

CLOSING TIME



ADRIANNA DANE

CLOSING TIME

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She needed him to fuck her now and it didn't matter what else happened beyond this moment, she needed to feel him inside her.

He pulled his hands free and rested them above her head. It sounded like he was trying to catch his breath after a long run. He nipped at her engorged lips and she responded in kind. Her hips undulated against him and she felt his thick cock, pressing insistently at the front of his jeans.

"I want to fuck you," he growled.

"Yesss." There was no other response but that one word of acknowledgment.

He shoved one of his hands deep into his pocket and pulled out a packet. She heard the zip of his fly being undone and the crackle of the packet as he ripped it open. "You might not believe it, but I'm not in the habit of doing this. I just need to be inside you. Right now. I can't wait or I'm going to explode."

"I need you there," she said as she gripped his hard length. She felt her juices drip in anticipation of feeling him filling

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BY

ADRIANNA DANE

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CLOSING TIME
AN AMBER HEAT BOOK

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*Dedicated to the many long hours I spent in my youth
at our small town public library. And to librarians everywhere—
the guardians of knowledge—where would we be without you?
My heartfelt thanks.*

CHAPTER 1

Evelyn scanned the last book in the pile, closed the cover, and slid it across the counter toward the young girl who waited patiently. As she grabbed her pile of library books and turned to leave, Evelyn glanced at the clock on the wall. Almost closing time.

It was quiet, but then it was the library—it was supposed to be quiet. She kept hearing the echoes of the music in her head from this past Saturday night. On Saturday nights she drove up to Boston for her one big night out, away from the cloying atmosphere of the town where she lived.

Esmerelda was a sleepy sort of New England town and if anyone ever found out about her Saturday nights in the big

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city, there would be hell to pay. She very possibly might lose her job as well. Boston seemed so exciting compared to her quiet, small-town existence. She did finally get the chance to spend four years there when she attended Boston University on a scholarship, but that was as far as it went. She was shy, didn't make a lot of friends, and in the end had returned to Esmerelda when an opening came up in the small library located in the center square. Besides, she felt guilty about leaving her father alone after all he had been through.

It was tiny, hushed, and rather boring. Not a lot of chances to meet anyone interesting. She'd lost her virginity while attending Boston University. It hadn't been a particularly memorable experience, nor had any of the transient relationships since that first one. Bottom line, her life was boring, boring, boring and she was suffocating in the atmosphere in Esmerelda. She loved the books, loved working with them, loved reading them, and really, she did enjoy her job. And here, she certainly had a lot more latitude than she would if she'd chosen a position at one of the libraries in a larger city. But it was also a lot less money than she could have made somewhere else. And then there had been her father who, up until recently, had needed her care and companionship—she hadn't felt right abandoning him. Yet, since her father had died, the need to break out of her quiet life had almost been beyond her ability to contain.

She liked Esmerelda well enough. After all, she'd grown up here and it was comfortable. As long as she kept herself under the radar line of gossip, everything was...fine. At least

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it had been.

Until her twenty-ninth birthday. By then, she'd already gained the moniker of spinster. She didn't date much—all the good ones already having been snapped up, and she'd rather be alone than settle for what remained of the eligible bachelors in her circle. Like everyone else, her heart had beat a little faster for J.W. Dalton, the local sheriff, when she was in high school. But, like the rest, she knew he had eyes only for Willow MacKenzie.

Now their story was exciting. When Willow came back to town and the gossip started to fly, it had made her realize how boring her own life really was. Willow's mom had somehow been involved in drugs and Willow had run away to Boston and gone to college on her own, and had even worked as a stripper for a time if any of the gossip was true. But all that was behind her now because she and J.W. had finally married, Willow owned a small dress shop, and they had a beautiful baby girl with one more on the way. They looked so happy.

It seemed being that happy wasn't in the cards for Evelyn. Neither was excitement. Contentment was about as far as it went. Not until the last couple of months. That's when she'd started going to Boston on Saturday nights. It was a last ditch move of desperation. And it was when she'd first met Reuben, the musician, who played in the small bistro she discovered and liked to frequent, that she risked allowing the wild woman inside to break free. He made her want to risk it all. And what he made her feel was very dangerous. She made a point of spending the night in Boston and usually drove back Sunday

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morning, no one the wiser for her little adventures. And feeling a bit refreshed and able to tackle the mundane.

It was a risk that some day someone would discover her little escapades, but what was life worth without a little risk or two to keep it interesting? As long as no one in Esmerelda ever found out, she could go on about her life, openly maintain the respect of the community in her position as head librarian in the small town, and still inject just a bit of passion on the side.

Again, she glanced at the clock. One hour to closing. And three days until Saturday spun around again when she would see Reuben. Even at the thought of seeing him again her blood simmered.

Lately, he'd been pushing for more of a commitment from her. She'd managed to skirt his questions so far, but how much longer could she hold him off? She could not envision any sort of long-term future with a musician. She was just a small-town librarian and certainly no match for the beautiful women she was certain approached him when he was out on tour somewhere else. She'd even seen it at the bistro. She had no idea how much longer he would remain in Boston. He kept telling her he would have to be on the road in another couple of months and wanted her to go with him.

She shied away from thinking about it. There were no spoken commitments between them. Nothing uttered aloud. He had responsibilities and so did she, and they were from two far different worlds.

Since that first night when she'd watched him perform on

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stage she'd been enthralled by him. There was an aura about him. And his eyes seemed to see right into her soul. She had been shocked when he came to her table after the first set. And even more shocked with herself when she had gone backstage with him and allowed him to make love to her right there behind the backdrop where anyone might have seen them.

She still couldn't believe she'd done it. She had thought when it was over, that would be it. But it hadn't been. He obviously hadn't considered it a one-night stand and expected to see her again. She'd managed to remain at a distance, keeping their relationship strictly to weekend encounters. On some occasions she would stay over until Monday and drive back to Esmerelda very early in order to open the library right on time Monday morning.

If she were to admit it, the lifestyle was taking a toll on her. And she knew the time would come when it would all come crashing down around her feet. And where would that leave her? She felt so torn between her status here in Esmerelda, and the wanton woman who spent her time with Reuben. She refused to utter the word l-o-v-e in regard to her relationship with him. He was way out of her league. Just listening to him talk about his fast-paced life made her dizzy.

She assured herself that when he left on tour it would be over and done with. And she would stop her weekend trips to Boston. She should have done so before now. But Reuben was like a drug to her and she couldn't stay away. She drank of him gluttonously when they were together, engorging herself on him in hopes she would finally have enough.

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It was never enough, and she had a feeling it never would be. And that's what scared her the most. When he left for good, she knew she was going to feel the loneliness more profoundly than she ever had before, because she now knew what it felt like to be with someone—to feel connected, even if it were only briefly.

His lips were like fire that heated her entire body, making her melt beneath his knowledgeable hands. His body touching her, possessing her was like a match striking flint and they would both go up in flames. There was nothing like the heart of his fire when it encompassed her. His fingers expertly played her just like he did with his guitar, pulling all the erotic music from inside her soul.

She became a wanton woman in his arms, a harem dancer, a Venetian courtesan, with her position as head librarian far removed from the woman in Reuben's arms...in his bed. She wanted it to be real, to be lasting, but she knew it could only ever be fantasy. He was her fantasy lover, the one who drew her across the tightrope of passion into his world for a short, deