heard that before. But guess what? There are a few areas girls *don’t* mature faster than boys, and sex is one. Oh, sure, women may be more emotionally advanced, I won’t argue with that, but a girl my age hasn’t yet learned to *respond* sexually the way a guy my age will—or the way a woman your age will.”

She tried to sound disapproving. “So you’ve done this before.”

He hesitated. “Well, no, actually.” He lifted his chin. “But all the magazines say that older women...”

She burst out laughing. “...are hot-to-trot sexpots, full of exotic bedroom tricks, right?”

Dylan began to challenge her but she cut him off.

“See, stereotypes work both ways,” she said. “Dylan, I’m not what you think. If you want some wild older woman, go find her. Right now, you’re looking at a woman who’s only been with her husband—ex-husband—for over a decade. You’re more experienced than I am, trust me.”

“I don’t care,” he groaned, taking her in his arms again. “I’m done with talking...” He began to kiss her, hot, probing kisses that made her release the doorjamb and sink into his arms. Everything in the world fell away but his warm mouth on hers, kissing her in a way she hadn’t been kissed in years; kissed ever.

“I’m crazy about you,” he muttered, his mouth traveling over her jaw and throat.

“You’re so hot. The moment I saw you, I knew we were meant for each other.”

“Dylan...”

But it was useless. Her every nerve was alive with light and heat. Her body cried out for the passion she hadn’t even known she was missing—her mouth, her nipples, her clit, her thighs, all cried out to be touched at once. She could feel his warm, strong arms around her, the hardness of his tall frame against her. This was desire. This was a man. She was going to drown in him and never come back.

“So beautiful,” he whispered, his mouth wandering across her breasts. There was a quick flutter of silk and then her little nightie lay on the kitchen floor. She was naked in the doorway, the cool breezes of a summer night skating across her body. “So utterly fucking beautiful.”

When was the last time her husband had pushed her breasts together and sucked both nipples into his mouth at once? Twirling his tongue around them, he sucked each in turn until they were stiff and aching. When was the last time anyone had told her she was hot and sexy, when was the last time she had even dreamed of a young man’s mouth kissing her stomach, kissing her hipbones? When was the last time a firm, warm tongue had gently parted her pubic curls and then slid, like the answer to a life-long mystery, to her burning core? It was almost too good, his mouth so skillfully and insistently exploring every part of her. His tongue waggled teasingly along her labia, making her moan, then danced over her vulva in an unpredictable pattern. Her head fell back and she moaned harder, caressing his silky blond hair as he gently bit her inner thighs.

“Please,” she whispered, unable to stop herself. “Please.”

But Dylan’s burning mouth began heading north again, leaving a trail of kisses up the dip of her stomach that seemed to sear her skin. She reached back and held the doorway for support as he sucked each of her nipples and then slid his tongue into her mouth. He towered over her again in the doorway.

“I want you,” he whispered. “Do you want me?”

Her heart was thundering too hard to answer. Instead she took his hot shaft in her hand and began to squeeze and stroke it, running his head over her swollen clit. She drank in Dylan’s hard stomach, his tanned and sculpted chest, his soft blond hair and his burning blue eyes. As she rocked her hips against his cock, a throbbing pressure began to build in her pussy.

“You liked that last night,” he reminded her softly.

She nodded, unable to speak.

“Then let me show you what else I can do,” he whispered. He slid down, his back balanced against the door, and pulled her onto his thighs. She gasped as he spread her legs and ran an exploratory finger up her slit. Self-consciously she tried to close her thighs but he held them open with firm hands, exposing her pussy to his gaze.

“You’re beautiful, Kristen,” he said, his voice a low purr. “Show yourself to me.”

Her insides jolted at his words. She’d never spread her legs in front of a man like this, simply for his viewing pleasure. As he began to play with her soft folds, electric bolts of heat ran down her spine. She felt stunned, dizzy and aroused all at once.

His finger breached the tightness of her entrance. She bit her lip, overwhelmed by sensation, as he began to draw slow circles inside her velvet walls. “Oh God,” she cried softly.

She leaned back, balancing herself on his knees, as she spread her legs wide for him. He slid another finger inside her as his other hand manipulated her clit, filling her pussy with shivery sensations. Under his hands, she twisted and writhed, desperate to come.

Then something throbbing and hot brushed her skin. She looked down to see Dylan’s cock standing erect between her thighs, long and hard in the moonlight. A pulsing ache spread through her pussy.

Dylan brought her forward so that his cock was resting against her slit. Suddenly she was aware that she was going to have sex with a new man—her first since her marriage eleven years ago. And right in her kitchen doorway yet, exposed to all the neighbors. She scuttled backward off him and onto the kitchen floor.

“Kristen, wait. What’s wrong?”

He was next to her in a second, holding her against his warm young body. “It’s okay,” he murmured, sucking her earlobe, “It’s okay, whatever you want, whenever you want it.” His fingers were fondling her nipples and tangling in her pubic hair, his cock still brushing her stomach.

“I—the neighbors—Sean—you’re Victoria’s son...” she managed to gasp, her mind a whirlwind of clashing fears.

“Shh ... shh...” He pushed her hair away from her face as he kissed her throat. “It’s okay. You’re so beautiful I’d wait forever.” His tongue flicked lightly at her nipples, then traced the undercurve of her breasts. She moaned again, helpless to resist the heat of the mouth as he headed south down her stomach and gently bit her hipbones.

Then his warm soft tongue was on her clit, swirling her into ecstasy. A faint cry

escaping her, she fell back against the floor and spread her thighs wide, wordlessly begging him to lick her. As his tongue fluttered across her clit, she began to groan in earnest. Unable to stop herself, she pushed her mound into Dylan's warm, eager mouth.

It felt so good. Better than any oral sex she'd ever had. As she arched her back, surrendering to the hot joy spreading through her blood, she realized Dylan's hips were resting by her head. Immediately she took his hard shaft and stroked it over her nipples, eliciting a deep, appreciative groan in response. Gently she sucked his balls one after the other, rolling them gently around her mouth.

Dylan's tongue flicked at her clit like a hummingbird, making her hips rise and twist with delight, and she knew she wasn't going to last much longer. Struggling to focus on his pleasure, she buried his cock deep in her cleavage, squeezing her breasts around his shaft.

Dylan groaned loudly, his ball sac tightening with impending orgasm. Roughly, hungrily, he covered all of her with his tongue, his soft blond curls tickling her thighs. She gasped as that long-delayed swell of blood began to pulse in her, stronger and stronger until it washed over her like a roar of bliss. Spasming wildly, her pussy began to throb in his mouth. Dylan moaned once more and then he was coming too, his white creamy juices lacing her nipples. For the next few glorious moments, they were purely animal, coming in mindless, ecstatic joy.

With a final groan, he collapsed onto the floor next to her. She wiped off her face, strands of hair stuck to her damp skin. She was dizzy and confused and couldn't think clearly.

"You're a goddess," Dylan whispered, rising to his feet. He headed to the sink and returned with a damp paper towel, with which he cleaned off her breasts. Tenderly, he pushed back her hair and kissed her forehead. "You are beautiful inside and out, Kristen."

She knew she should say something. She should apologize; no, she should order him out and tell him never to come back. She should pretend she had been swept away in the moment, that she immediately regretted it.

Instead she opened her eyes and stared into his in the dark.

"Go to sleep," he whispered and kissed her hair once more. "We'll talk tomorrow." Then he was gone—like a shadow in the moonlight or a figment of her imagination, a fantasy that in the morning light would prove itself a lie.

Chapter Six

Are you crazy, Kristen?

Her mother's admonishing voice echoed in Kristen's head that morning as she beat pancake batter in a bowl. True, her mom had died of throat cancer five years ago, but Kristen still found it helpful to imagine her reactions to things. Usually helpful, that is. Today the scolding voice was more like an irritating echo she wanted to throw off.

Lie down with dogs, wake up with fleas. Yes, that had been one of her mom's favorite sayings. Kristen had been so terrified of getting "fleas" that she avoided every man whose grin reminded her of a dog—from a carnal wolf to an abandoned puppy. But now, she had a man who somehow embodied both, and if he came scratching at her door again, she wasn't sure she could turn him away.

Oh hell, she knew she couldn't.

"Mom, I'm hungry," Sean complained.

"Just give me one more minute, honey. Are you packed?"

Sean shrugged sullenly.

He didn't want to go back to Victoria's and Hal's this morning, and she couldn't say she blamed him. While she hadn't been eight in a very long time, she was quite sure it wasn't a lot of fun to leave your home and move into someone else's for three months. Maybe it would just take some adapting for him, getting used to these weekly overnights.

He came over now and slouched gloomily over the kitchen counter. "Mom, why do I have to go back already? I hate staying there."

"Sean, come on. You didn't hate it a few days ago. Think of all the birthday presents you haven't even had a chance to play with yet."

"Big deal." He played with his juice glass, then shoved it away. "I want to stay here."

That's what we both want, she said silently. But she had made a promise long ago never to poison Sean against his dad. "You have a swimming lesson this morning," she reminded him. "Maybe next week you can stay a little longer."

He made a skeptical *phht* noise that made her want to laugh and burst into tears all at once. "Look, you'll have a good time back at Dad's," she said unconvincingly. "Maybe Victoria's son will help you with softball a little more."

Sean brightened. "Yeah, I bet he will if I ask him."

She had to look out the kitchen window to hide her own thoughts of Dylan.

Then, spurred on by a recurrent guilt, she glanced back at Sean. In just ten years he would leave for college; she couldn't help but imagine her reaction if he came home his senior year and announced that he was dating a divorced mother in her thirties. Just the idea sent a tide of revulsion through her. Though Sean was years away from young adulthood, she knew she would still regard him even then as her little boy. So how could she justify what she had done with Dylan last night?

Of course he hadn't acted like a little boy with her last night. On the contrary, he had been all man.

The enormous expanse of emerald green lawn was empty when she dropped Sean off later that morning. Hal emerged to apologize for forgetting Sean's medication the night

before, Victoria hot on his heels. It was funny how Victoria never seemed to want to leave them alone together, even for a moment. Could the beautiful blonde society queen possibly be threatened by her? No, that couldn't be it. She had stolen him away with a snap of her fingers, after all. Perhaps she just wanted to rub it in Kristen's face.

But that didn't seem to be her motive either. Victoria seemed genuinely friendly as she nudged Hal aside to speak to her. "Sorry again about last night—I take it Dylan found your place okay?"

Kristen pretended to notice a spot of dust on the dashboard glass. "Yes, he found it," she said, rubbing off the nonexistent spot.

"Fantastic. I hope he didn't make too poor an impression on you the other night, Kristen—he's still a spoiled child in a lot of ways, but he can be a gentleman when I nag him enough."

Victoria's light laughter filled the air. Kristen forced herself to laugh too.

"Well, take care. We'll see you next week!"

Ah yes, such a civil divorce, so adult and responsible, all of them. Did Victoria and Hal really not understand how hard this still was for her a year later? Watching her husband with another woman who floated around in white peignoirs like something out of a perfume ad?

Wonderful, she felt like snapping. *Since we're all being so calm and friendly about this, Victoria, then you certainly won't mind me having a fling with your son, right?*

As if. Besides, she didn't even know if she would see him again. His appearance last night at the back door in the moonlight, his hot tongue on her pussy and his hands on her breasts, bringing her to a writhing excitement she had never known. Well, it was all beginning to seem like a hallucination—a very pleasant hallucination, but unreal all the same. He hadn't even popped his head out to say hello today, although perhaps that was merely his version of discretion.

Bah. Probably all it had been was this: He saw a pretty older woman at his mother's party and decided to take a shot. He had as much as admitted last night that he'd been seeking a sexual experience with the proverbial Mrs. Robinson. And now that she had practically swooned in his arms like a foolish virgin—and told him of her own sexual inexperience!—he had grown bored and moved on to his next conquest.

That was all it was, she told herself. That was all.

* * * *

She was trying to figure out a plumbing mishap when the doorbell rang that afternoon. At first she barely heard it; she was so intent on following the do-it-yourself manual she'd acquired last fall. That was one of the realities of divorce—having to make simple repairs or pay a costly contractor to do them. Despite Hal's generous settlement, she really couldn't afford the latter. So over the last year she'd been learning to replace bathroom taps, unclog sinks, change fuses and fix blown oven lights by herself.

Sometimes she was successful and sometimes she wasn't. Today was a not-so-successful day.

The doorbell rang again. "Coming!" she yelled and dropped her manual. Dylan fleetingly ran across her mind, along with an idea of how bad she must look—in her oldest jeans and housecleaning t-shirt, her hair in a messy knot. But it wasn't Dylan outside. It was a man in a delivery uniform and he was holding a bouquet of flowers.

“Kristen Tilden? Sign here please.”

Heart pounding, she accepted the flowers and closed the door. After taking in the extravagant summer basket—black-eyed susans, daisies, daffodils, and irises—she brought them to her nose and gratefully inhaled that fresh summer scent. Then she slid the card out of its tiny envelope.

I was pushy, aggressive, and obnoxious last night. Please let me make it up to you with dinner. I'll be by at seven.

Dylan

Well. *That* was something to think about! Yes, he had been a little on the obnoxious side last night with his bold back-door appearance—and yet wasn't this just a trick of a different stripe? Play sensitive and see if the older woman puts out even more? Maybe he'd get a blowjob out of it. No doubt that was his plan.

She put the basket of flowers on the table and headed upstairs for a shower. Trick or not, she was going to look her prettiest tonight, and just maybe she'd get her plumbing fixed as well.

Later, something nagged at her as she soaped up with her French bath gel—a feeling something was incomplete—and she knew what it was. Julia. At any other time, she'd be on the phone with her best friend spilling all of the details of her latest crush or erotic fantasy about a hot guy she'd seen at the gym. Now she was forced to maintain a secretive silence. It felt unnatural. Julia was in Europe for most of the summer, but in August she would return. What would she say when Julia asked for all the details of Victoria's party?

Kristen had never lied to her best friend. She had told her frankly of Hal's impotence problems toward the end of their marriage, of her desire for a second child—a child Hal refused to even discuss—and her fears of aging alone after the divorce. Now she was experiencing her own sexual revolution, a life-changing passion that exceeded any frame of reference she might have. She was dying to talk about it with someone and who better than Julia, with her insights and no-bullshit attitude? And yet ... just saying the words aloud made her cringe.

“I'm dating Victoria's son,” she said to her blue bathroom tiles. Her voice faltered and she tried again. “Julia, you won't believe this. Are you sitting down? You won't believe who I'm, uh, kind of seeing.”

Say the words, Kristen. Say you're getting naked with a twenty-two-year-old, spreading your legs for him and loving every second of it.

Just the echo of the words made her nipples get hard. Shaking her head, she wrapped up in a soft bath towel and began to get ready for her date.

Chapter Seven

“Wow! You look awesome.”

Dylan’s blue eyes were sincere with his praise. He looked her outfit up and down, then leaned against the doorjamb and smiled helplessly. “I think I’m in over my head here,” he said before handing her more flowers—a simpler bouquet this time of violets.

As if, but she only said, “More flowers? You’re too sweet” and walked back to the kitchen to put them in water. Her heart was pounding. Pulling off this woman-of-the-world routine, as if she routinely opened her door to gorgeous young men taking her on dates, was tough.

After much thought, she had decided against wearing a dress. Girls Dylan’s age didn’t get dressed up, they usually wore jeans and a sexy shirt; she knew that much from seeing them around town. On the other hand, she wanted to put some effort into her look tonight and jeans seemed too casual for a first date. Finally, she had decided on black silk pants, black strappy heels, and a white camisole—that seemed to straddle the perfect blend between looking too matronly and as if she was trying too hard to look young. Now the fire in his eyes made her feel pleased with her choice.

“Where are we eating?” she called over her shoulder.

“Huh? Oh—an Indian place I know,” he said. He sounded distracted and she was amused to find his gaze squarely on her ass when she glanced over her shoulder. “Do you like Indian food?”

“Never had it,” she answered honestly. She arranged the violets in a small crystal vase and left them by the phone—a place her cat was unlikely to fool with. “Sounds like an adventure.”

“Oh, we don’t have to go Indian. We can eat anywhere, I don’t care...” Dylan was staring at her chest now and she had to bite back a smile. *My god, he is so young! All hormones, all the time.* Then, perhaps hearing his indifferent tone, he changed gears. “I mean, but I would rather take you to this Indian restaurant... It’s very romantic and I think you’ll like it.”

It was also thirty minutes away and far from anywhere Victoria Stafford might discover them, Kristen noted when they pulled into the lot. Good, she hadn’t quite been ready to go public with this little adventure just yet. On the other hand, had he picked a discreet restaurant because he was ashamed to be seen with her?

As the pretty Indian hostess seated them, Kristen had another thought. Were the other diners looking at them, wondering why they were together? She was too young to be his mother and they looked too different—tall and blond compared to petite and dark—to be siblings. Besides that, what siblings looked at each other like this? She also knew she looked too old to be his date. Yes, everyone was definitely whispering about them, they had to be.

But as she looked around, no one seemed to be. An older couple flashed them a sweet smile, as if they were any young couple out on a date. The waiter pouring their water didn’t seem surprised either. How could that be?

Dylan leaned forward. “What are you thinking?”

“That the décor in here is very interesting. That painting of an elephant-headed

god..."

"Is Ganesha, the god of good fortune, and that blue god over there is Krishna—the god of love." His eyes burned into hers. "Seems auspicious we were seated in a booth decorated with their paintings, huh?"

She laughed nervously. It was way too soon to talk of love. Wait, what was she thinking? There would be no talk of love at all. This was lust, pure and simple.

"Now tell me what you were really thinking."

She glanced up guiltily. Dylan was looking at her seriously, compassionately. As if he knew.

"Just that, you know..." Her mouth dried. "I mean, everyone in here must be wondering what we're doing together, I am so much older than you."

"Kristen, it's only a ten-year difference."

Only.

"And you look so young for your age that I really don't think people would even realize there is a difference."

Smooth, kid. Very smooth.

"Is that important anyhow? I mean, what we feel is important, right?"

Suddenly she felt angry. "Dylan, what's with the romance and flowers? What we *felt* was me getting naked in your bedroom five minutes after we met and you feeling me up. This isn't the love affair of the century here, so let's not pretend, okay?"

His eyebrows shot up. He didn't speak for a moment. Then he said, "Damn, that was harsh."

The waiter approached and seeing their tense faces, hurried away.

"It's the truth," she told him. "You're twenty-two; you're a horny kid who wants to get laid by an older woman. You pretty much said so last night."

Dylan shook his head furiously. His blond curls tossed about, and against her will she thought of how adorable he looked. "That's not what I said. Yes, I am attracted by the fact that you're older. I've always found older women to be sexier and more interesting than girls my age, but it's you I'm interested in. If you were twenty-five or forty-eight, I'd still be sitting here trying to make you believe it."

"Believe what exactly?" she asked skeptically.

"That we're meant to be together. And that I've known it since I saw you standing in my backyard at the party."

She felt an odd mix of anger and emotion. "Look, at your mom's party and last night, you were..."

"I know, I acted like a dog. I was all over you and I'm sorry. My lust got the better of me, but I do like you, Kristen, and I want to get to know you. As a person."

He looked so earnest that she suddenly wanted to laugh. "That's what you want," she said. "To get to know me."

"That's right."

"Biblically, of course."

He groaned. "And in other ways..."

"Of course."

"Sheesh, Kristen! Look, I know you've probably got guys banging down your door trying to get with you. I'm not like that. Yes, I want you so bad I can't think about anything else. Just looking at your cleavage in that wispy little shirt gives me a boner;

I'm so uncomfortable I can barely sit here. But I'm not like the rest of the guys who hit on you. I swear it."

For a moment she didn't know what to say. Finally she said, "If we're going to be honest with each other, I may as well tell you there are no other guys banging down my door."

"What? That's crazy."

"Pickings are slim for a woman in her thirties, Dylan. Most guys are married... The single guys don't want a woman with a kid... It gets tough."

"But you're beautiful," he said simply. "Any guy would want to be with you."

She was so touched she couldn't speak.

"Well, that's good news for me," he said after a moment. "But don't think I'm going to stop trying to win you, Kristen... I'll make you believe in me. You'll see."

The waiter cleared his throat then and they opened their menus.

Dinner was delicious. Dylan had her sample several popular Indian dishes, none of which she could pronounce. She didn't care. They were drinking a lot of wine and his eyes were a deep azure by candlelight; and as the night wore on, the rest of the restaurant seemed to melt away. It was just the two of them now. When he paid the bill and escorted her outside, she felt her head swimming, as if she were in a dream.

"Steady now," he laughed as she wobbled on her heels. He pulled her close to him, a comforting arm around her waist. "You're not drunk, are you?"

She shook her head. "Just a little tipsy."

"Well, I have an idea. Let's take a walk."

The July night was warm and slightly muggy, but she happily leaned into him as they walked down the street. A dark patch of pine trees preceded them but she followed his lead as he carefully led her through the momentary darkness, then out onto a soft green hill. A small lake sparkled before them in the moonlight.

"Dylan, what is this place?"

"The country club," he replied. "When I was in high school and my parents would drag me to boring cotillions here, I used to escape onto this golf course and fantasize that I was making love to some gorgeous woman out here."

It *was* a golf course. She looked down and around at the miles of perfectly-tended emerald grass, marked by hills, sand traps, and the lake in the center. Though logically she knew that middle-aged men made business deals out here every day, in the quiet night it might have been their private paradise.

"All my life I've been waiting for the right woman to bring out here," he said.

"Tonight I want to make that fantasy come true."

She looked up at him, his face hazy but handsome in the moonlight, and his lips met hers in a kiss. His lips were so strong, yet tender. A hissing noise broke the silence—and something cold and wet landed on her back. She gasped.

"What the..."

They both turned. It sounded as if snakes were hissing all over the golf course, but as tiny streams of water shot through the air, they realized it was merely the sprinkler system turning on.

"Oh God, I'm so sorry," Dylan said. "Your clothes..."

She laughed. "Are you kidding? This feels great!" Drunk with joy and the beauty of the night, Kristen tilted her face up to catch the falling patter of water. To their right

another sprinkler came to life—and doused the front of her shirt. She arched her back with sensual delight as the white cotton became transparent.

“This is fun!” she called. Dancing through the falling streams of water, she opened her arms, letting her camisole become plastered to her skin. Her nipples had become erect from the water and to tease Dylan, she pulled the transparent material taut over them.

“Come back here!” he commanded and tugged her to him. Fixing his mouth on her wet top, he sucked her nipples through the cotton until she groaned. His tongue was warm against the cool air and a naughty shiver went through her.

“No!” she said and playfully shoved him away. Leaving him half-bent over with frustration and lust, she returned to twirling through the water. Squeezing her breasts, she smiled at him, then shook back her wet hair and slowly began to slide her camisole up her waist. As it passed her ribs and caught on the bottom swell of her breasts, Dylan made a guttural noise like an animal.

“Take it off,” he said harshly.

Instead she left her camisole like that; tight, wet, and pushed up just on top of her nipples. Leaving the pale bottom half of her breasts exposed, she unzipped her pants then slowly smoothed them down her hips. She smiled again at him.

He didn’t say a word this time.

Never in her life had she felt so naked. Not in his bedroom the other night, not in her kitchen doorway—not in any of the nights of her marriage. This was different. She was peeling off her clothes under the stars, outside where really any caretaker or passerby could come by, and she was showing Dylan that she was not ashamed. She kicked her pants across the wet grass and then pulled her camisole over her head, letting her breasts bounce free. Then she was truly naked, with only her sprinkler-damp hair to cover her.

Dylan whistled low. “I’ve never seen anything so sexy in my life.”

She laughed a little nervously, but she was determined not to act shy. Dylan’s blue eyes were filled with an emotion she couldn’t describe in the starlight. Then he did the last thing she would have expected—he pulled out his cell phone.

“Please let me take your picture,” he begged. “I’ll erase it tomorrow, I swear, but I have got to capture you looking like this.”

At the thought of being photographed naked, moist warmth began to build between her legs. She had never let Hal take dirty pictures; she was too terrified of them being found by the wrong eyes, or winding up online. It was an act of trust and she didn’t even know this guy. Not really.

But the thought of him looking at naked pictures of her later made that familiar throbbing start between her legs.

“Do it,” she said. Taking a deep breath, conscious of the night air skipping across her bare nipples, she struck a pose.

Dylan activated the camera feature on his phone and focused. As he clicked the shot, she felt her arousal trickle through her sex.

“Put your hands on the back of your neck,” he ordered hoarsely. She obeyed, the gesture lifting up her breasts. “Yeah, like that... Okay, now turn around and bend over. You know, and look at me over your shoulder.”

She did as he requested, spreading her feet apart. Bending over, she was aware that all of her was exposed to the camera, every last inch of her pussy. Her thighs were shaking as he clicked the shot.

“Beautiful,” he whispered. “I don’t know how much longer I can hold out... Lay on the grass, Kristen. Spread your legs for the camera, show me everything.”

Her heart was pounding hard as she spread her thighs for him. He was twenty-two—a horny, shallow kid. What if he showed these pictures to his friends? What if he posted them online? As he clicked away, she surrendered to the night wind in her hair, the wet grass tickling her ass, the wet hunger swelling her open slit.

There was a soft noise as Dylan’s cell phone hit the grass. Then he was top of her, hungry as an animal. He bit her thighs and wiggled his tongue deep in her pussy. Squeezed her breasts before kissing her roughly on the mouth. “Tell me you want me,” he demanded. “Say it, say you do.”

“I do, you know I do,” she protested, half-laughing, half-panting.

“No, I want you to say it. Tell me you want to fuck me, *bad*.” He was rubbing the head of his cock against her vulva, driving her crazy.

“I want you, Dylan. I want to fuck you.” She blushed. It wasn’t easy for her to say dirty words. Her hips rose up against him, seeking his cock, but he lifted just an inch away.

“No, tell me. Say it like you mean it.”

She gave up. “Fuck me,” she whispered. “Fuck me, Dylan. Now.”

“Fuck you where?”

“My pussy. Fuck my hot, wet pussy.” She blushed a deep crimson.

He drove his cock into her, plowing between her slick walls with hard, skilled thrusts. She gasped and momentarily saw nothing but molten, melting heat—and then he pulled out of her, making her whine with need. Slowly he drove back into her until his balls rested against her body. “Fuck me,” she begged, “please,” but he pulled out again.

Her pussy felt frustratingly empty. She lifted up on her elbows and begged, “Dylan, please, I need it,” and he pushed her down and thrust into her, in, out, in, out, and then just as she was feeling that wonderful electricity fill her body, he pulled out.

“Are you crazy?” she cried. “Fuck me, don’t stop!”

He laughed a little and pushed into her, just the swollen head of his cock lodging in her warm tightness, and she drove her hips up into him, pulling his ass close to her to swallow his entire cock. “Fuck me,” she panted, “don’t stop,” and he obliged her by driving into her faster and deeper until a hot white euphoria exploded in her body, shuddering through every muscle. As her pussy squeezed him over and over, he cried out and buried himself to the hilt one last time, his own orgasm wracking his body.

For a long time they cuddled on the wet golf course together, dreamily watching the occasional plane pass through the stars. Dylan wound his fingers in her hair, but neither of them spoke. At last he kissed her cheek.

“I knew from the start that you’re the one,” he said. “You’re the one I’ve been waiting for, Kristen.”

She struggled to turn over in his arms. “Dylan...”

“Shh, don’t say anything. I know you don’t believe in this ... but you will. I’ll make you believe in us, Kristen.”

Silently they found their wet clothes and put them on. Then hand in hand, they walked back to his car.

Chapter Eight

The next few weeks passed in an erotic blur of skin, sex, and laughter. Dylan arrived each night with some little token of his affection: a bottle of hand lotion, wildflowers, a CD he thought she'd like. Which, while appreciated, she could barely slow down to examine before ripping off his t-shirt and jeans. Tanned and taut, he would fall to his knees to lift her skirt and tease her pussy until she screamed. Other times, he lowered her onto the sofa where they explored each other for hours like teenagers, driving each other crazy with the most torturous kind of foreplay. They took long baths together and kissed for hours, he spread her open on the kitchen table and pumped away at her until she lost count of her orgasms. Dylan was wild and energetic, a sex demon brought to life—and she was physically starved for the crazed sex they brought out in each other. Tumbling wildly around the living room, knocking over cushions and side tables, she clung to his wet skin with a passion that was as desperate as it was euphoric.

Was it really possible that she had met the lover of her dreams—in a twenty-two-year-old?

Oh, it was just a summer fling, she knew that—they were living in a fantasy, both of them on break from school and enjoying a freedom that could never last. In September, Sean would come home, she would go back to teaching, and Dylan would go back to college. And their glorious affair would end. It would be impossible to hide it from Sean, after all, and Dylan would be on campus with so many beautiful co-eds around... She swallowed, but there was no way around it. Better to face facts, but for now she was enjoying every minute.

"Don't give up on us," Dylan kept saying. "I see it in your eyes sometimes—you're closing your heart to me."

"I'm not," she protested, though of course he was right.

"I'm the man for you, Kristen. Wait and see. I'm going to be the answer to your dreams."

It was so hard to look at him when he said things like that. "Let's just take it one day at a time," she said gently. "The future will work itself out."

"No, we'll *make* it work. I'll make it work. I know your husband hurt you but I'm going to make it up to you."

She knew he meant what he said. She could see it in his earnest face. But she'd been in her early twenties before and he hadn't. She knew what he couldn't—that things changed. She had no doubt Dylan fully intended to be the perfect man to her, but young men that age wanted a million different things before they turned twenty-five. The whole world looked good to them—sexy women, exciting careers, exotic countries ... it was only a matter of time before this little adventure grew stale and he was off to his next exploit. She didn't hold it against him. It came with the territory.

So she would say, "Shh" when he began his wild promises. "Let's focus on today. I've got you in my arms and that's all that matters."

The only night they spent apart was the night Sean stayed over. The night before they would scrub the house down—her stifling a laugh as Dylan frantically stuffed the laundry machine with sheets and hid his shaving kit and boxer briefs—so as to remove

any trace of another man in the house. Then she would have a wonderful day with her son, and hours after returning him to Hal and Victoria, Dylan would slip back in the house burning with pent-up desire.

"Where does your mother think you're spending your nights?" Kristen couldn't help asking him. "Doesn't she get suspicious that you're never home?"

As soon as she spoke, she realized the possibly ugly answer she didn't want to know—that Dylan routinely stayed out all night.

But he only shrugged. "She did ask. I just told her I was seeing someone and if she didn't like it, I could pack my stuff and jet. I'm almost twenty-three, she can't tell me what to do."

A warning bell went off. "But what if she *had* told you to leave..."

"So what? We're going to move in together eventually."

"Dylan..." she said warningly.

"Yeah, yeah, I know—Sean. That's completely understood. Well, I'd stay with my buddies for a while. Or rent a place. Whatever."

She asked the question she'd always wondered. "Why do you still live at home when you and your mother argue so much? I know you save money on rent, but with the trust fund your father left you..."

"The trust fund my father left me can *only* be used for tuition. It doesn't pay for any of my living expenses. All my clothes, the things I do for fun, the gas in my car—I pay for that. But that's only one reason I still live there. The truth is, Mom has live-in help and I like having all my meals cooked and laundry done."

She sighed. As sweet as Dylan was, he definitely was spoiled.

"Besides, that house is so big we never see each other." He shrugged again. "I'll move out after I graduate."

"And why do you and your mother argue so much? Despite everything that happened with Hal, Victoria seems nice enough..."

Dylan laughed bleakly. "Sure she does. That's a mask that she wears."

"Dylan, you're not about to tell me that she's a secret child abuser or something."

"No, but she's not a great mother either. Like I said, she wears a mask—no different from all of her makeup, Botox, and designer clothes. She acts like the perfect lady around all her friends, but the truth is she barely paid attention to me or my brother when we were young. It was like she just had us for show. And as for my old man... He worked all the time and then he died. It wasn't exactly a loving home, know what I mean?"

She laid her hand on his chest. Despite the casual tone of his voice, his heart was beating fast. Dylan's childhood wounds still hurt.

"My mother just doesn't think about other people's feelings," he said. "She'll act all sweet, but whatever she does is for her sake alone. Trust me, Kristen, most people have no idea. Do you know she lies about her age? She tells everyone she's thirty-nine when really she's forty-five. What the hell?"

Kristen stared at him. "What?"

"I'm dead serious. She even had her driver's license altered. Sometimes I think that's why she doesn't talk about my brother and I too much—because people might realize there's no way she could be so young if I'm twenty-two. She didn't get pregnant in high school, know what I mean?"

With a stunned flash of insight, Kristen realized that obvious fact for the first time.

Of course Victoria wasn't thirty-nine. No wonder her face looked so tight and expressionless—she was probably even more lifted than she previously thought. But did Hal know her true age?

Unsure of what to say, she opted for silence. Dylan propped himself up on one elbow and began to trace her nipple gently with his finger. "After I graduate, we can be open about our relationship," he said. "By our one-year anniversary, people will have to take us seriously." He ran his tongue around the under curve of her breast and she moaned. With practiced fingers he began stroking her inner thighs. "And who cares what anyone thinks when what we have is so good..."

* * * *

Despite his avowed independence, Victoria continued to exert some power over her son, as demonstrated later that week when she asked him to visit his grandmother. Kristen wasn't entirely disappointed—a night to herself might be nice after the physical whirlwind that was their sex life. That night she ate a light supper of steamed salmon and grilled vegetables, and then opened her new paperback. She had barely started reading when there was a knock on the door.

Hal and Victoria were standing outside.

For a moment she thought it was bad news. Dylan must have been injured in an accident and they had come to tell her. Her heart was pounding as she unlocked the door.

"Hi!" she said. "It's not Sean's night..."

They were both staring at her with a cold disgust: immediately she knew they knew.

She fought for composure. "Please come in," she announced and stepped aside.

Victoria had never been in her home before and now she saw it through her eyes; a nice enough home, with pretty plants and a soothing off-white scheme, but not nearly as grand as her own home. And then she saw Dylan's sneakers kicked off in the hall, his baseball cap resting on the kitchen counter by the phone, and one of his car magazines on the coffee table.

"I think you know why we're here," Hal said quietly.

He and Victoria were sitting side by side on the sofa, holding hands. Two against one, how nice. Of course it had been a set-up to get Dylan out of the house tonight. How gullible they had both been. But how did they find out? Had someone seen them at the Indian restaurant, or the movies?

Victoria's made-up face was a mask of rage. Hal simply looked devastated. He looked humiliated, horrified, and baffled all at once. Kristen drew herself up.

"I don't know," she said. Let them say the words.

"Kristen, we know that..." Hal began.

But Victoria exploded. She jumped up and screamed, "We found the pictures! You naked on my son's cell phone! Explain that, you filthy whore!"

A stone sank in Kristen's stomach; the nude pictures from the golf course on his cell phone. He had promised to erase them. Of course he had kept them to look at over and over, that was exactly what a boy would do. And now Victoria and Hal had seen them. Her rival Victoria Strafford had seen her naked body. How appalling.

Her next words surprised even her. "And? It's none of your business, as far as I can see."

Victoria's jaw dropped—and Kristen savored that moment for all she could. "How

dare you—my son is a—you disgusting...”

Hal was more composed, though cold. “Kristen, for God’s sake. He’s a child.”

“A *child*?” She raised her brows. “He’s the same age as when I married you, Hal. Did you marry a child?”

He scoffed. “Men and women are different. Why, I’ve known Dylan for a year now, he’s about as mature as a box of rocks...”

“You leave my son out of this!” Victoria snapped at him. “Dylan is innocent! Or he was until your slut of an ex-wife seduced him!”

“Actually *I* seduced *her*.”

They all turned to see Dylan in the doorway. His blue eyes were blazing with rage and heat. “The whole thing has been my idea, not Kristen’s, Mom—and by the way, don’t you dare call the woman I love a slut.”

Victoria laughed emptily. “The woman you love. Dylan, she’s a...”

“Mom, I am so fucking serious.”

Victoria and Hal returned their attention to Kristen. “We are ordering you to end this immediately,” Hal told her. “Tonight. We won’t make any problems for you if Dylan just comes home with us.”

“Problems? Like what, Hal? We’re not doing anything illegal.”

“Like a custody battle, for one!” Victoria snapped. “We’re taking poor little Sean out of this house and you’ll never see him again!”

Waves of rage and nausea swept through Kristen. “You can’t do that,” she managed. “I’m a good mother. No judge is going to award you custody just because I’m dating a younger man.”

“You’re dating his stepbrother!”

“He’s only a stepbrother because *you two* had to have an adulterous affair and break up our home. So as far as I’m concerned, you can threaten me all you want—but you can’t really do squat.”

“You’re a child molester!” Victoria hissed. “This is an unfit home for that little boy!”

Dylan sailed across the room so fast Kristen didn’t realize what he was doing at first. Grabbing his mother by the arm, he pulled her from the room. “Don’t you ever call her that again!” he shouted. “If you do, I’ll kill you!” He pushed her outside.

Hal was hot on his heels, but no match for the younger, stronger man. As he tried to swing at him, Dylan grabbed him easily and shoved him hard out the door.

“Get the fuck out and don’t come back!” Dylan yelled. “And don’t even think of trying to use Sean against us, Mom—not when we all know what a horrible mother you are!”

The door slammed and silence fell on the house. Kristen closed her eyes, letting the ugliness of their words drain from her ears. For a while there was only the sound of Victoria sobbing outside and Hal’s low, urgent voice. It was followed by the sound of Victoria’s BMW convertible starting and driving away. Then the silence descended again, broken only by crickets chirping in the warm July night.

She didn’t realize Dylan was kneeling in front of her until he took her hands. “I know that was bad,” he began. “But maybe this is how it had to be. Now everyone knows. They’ll get used to the idea and we can go public with our relationship.”

She burst into the tears she’d been holding back. “Dylan, did you not hear her? They’re going to take me to court over Sean. Oh God, and your mother has so much

money. She'll hire the best lawyers in the world."

"She doesn't want Sean," Dylan said reasonably. "She just wants revenge. She'll cool down, Kristen. I know my mother. Give her time to get used to the idea. I doubt anyone's going to court."

She felt as if she were going to be sick. It was so easy for him to say that—it wasn't his son on the line. "I'm going to bed," she finally managed. "I can't think right now."

"I'll tuck you in."

Dylan was very sweet as he brought her a glass of wine in bed and then rubbed her back. It was almost as if he were the older one tonight. "It's going to be okay," he kept whispering as they went to sleep. "You'll see. Everything's going to be fine..."

But she found that hard to believe as she drifted off.

Chapter Nine

And so she and her nemesis Victoria Stafford were at war again, and unlike last summer, this war was turning vicious. That was because last summer had been more of an uncontested fight, she realized; Victoria had decided she wanted Hal and Kristen gave him up without a fight. Now, Victoria was demanding the end of another relationship and Kristen was defying her. The little schoolteacher was standing up to the society femme fatale. It had to be an unforgivable sin in Victoria's eyes and a shock as well. Ditto for Hal. Every time she replayed their words, *we are ordering you to end this immediately*, she shook her head with outraged astonishment. How dare they give her "orders"? How dare they treat her like their inferior? And how dare they call her a slut when they'd had an extramarital affair last summer? She and Dylan might have an age difference, but they weren't cheating on anyone. If the genders were reversed, it was quite possible no one would say a word.

Kristen longed for Julia's return from Europe. Not only could Julia console her, she could confirm the rumors snaking their way around town.

For Victoria had effectively employed that sneakiest of weapons: character assassination. She was smearing Kristen's reputation far and wide. Kristen could tell from the stares in the grocery store and post office, some fascinated but most contemptuous. When she shopped for shoes or picked up video rentals, clerks and customers whispered just out of earshot. *"That's her! I heard she was..."* She was the local Mrs. Robinson now, preying on an innocent boy. She was a predator, a bad woman. And the fact that she taught fourth grade just made the scandal more delicious to the town.

"Aw, don't let those small town minds get you down," Dylan kept saying. "Who cares what they think?"

"I care," she said through gritted teeth. Why didn't he understand? The adults in town considered him an innocent victim, someone too young to know any better. The kids his own age thought he was a stud for getting casual sex from an older woman. But everyone judged *her* far more harshly.

Far more harshly, she thought, than they had judged Hal and Victoria last summer. It was so unfair.

Victoria and Hal had yet to make good on their threat of a custody case. Perhaps Victoria was realizing she didn't want the responsibility of a being a full-time stepmother. Or, perhaps she was merely letting her vicious rumors ruin Kristen's reputation before taking her to court. Sean still slept over once a week, but now no one came out to speak to her when she picked him up and dropped him off. That was fine with her.

As for Dylan, he had gone home only once to pack his things. He and Kristen argued bitterly over him moving in, and finally she had won. "It would look bad if we do go to court," she'd said desperately. "And you have to think of Sean. He thinks of you as his stepbrother; it would be too confusing to suddenly find you living with his mother. First, we'll tell him that we're friends, and then later that we're dating... and only after he accepts us as a couple can we move in together."

That day will never come, because you'll be long gone by then, she added silently. Of course Dylan wanted to move in now; their days and nights were one long tangle of mind-blowing sex, interrupted only by long meandering discussions of their secret dreams and future plans. Even throwing together a salad or picking up the living room was fun because they did it together and took frequent breaks just to kiss or burrow into each other's arms. But that wouldn't last forever. Once they went back to the grind in the fall, and there was an eight-year-old boy on the premises, Dylan would taste the responsibility and boredom of domestic life all too quickly. And he'd be gone. So as far as she was concerned, Sean need never find out about their relationship. She could only hope that he hadn't overheard any of Hal and Victoria's conversations about it.

Dylan gave her a probing look. "You're not just putting me off, are you? I love you, Kristen. I'm in this for the long haul."

She shook her head. "I know, Dylan. And you know that we need to be careful."

So Dylan was staying with his college friends. This wasn't a scenario that thrilled her—she knew there were probably pretty young women visiting the apartment regularly—but it was his only option apart from her.

Sometimes she just wanted the anguish of knowing she would lose him one day to be over. Other times she didn't think she could live without him. Every day he looked more gorgeous to her, so tanned and smooth, with that tousle of sandy blond hair. As he mowed the lawn, shirtless in the summer heat, his biceps glistened with sweat in the sun. She never got enough of running her hands over his taut abdomen or tracing the blond stubble that graced his jaw early in the morning. He was just so gorgeous. And when he turned his guileless blue eyes on her, she knew that she wanted to look into those eyes every day of her life.

Ridiculous! She'd scoff at herself. *This is just a sex thing. Quit kidding yourself.* But other times she'd wake up in the middle of the night and look at his sleeping face on the pillow and know that she was truly in love with him—more in love than she'd ever been with her husband.

* * * *

In early August she did what she did every year since she'd begun teaching—return to her classroom to prepare it for fall. The big elementary school was always quiet and rather spooky in August, with only the occasional echo of another teacher's preparations echoing through the dark corridors. Sometimes she was the only one present. That week she prepared welcome tags for all of the children, based on her new class roster, and organized the supplies she had ordered. While parts of the annual curriculum stayed the same, she tried to stay current and find new projects for each class to do. She felt it kept her as well as the students fresh.

She was organizing her desk drawers when the principal knocked on her door. "Oh, hi Sheila," she said, looking up. "Almost time for the madness to start up again, huh?"

Sheila laughed shakily and came in. "I guess." She didn't speak for a moment and Kristen looked up again. Something in the principal's eyes made her stomach tighten. She knew exactly what was about to happen.

"I heard something disturbing over the summer," Sheila began. "I'm sure it's not true but Kristen, two separate people have told me—well, I'm just going to say it. They say you're dating a teenager."

“A teenager!” Kristen exclaimed. She jumped up. “Sheila, please tell me you didn’t believe them.”

“Well, of course I didn’t, but a lot of people are talking, Kristen... Where is this rumor coming from? You must realize how difficult it will be for the school if words get out that one of the teachers is involved in statutory rape.”

At the words *statutory rape*, Kristen closed her eyes tightly and shook her head. God, Victoria was good. It was like a nightmare that would never end. “Sheila, I would never do such a thing,” she replied at last. “I am involved with a younger man, but he is far and away above the legal age!”

But Sheila only looked more disturbed now. “How old is he?”

“Twenty-three,” Kristen said. Well, okay, he would be in a month. Close enough. “Ten years younger than me. Yes, it is a considerable difference. But there are plenty of men my age dating girls his age, so I really don’t see what the big deal is.”

Sheila’s mouth opened. In the ensuing pause, Kristen had time to think of how ridiculous she looked, like a goldfish. “A twenty-three-year-old! Kristen, are you nuts? That’s a child!”

“No, he is *not* a child,” Kristen said in a steely voice. “I was married at his age. He’s an adult who can make his own decisions.”

“My sons are that age,” Sheila said righteously.

“I don’t see the connection,” Kristen said. She was trying to stay pleasant but the conversation was wearing out her patience. “Look, Sheila, this really isn’t anyone’s business. I can appreciate how the rumors might cause trouble but since they’re not true, we don’t need to worry.”

Sheila drew herself to her full height and said, “I’ll need to think about this.” Then she squared her shoulders and walked out.

Kristen stared at her. Think about what? She and Dylan didn’t need her permission to have a relationship.

Upset, she finished her desk arrangements, picked up her handbag, and went home.

Chapter Ten

Dylan's truck was in the driveway when she arrived. She opened the door to find the house clean and the dining room table ablaze with candles, though it was a warm evening. At the sight of a chilled bottle of white wine, she smiled. When she saw the book next to it—a hardcover just published by her favorite author—she had to blink away tears. God bless his sweet little heart. Dylan might be young but he knew exactly how to pamper her.

He emerged from the kitchen naked behind a red apron. "Welcome to your personal spa, my lady... I am here to serve your every need." He pulled aside the apron and flashed his erection, a devilish smile curling his lips. "And I mean *every* need."

She laughed, and walked into his arms. "How'd you know I had a bad day?"

"Because we're connected in that way that true soulmates are. I telepathically sensed your distress call."

"You're crazy," she said, kissing him.

"And horny," he said casually, wrapping her fingers around his cock. Feeling its pulsing heat in her hand, all thoughts of the day left her mind. She buried her head in Dylan's neck to inhale that sexy scent of his cologne and the warmth of his own skin.

He kissed her hair. "You okay, baby?"

"Just sick of the nosy world we live in. And oh yes, I'm horny too."

They laughed and she lifted his apron again. There it was, the most gorgeous erection she'd seen in her life: a throbbing shaft of smooth, velvety hardness. She began to stroke him in her hands, rolling her palm over his already swollen head. Dylan went very still and his breathing quickened. Smiling, she began to run her fingernails over his balls in the way she knew he liked.

"I'm here to serve you..." his voice faltered as she continued stroking.

"My mouth needs to be served," she told him and pushed him down on the arm of the sofa. Falling backward, the apron was pushed to the side, exposing his hard, tanned thighs and firm balls. That old familiar heat spread through her pussy, but she resisted the urge to straddle him. Instead she knelt between his legs and nuzzled his balls. An involuntary noise escaped his throat.

Casually she began licking his sac and the silky skin beneath. "So did you have a good day today?" she asked. "Thanks for the book, that was really sweet of you." She loved the faint salty tang of his skin down here.

"I know that's your favorite writer..." His breath was coming in sharp little bursts.

"Yes, I just love her books. They're so interesting." Without warning she sucked the head of his cock in her mouth and engulfed him. He gasped and then she released him and returned to playing with his balls. "It's never occurred to me—who's your favorite writer, Dylan? For someone who's going to be a lawyer, you don't seem to read much."

"I guess I... don't have time..." His hips strained up to find her mouth but she only idly ran her tongue around his shaft. He groaned and reached for her head, and she pushed his hands away. "Please, Kristen..."

"That's a shame. Reading is such a great escape and you learn so much from it, too." She straightened up a bit and taking his penis in her hands, began rubbing it against her

shirt. Slowly she unbuttoned her blouse, letting his cock in further with each button, until he slipped between her bare breasts. She squeezed them together and he moaned, trying frantically to thrust into her cleavage.

“But it *is* time consuming, so if you’re too busy...” At that, she lowered her head and sucked him back into her mouth, the head of his cock embraced with swirls of her tongue, his shaft still snug and warm in her tits. Dylan let out a cry of desperation as she sucked him over and over, ruthlessly, expertly, making his body shudder beneath her. He twisted and turned on the sofa, groaning helplessly as she continued to tickle his balls, and then his sac tightened and she felt it shooting up through his shaft; a warm, delicious stream of cum. She swallowed it greedily, easily, as he panted, “Oh God, I love you. I love you so much, Kristen.”

A buzzer from the kitchen interrupted them. After a startled moment, they both began to laugh. “I forgot I was getting dinner ready...” Dylan said. “Come on.” Getting shakily to his feet, he pulled her up and led her to the table.

Dinner was honey-grilled salmon with roast potatoes and a wonderful salad of roasted pine nuts and gorgonzola cheese. “I had no idea you could cook like this!” Kristen kept saying as she wiped her lips.

“Yeah? Good, then maybe you’ll consider keeping me around full-time.” He leaned across the table to kiss her—and a crackling sound filled the air.

“Oh no, you singed your chest hair on the candles!” she exclaimed. He didn’t look hurt, but the scent of burnt hair filled her nose. She hopped up for a wet paper towel and dabbed at his bare chest. “This is what we get for eating dinner naked.”

He laughed and pulled her onto his lap. His cock was hard again and slapping his belly. “No, this is what *you* get for eating dinner naked. I could barely taste a thing with your beautiful breasts staring me in the face.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah. That’s so.”

He reached for her but she stepped out of his reach. With a devilish smile, she slowly lowered herself onto his lap.

“You sure made a fast recovery,” she told him, pulling his cock up to trace a circle around her belly button.

He hooked his hands around her bottom, holding her steady. “Hey, that’s why you have a young stud like me around, remember?” But his fast breathing belied his brash tone.

“You know it,” she said, casually palming the head of his shaft. “If only you could give it to me right now the way I really need it. But I guess that’s too much to ask.” She rolled her hand around his most sensitive nerves in a way she knew drove him crazy.

“What are you talking about? It is not too much...”

She cut him off with a kiss. “Because after all, I *really* need it bad right now and I just don’t think you could stay hard enough to satisfy me.” She was squeezing his cock harder now.

“Oh, I can satisfy you.” His blue eyes burned. “Trust me.”

He took her chin in his hand and kissed her then, deep and slow. As his tongue brushed hers, she felt something hot spread through her lower body. Without thinking, she moved the head of his cock back and forth over her swollen clit, flooding her pussy with incandescent desire.

She broke their kiss. "Do it," she said raggedly. "Satisfy me, Dylan."

A fiery light in his eyes, he pulled her hips closer to him. At the first push of his penis against her wet, soft folds, she let out a groan of need. Then, holding his shoulders, she opened her thighs further and slid onto him until his head was lodged tightly in her entrance.

"Easy now..." Dylan was biting his lip, a sure sign he was struggling to hold back.

"Come on, you can last longer than that," she teased. "I just made you come half an hour ago, remember?" Slowly, steadily, she began gyrating on the head of his cock. Tilted in his lap like this, her breasts were level with his face; to torture him more, she began moving faster, her nipples now swinging against his face.

"Oh God..." he moaned. "I'm so hard..."

She slid all the way down his cock, her pussy as slick and soft as silk. Both of them gasped as he drove in to the hilt. For a moment neither of them moved. Then slowly, she began to fuck him in earnest, up and down and around.

"Fuck me," Dylan said hoarsely. "Fuck me good."

She rode him faster, her breasts slapping his face. From his muffled cries she knew he was close to coming and she was too when a voice startled them.

"Uh hey—oh shit. Sorry."

The both froze, then Kristen slid off of him and lunged toward the stove, the refrigerator, anywhere she could hide her nakedness. But the young man standing in the kitchen door had backed out. Heart pounding with arousal and mortification, she tried to cover herself as Dylan grabbed his apron and followed the stranger out.

"Dude, what the hell..."

"You told me to bring the CD by, I didn't know..."

"And you couldn't call first? Or try knocking? Shit, Brent..."

"I'm sorry! We did knock, no one answered and we saw the lights on so..."

God, how humiliating. Her first meeting with Dylan's roommates and they got an eyeful of her bouncing naked in his lap. There was no way she could ever meet or make conversation with them now. No way. And how much did they see? Her eyes had been closed toward the end, so they might have observed for quite a while. A hot flush of shame swept over her at the thought of her accidental performance.

Collecting her wits, she found a spare robe in the downstairs bathroom and pulled it on. Through the window screen she could hear bits of their conversation in the driveway.

"You weren't kidding about those big titties, man," one of his roommates said admiringly. "She's stacked!"

"No shit," said the other roommate. "Way to burn your mom, dude."

"I'm not trying to burn my mom!" Dylan flared. "Look, just get the hell out of here. You guys have no manners."

She fled into the bedroom before she could hear the rest. So Dylan had been discussing her body with his roommates, had he? Of course he had. He was a horny kid, she knew that. What did she expect? She would probably die of mortification if she knew all the things he'd said to his friends about their sex life. And as for "burning his mom," what did that mean?

All these weeks, she had been attributing his interest in her to lust—the curiosity and strong carnal appetite of a healthy young man. Now, for the first time, she considered an alternative. Was it possible that he had become interested in her partly because it was

such an effective way to anger Victoria? Was he only involved with her out of pure adolescent rebellion?

Dylan came into the bedroom. His face was both grim and apprehensive. “Kristen, I am so sorry... I can’t believe they walked in like that.”

She didn’t answer.

“You’re not mad, are you?” he asked. “I mean... I just chewed their asses out and you don’t ever have to see them again if you don’t want to...”

He reached to stroke her hair and she pushed his hand away.

“Your cell phone camera,” she said. “The night we took those pictures... You said you were going to erase them.”

He looked timid now. “Well, I did eventually. I mean, come on, Kristen, can you blame me for wanting to have nude photos of you?”

“I can if you promised you’d delete them and didn’t.”

It was clear he didn’t know what to say. “I’m... I’m sorry...”

“You showed them to your friends, didn’t you?”

“What? Of course not, I would never do that...”

“You probably staged this whole scene tonight so your perverted friends could get an eyeful.”

“Kristen! That is not true!”

She knew it wasn’t, but she was furious at him and wanted something worse to blame him for. Somehow all of this was Dylan’s fault—her new status as the town hussy, her difficulties at school, her naked exposure tonight—why wasn’t anything negative happening to him? Instead the fall-out was all raining down on her.

“Kristen, don’t do this... Don’t let other people come between us. I love you. I’ll make it up to you. I’m sorry.”

She shook her head. “Dylan, I think you’d better sleep at your place tonight. I need to be alone.”

“I disagree. I think we need to be together.”

“I’m not giving you a choice in the matter!” she told him, her anger flaring. “Just give me some time, okay? I need to think.”

He stared at her. There was real anxiety in those blue eyes and she had to drag her gaze away from his, lest she fall right back into his arms.

“I just need some space,” she said in a controlled voice. “A night apart, Dylan. If you’re really an adult, you can give me that much.”

He swallowed hard. Then he said “Okay” quietly, and dressed. Remembering the dinner he’d cooked, the book he’d tracked down for her, she wanted to call him back, or apologize, or scream. Instead, she bit her lip until she heard his truck pull away, and then she gave in to the tears.

Chapter Eleven

When the phone rang the next morning, she winced. What bad news and harsh judgments would it bring today? Would Sheila the principal threaten her again or would it be Hal announcing he was seeking full custody of Sean? Instead Victoria's cool modulated tone began to speak from the answering machine. Kristen reached to disconnect the phone.

As if reading her mind, Victoria said, "Kristen, please listen to me. I know you have no reason to believe me, but I am your friend in this. Please give me a chance. You may find I am the most sympathetic friend you have."

Intrigued—and against her better judgment—Kristen picked up the phone. "There is nothing you could say to convince me of that, Victoria."

"You *are* there." Victoria sighed, but her voice was shaky when she resumed. "Kristen, would you please do me the favor of at least having coffee with me today? So we can talk about this like reasonable adults?"

"You mean so you can humiliate me in public? No thanks. Your little gossip campaign has been quite effective as it is."

"I deserve that, I guess." Victoria laughed shakily. "Please, Kristen. I was up all night over this, and in the end I was forced to realize that we are all family. We have to resolve this somehow."

She was right about that. Kristen was silent. When she spoke, she said, "Fine. One cup of coffee, no more."

"Thanks, Kristen. I appreciate you doing this."

That was so unlike Victoria to be so humble. It was almost as if she was contrite. But would she really grovel just to end Kristen's affair with her son? Of course no mother would approve of it. Once again she imagined her own disapproval if Sean came home from college one day with a woman in her thirties... Just the thought made her swallow with guilt.

Yet Victoria's voice today was almost frantic. What exactly did she want? A cynical little voice spoke in Kristen's mind.

One, she doesn't like the jealousy this has stirred up in Hal. This is making you look awful good to him and she wants his undivided attention back.

Two, having custody of Sean this summer has reminded her that she's not prepared or willing to have a small child around again. Her kids are grown and she doesn't want to raise another. She's afraid of Hal actually winning a custody battle.

Could that be it?

As always when meeting Victoria, Kristen prepared carefully—full makeup, hair brushed till it gleamed, and an attractive violet camisole over her denim skirt. Looking in the mirror, she realized that she looked younger since she'd begun dating Dylan. Something about her face had softened and there was a sparkle in her eye. Perhaps *that* was what bothered the women of Foxdale so much.

When she arrived at the café, Victoria was already at a polished wooden table in the corner. She was wearing Gucci sunglasses and Kristen felt a surge of irritation at her movie-star pretensions. But as she sat down, Victoria removed them and Kristen saw

with a shock that her eyes were red.

“Told you I was up all night,” she said, attempting a wan smile.

Kristen was flummoxed. The icy Victoria Stafford was up all night fretting over *her*? Had actually come out in public without her trademark heavy makeup? This had been bothering her more than Kristen knew.

“You probably don’t think I’m your friend,” Victoria began. “And I won’t deny that I wouldn’t feel too kindly toward the woman who stole my husband. I can put myself in your shoes, Kristen.”

Kristen nodded. “That’s generous of you.”

“But I’m asking that you put yourself in mine.” Victoria stared at the table. “Imagine that just ten or twelve years from now, Sean comes home and tells you he’s dating a woman practically old enough to be his mother; a divorced woman with a child. Oh, and she just happens to be your husband’s ex-wife. Can you imagine how you would feel?”

Kristen felt a deep stain of guilt. “I’ve never expected you to be happy about this, Victoria. Hey, I was upset about it myself. But sometimes things come along that are bigger than both of you...” She stopped, aware that she was quoting Hal that fateful night he had asked her for a divorce.

“Yes, well, that’s the thing.” Victoria sipped her latte. Her hands were shaking. “You remember the night you met Dylan, when I told you he’s had—issues since his father died.”

Kristen nodded. “Yes, he got kicked out of his dorm for a prank you said.”

“Well, it was a little more than that.” Victoria’s pale eyes flickered up at her then lowered to the table. “This isn’t easy, what I’m about to tell you. I am going to trust that it stays between us.”

Kristen was touched. “Of course.”

“I think I mentioned Dylan has always been angry at me since his father became ill. You see, Kristen, my husband was sick for over three years before he passed. He was quite a bit older than me and bedridden for most of those years and I—well, there I was, only thirty-three or so...”

Kristen remembered Victoria’s true age and bit back a smile.

“And well, I was very lonely. There was this financial manager who began coming over to the house to go over the estate planning with us and we... Well, we...”

“You had an affair,” Kristen finished. Of course, now it made sense, Dylan’s anger toward his mother.

Victoria nodded. “Yes and Dylan found out. He actually walked in on us one day. He was only fourteen at the time.” Her cheeks burned a bright red. “He was disgusted, betrayed—you can imagine. After that he was convinced that I wanted his father to die. For years he believed that. Now that he’s older I think he’s a little more forgiving, but he still seems to have this—need to punish me.”

Kristen was impatient. “What does this have to do with his getting kicked out of the dorm?”

Victoria stared at the table. “He didn’t actually get kicked out so much as have to leave. He—he had an affair with a professor, Kristen. A married professor. They got caught and she was forced to resign; the whole campus was in an uproar about it. The school asked him to move off campus in hopes that the scandal would die down.”

Something cold was forming in Kristen. Dylan had told her she was his first older

woman. His *only* older woman. “How—how old was he at the time?”

“He had just turned nineteen,” Victoria said. “Well, you can imagine my reaction. He moved back home and then the next thing I know I get a phone call from Bill Southwood, screaming that my son is sleeping with his wife.”

No. No, this couldn’t be happening. Not Dylan. Those guileless blue eyes wouldn’t lie to her.

But Victoria went on with a sigh. “After that he moved on to Beth—my friend. We used to golf together at the club. That time Dylan made sure they did it in her pool, making enough noise to attract the nosy neighbor next door. You see, I understand that some boys enjoy the sexual experience of an older woman, but Dylan seems to have a different agenda—he seems to *want* to get caught and ruin the women’s lives.”

Nausea was swimming through Kristen’s heart, and her mind. Yes, Dylan had been persistent in pursuing her; fondling her in his closet with Victoria just a few feet away. Encouraging her to pose for those nude photos, knowing her judgment was at least mildly impaired. It was possible he’d picked her out from the start, wasn’t it? She and Sean had already passed his bedroom that night to look at the gifts—perhaps he’d seen her and marked her as Sean’s mother.

“This is preposterous,” she heard herself say. “So he’s angry at you—why take it out on us?”

It hurt to include herself in *us*. It hurt to admit she was just one of a vulnerable—and very dumb—group.

Victoria stirred the ice in her latte. “Other than embarrassing me, I’ve no idea. I guess it’s just, what do the shrinks say, transference. I’ve suggested he go into therapy, but he won’t hear of it. I don’t know what to do, Kristen.”

She couldn’t think of a response. She couldn’t think of a way to retrieve her dignity at that moment.

“This time he’s just gone too far,” Victoria said. “You’re the mother of his stepbrother, for heaven’s sake. So before this gets any worse, I wanted you to hear the truth. You can make your own decisions, of course. But I thought you should have all the facts before doing so.”

She stood up, sipped the rest of her latte and dropped the cup in the trash. “I’m sure you have a lot to think about,” she said and exited the café.

* * * *

How? How could she have been so stupid? What was she thinking, assuming a gorgeous young man like that could fall in love with her?

Kristen wept for hours. Twisting and tossing on her scarlet silk throw, a throw Dylan had bought her, she cried and moaned. She hated him. But she craved him. Her mind despised him, but her body longed for him, and her heart was stuck between both extremes—struck dumb, blind, and broken.

“Dylan,” she managed to say into his cell phone voice mail. “It’s me. After everything’s that happened, I’ve decided—well, you’re just too young. We don’t have a future together and as a matter of fact, I’ve met someone else. Someone my age. I’m sorry, but please don’t contact me again.”

Then she hung up and collapsed sobbing into her pillows.

Chapter Twelve

The dog days of August were upon her and they passed with excruciating slowness. Her classroom was organized, Sean had all of his new shoes and supplies for school, and her house was sparkling clean. There was little to fill her days, and nothing but loneliness to fill her nights. Sometimes in the bathtub she broke down in tears and other times an unbidden vision would fill her mind of Dylan with another girl. Sometimes driving to the store she thought she saw his blond head, bent low to hear the whisper of some pretty young thing at his side, but it was always a different young man.

Dylan hadn't taken the break-up well. He had come to the house that night and pounded on the door, then shouted up at her windows until a neighbor had come out and threatened to call the police. For the first week he had left letters, tulips, and photos on her doorstep. He filled her answering machine with pleas for another chance. By the end of the second week, he was writing her long, impassioned letters that arrived daily in the mail. She threw them away unopened. She had fallen into the spell of his arms, his eyes, and his promises once. She didn't trust herself around him a second time.

A week before school began, when she had spent too many nights staring at her television set, she impulsively visited a respected dating service. There the young "romance counselor" took down her data then told her how the process would work.

"We'll show you our videos from the clients in your category, and you can pick the ones you like, then we'll show..."

"I'm sorry, my category?" Kristen questioned.

"Well, to narrow down the selection process. We'll look at the traits and criteria you listed, and try to match you up with the preferences our male clients have requested. We have some wonderful men in our Over Forty category. For instance..."

"Over Forty?" Kristen laughed. "I'm only thirty-three. Why wouldn't I be set up with someone my own age?"

The counselor looked embarrassed. "Well, most of the men list a mate who's five to ten years younger as one of their criteria. Our male clients in their thirties are usually only interested in dating a woman in her twenties. So our female clients in their thirties..."

"Get set up with the Over Forty guys. Got it." Kristen stood. "I'm sorry, but I don't think this is for me."

"Oh, but you shouldn't let that throw you off! We have some great guys in the Over Forty category!"

"You don't understand. Your system is intrinsically sexist and therefore unacceptable to me."

Whoa. Did she really say that? She *had* gotten more confident over the summer.

"Thanks for your time," she said breezily and exited the dating service.

But at the supermarket that night, she no longer was feeling so sure of herself. As she selected a quart of gourmet ice cream, two women at the end of the aisle were whispering about her. She could hear little snatches..."yes, only twenty years old!" and "my God, I could *never*..." and finally she lifted her head and stared at them. The women fell silent and moved their carts out of the frozen foods section.

Loading up her car trunk in the parking lot, she had to fight against the tears that collected in a hot pressure behind her eyes. Why had this happened? She had been better off before, lonely but respectable. Now she was heartbroken, a laughingstock, and filled with an emotional yearning that no one but Dylan could satisfy.

“Kristen?”

She hastily brushed her eyes and turned to see a familiar-looking woman approach her. She was tall and striking with a chic auburn haircut, and even in the dark parking lot, her expensive clothes stood out. “My name is Nadine,” she said. “I saw you at Victoria’s party earlier this summer. You are Hal’s ex-wife, right?”

“Right,” said Kristen, wondering where this was going.

“I...” Nadine hesitated. “Well, I hope you don’t hate me for saying this. But I’ve heard of your relationship with Victoria’s son and I wanted to offer you my support.”

Her *support*? Did she hear her correctly?

Nadine sighed. “I was in your shoes once. Oh, it was a long time ago—though I remember it like it was yesterday. His name was Nick and I was so in love. We kept it a secret—I was afraid of the gossip—and of course I was afraid of looking like a fool. I’m sure you know what I mean.”

Kristen nodded dumbly.

“He was just wonderful, but all I could think about was the future. Of when I was getting wrinkled and hitting menopause and he was still in his prime. Of the younger women that would try to seduce him. Of being alone and broken-hearted when he left me for someone else.”

“I’m sorry,” Kristen said softly. “It must have been awful when he left.”

Nadine shook her head. “Oh, he didn’t leave. *I* left. I had to have my pride, don’t you see? So I left before that day would come... and now years later I wonder if it ever would have. We were so happy together. And I destroyed it.”

Neither of them spoke. Then Nadine smiled brightly and said, “I just wanted to tell you how much I admire your courage. And to give you some advice so you don’t make my mistakes.” Then she turned and hurried through the dark.

Driving home, Kristen cried helplessly.

* * * *

The next day began with a loud pounding on the door. Still half-asleep in bed, Kristen frowned and pulled the pillow over her ears. Then a loud voice floated up to her window.

“Oh sure, ignore your best friend who’s been away all summer. It’s not like I don’t have a thousand juicy stories for you, but hey, I’m sure what happened in Europe isn’t any great shakes compared to Foxdale...”

It was Julia! She was finally home. Quickly Kristen jumped out of bed and ran downstairs in her baby tee and boxers. She threw open the door and hugged her friend.

“Boy, am I glad to see you!” she said. “I didn’t think you were ever coming back. It was a long summer without you.”

“Aw, I bet you did fine. That’s nice to hear, though. Europe is still there, I don’t know why we have to go every summer, and do you have anything to drink? It might be almost September, but it’s hotter than hell outside.” Julia fanned herself.

“Sure... come in, sit down.”

All summer long she had dreamed of unburdening herself to her best friend—but now that Julia was relaxing in her living room with a glass of iced tea, she found it hard to begin. Luckily for her, Julia took the lead.

“So we could talk about Paris or Vienna or even Copenhagen and my exciting wanderlust life, but we both know that *you* had the most exciting summer—so spill, honey, this is your best friend sitting here.”

Kristen looked up in a flash of relief and fear. “You—you heard?”

“Heard? Kris, my phone rang off the hook yesterday with three different ladies just dying to tell me what little ole you got up to this summer. You’re big news in this town, girl; no ones got the guts to pull that off but you.”

Kristen shook her head, closing her eyes tightly against the tears—but they came anyway.

“Aw, Kris, don’t cry. Come on, just tell me. Tell me everything, from start to finish. How did it happen and what did he mean to you? Or should I say, what *does* he mean to you.”

Sipping her tea, Kristen found the strength to tell her the whole story—from meeting Dylan’s gaze on the lawn at Victoria’s party, to their midnight escapade on her kitchen floor, to all the torrid nights and languid afternoons that followed. And less pleasantly, of Victoria’s malicious gossip campaign, the hateful whispers that followed her around the store, and the ominous threats at school. And then, she told the final revelation of Dylan’s true motives.

“I was such an idiot thinking he loved me,” she admitted, sobbing freely now. “He’s young, he’s gorgeous, and he’s got an amazing future ahead of him—what does he want with a thirty-three-year-old schoolteacher? I’m such a moron, Jules. Falling under his spell like that.”

“Sounds like anyone would have, the way you describe your relationship,” Julia said softly. “It was magic between the two of you—and you were starved for magic, hon.”

“But it was a lie!” Kristen cried desperately. “None of it was real! How could I have been so stupid?”

She burst into fresh tears. Her throat was raw and her skull pounded with shame and exhaustion. “Ssh,” Julia said, uncharacteristically gentle. “It’s going to be okay, Kris. It will, I promise.” But Kristen couldn’t see how. Instead she just continued weeping.

Chapter Thirteen

The long muggy boredom of August ended in nights of thunderous rain that flooded the streets. From her living room windows Kristen watched cars hissing down wet roads and listened to the steady rattling of the drains. Sean came home in a week; school began two days later. Then this whole horrible summer would be truly over and she could start the act of forgetting the greatest love of her life.

As if.

The cat jumped purring onto her lap. She scratched his head before returning to the kitchen to pour herself iced tea. No more wine for her; she got tearful after a glass or two. As her blood warmed and her memories unlocked, she could feel it all building up inside her: the yearning for strong hands, hard thighs, and the sweetest eyes she'd ever gazed into. And then the tears came, followed by that ravenous hunger of his skin on hers. So she only drank iced tea now, by the gallon, hoping the cold minty drink would cool her grieving heart.

Sean was coming back home. School was starting again. She kept repeating this to herself like a mantra. As soon as these things happened, normal life would begin again and she wouldn't miss Dylan quite so much.

Then there was a knock on the back door.

She froze. *You're hallucinating*, she told herself. Slowly she put the glass of tea on the kitchen table and waited. The silence stretched out unbearably.

Yes, she was hallucinating. Probably a tree had scraped against the door and—

The knock sounded again.

Kristen jumped to her feet, thinking of how she looked. She was wearing white shorts, a pink t-shirt, and barely any makeup at all. She ran a nervous hand through her hair and the knock came a third time.

Taking a deep breath, she approached the back door.

Dylan was waiting outside in a wet windbreaker and sodden jeans. His blond hair was plastered to his forehead with rain. But his eyes were burning with anguish.

"We need to talk," he said and pushed past her.

"Dylan..." she said.

"No, you need to hear me out. You owe me that, at least." When she didn't deny it, he glanced at her and said, "Please just sit down and listen to everything before you say anything."

She shrugged and took a seat. She could feel the defiance in her face, a sulky pout that she knew was childish, but it was preferable to the excitement dancing inside her. Damn her delusional heart! Why was she so happy to see him? Dylan was a liar, a user. He'd treated her like a prop to annoy his mother and impress his friends.

"Okay, number one," he said. "My mother lied to you. I've told you before, she lies well. Her specialty is hiding a lie between two truths; it makes it very easy to believe her. So, let's start with my past. I did *not* have an affair with a professor. I had a crush on my history professor, and like a dumbass kid I left her a letter telling her about it. Her husband, the Dean, found it and put me on disciplinary parole. That's the real story of how I left the dorms."

He was pacing the kitchen. His wet t-shirt clung to the defined lateral muscles rippling in his back and she could barely take her eyes from them as he went on.

"It's true that I've always liked older women. But you're the first one I actually dated. The other women my mother told you about—both lies. One of them was always hitting on me and I couldn't stand her. You have no idea how predatory some women can be—half my mom's friends have hit on me. Why do you think all those bitches are so jealous of you?"

She began to answer but he held up a hand. "And I just wanted to say that the other girl was just that—a girl. It was the daughter, not the mother I was with in the pool. Yeah, I've acted like a stupid horny kid at times. I don't deny it. But I have never intentionally hurt anyone and I have no interest in ruining anyone's life. All I want is to build my life with you, Kristen."

Her heart was pounding like thunder. "Really," she managed to say. "If all this is true, Dylan, then how is it you knew *exactly* what your mother told me?"

"Because Julia told me!" he cried. "If it wasn't for her, Kristen, I'd still believe what my mother told me—that you asked her to keep me away from you!"

She sat straight up. "What!" she exclaimed.

"That's right. My mother and Hal sat me down and said you'd begged them to make me stop trying to get in touch with you. That you were threatening to get a restraining order, and because Hal was there, I believed it." He ran his hands through his wet curls. "God, to think I fell for her bullshit!"

Kristen stood up. "Dylan, if you're telling me the truth..."

"Kristen, I love you." He began to cry. "I swear it. All I want is to spend my life with you. Please don't leave me again."

She put a trembling hand on his face. "I love you," she told him, trying not to cry. "But Dylan, we both knew this had to end sometime."

"No, it doesn't!" he cried out. "So we're ten years apart in age, so what! Love is what matters... Let me spend a lifetime proving it to you."

Then he was kissing her, that hungry, feverish mouth she had been dreaming of for weeks. Wild chills raced up and down her skin and unable to stop herself she tugged off his wet shirt, then his pants.

"Prove it to me now," she panted as he lifted her onto the kitchen table. "Show me how you feel about me."

Roughly, he pulled off her top and tossed it across the room. Then he bit and sucked her breasts through her blue lace bra, impatiently pushing the material out of his way with his tongue until he was sucking her nipples hard and strong. "Oh God," Kristen moaned. Dizzy with heat, she leaned back on her hands and spread her thighs. "I've been waiting for this for so long..."

In answer, he pushed her back on the table and lifted her ass in the air, just long enough to pull her shorts down her thighs. "And I've been waiting for this," he said tersely. Holding her legs apart, he ran his thumb over her glistening pink slit. Impatiently she wiggled her hips, desperate to draw in his fingers, his cock, any part of him to where she was aching and empty. But his strong fingers continued to draw a maddening circle just inside her swollen lips. He lifted tortured blue eyes to hers.

"I've been dreaming of your pussy ever since you threw me out," he said. "Just thinking that I might never taste you again made me insane. You are so beautiful,

Kristen.”

He slid two fingers deep inside her, evoking a gasp of fulfillment and wonder. She spread her legs wider for him as he began to fuck her with his fingers, in and out. Her pussy swelled with hot liquid need, and she wanted his cock, his mouth, his hands all at once.

“Please,” she whispered, her thighs straining apart, “don’t stop.”

But he did stop. He gathered her into his arms and hoisted her up in the air like a child, then sat her squarely on his face. Suspended in the air, helpless and unable to move, she could only submit to his hot, heavenly mouth on her sex. “Oh God,” she groaned. “Oh Dylan...” The feel of his lips working her vulva filled her with a searing demand. Then his tongue pushed deep into her pussy and licked intently at that magic spot that made her moan. Still suspended on his face, she threw back her head as her body contracted in a powerful, shuddering orgasm.

“Oh baby,” Dylan whispered, gently setting her down. His face was red and wet with her juices. “That’s only the beginning, understand?” Still supporting her back, he lifted her and walked into the living room, then sat her on the edge of the sofa. “There’s something I’ve wanted to do to you since we met...”

Dazed, she said, “What?”

“This,” he said and surprised her by caging her ankles together in one hand, then pushing her legs up toward her face. This, she knew, was an angle that exposed her pussy in its entirety, and though she knew it was silly to be self-conscious, the vulnerability of the position filled her with a delicious shame. Dylan straddled her on the couch and began bumping the hard polished head of his cock against her folds.

“Do it,” she breathed, squeezing the sofa cushions with anticipation. “Please, Dylan. I’m dying for it.”

He smiled, lightly tracing his cock against her thighs. “What was that?”

“Dylan—don’t make me beg...”

Steadily, relentlessly, he pushed his cock through the tight crevice between her legs, working his penis up and down the length of them. She bit her lip at the sensation of his cock sliding back and forth. No one had ever fucked her thighs before. The sensation was excruciatingly delicious and burningly frustrating.

She jerked her bottom around on the sofa and received a single spank for her pains. “You stop that,” Dylan ordered softly. “I’m in charge here.” His cock was firmly wedged between the middle of her tightly closed thighs. She held her breath as he see-sawed up and down her legs, gradually sliding all the way down until he was resting on her pussy. Smiling, he rubbed his cockhead over her aching clitoris. She could feel just a jot of stickiness, the drop of ejaculate already welling from him, and she thought she would go mad with the need to have his stiff cock inside her now.

“Just remember,” he said, “how much I love you,” and then he slid into her tight clinging heat.

Still holding her ankles captive, he began to glide rhythmically in and out of her, the molten desire between them swirling higher and higher until Kristen couldn’t breathe. “Oh God, I love you,” Dylan said, closing his eyes. She couldn’t think or speak. Her entire being was focused on his cock filling every part of her, sealing the two of them in a web of warm glowing lust.

“I love you,” she whispered. “Always.”

Dylan released her legs and leaned over her. He grabbed her hand and held it, then opened his eyes. Staring at each other in wonder and love, their orgasms broke through them at the same moment. They gripped each other's wet skin in a shattering, shuddering ecstasy, knowing that this time nothing could divide them again.

Chapter Fourteen

The last day of summer was moist and overcast. The rain had stopped at last but the affluent Foxdale lawns looked a brilliant green as they drove together to visit Victoria and Hal. Kristen's heart thudded sickly in her chest, but Dylan held her hand tightly. From that she drew strength.

They parked outside the colossal white home that intimidated her so and approached the door. After Dylan's brief knock went unanswered, he opened the door and popped in his head. "Hello..."

Victoria's cool voice echoed down the hall. "Dylan, is that you?"

She stopped speaking as she saw Kristen next to him.

Dylan quietly shut the door behind them and led Kristen down the long cool hall that smelled of money. Together they passed into the cavernous living room, overstuffed with antiques and art, and she sat down on a cream-colored sofa. Sean was at Little League; they'd timed it this way on purpose.

Dylan turned to Victoria. "Hi Mom," he said cheerfully. "Is Hal around? We'd like to talk to you both."

It was all Kristen could do not to burst into laughter at the flicker of panic breaking across Victoria's Botoxed face. "I'd like to know what this is about," she said finally.

"Mom, just go get Hal," Dylan said impatiently. "It's time we all talked together like adults."

Victoria threw him a contemptuous look. "You're hardly an adult, Dylan."

"Your son is a man, Victoria," Kristen said quietly. "It's time you began treating him like one."

"Kristen? Is that you?" Now Hal came into the room with a confused expression. "Thought I heard your voice..." His eyes fell on Dylan. He frowned at the sight of them together. "What the hell is going on?"

"We have an announcement to make," Dylan said. "We wanted you both to hear it."

"We're back together," Kristen told them. "For good. Forever. And none of your threats or gossip wars are going to stop us."

"Because we're in love," Dylan continued. "And we always will be. So stop trying to worry about it or control it, because it has nothing to do with you."

"It's our decision when and how we will tell Sean," Kristen added. "We know it will be confusing, but we'll handle it all in good time. In any case, it's our business—not yours."

"Yeah, and there will be no custody battle threats," Dylan said with a look at his mother. "Mom, you don't want a little kid around the house; you barely even noticed Davey and I when we were little. So face it, Sean belongs with his mother."

"Oh and lastly," Kristen said, struggling not to laugh, "We don't expect you to object, Hal, since you're dating an older woman yourself."

Now a thunderous silence fell upon the lushly decorated room.

"Pardon me?" Hal asked.

Kristen glanced at Victoria. Her face was pinched and white with fury.

"Well, after all, you're only thirty-nine," Kristen said innocently. "Since Victoria is

forty-five, that makes her an older woman.”

“That’s ludicrous!” Hal exploded. “Kristen, of all the jealous and spiteful things to say...”

“I’ve got a copy of her birth certificate,” Dylan cut in. “Come on, did you really think Mom had me when she was in high school? Do the math.”

It was a look they would treasure forever: Hal’s stunned face next to Victoria’s white-lipped rage. But that afternoon, gracious with victory, they only stood and said, “Goodbye” together. Then they walked down the long shadowy hall and back out into the moist summer day.

Once in the car, Kristen exploded with laughter. “Wow, that felt good,” she admitted, wiping away her tears. “Oh wow. Dylan, I know she’s your mother but...”

“Hey, no *but*s. She totally had that coming, given all the lies she’s told.” Dylan backed out of the driveway and began driving east, out of town and into the country. “But let’s not talk about them. We’ve got lost time to make up for. And I’m going to start making it up right now.”

She smiled. “Oh really? How’s that?”

He scooped her close to him with an arm around her waist. “First, I’m going to start with your gorgeous face,” he said, kissing her hair. “And then I’m going to work my way down until I’ve had every beautiful inch of you in my mouth.”

She smiled. “And then?”

“And then you’re going to sit on top of me and smother me until I beg for mercy.”

His hand was up under her skirt now, teasing along the edge of her panties. “And then?”

“Then I’m going to bend you over...” The car was weaving erratically on the road. “I’m going to take off that skirt and... aw, damn...”

He pulled off the road and parked, and carried her off into the grass, giggling wildly. The late August meadow was still damp and soft with rain, and abloom with a riot of colorful wildflowers. Spreading his shirt underneath her, he lay her down. “And then I’m going to spend the rest of my life making love to you,” he said.

And there on the last day of summer, he proceeded to do just that.

The End

About the Author:

Veronica Wilde is a thirty-something author who lives in Arizona with her boyfriend and three cats. She has a never-ending passion for both erotic literature and the paranormal, and is always on the hunt for good books that combine the two. When not writing or reading, she enjoys astronomy, horror movies and night hiking.

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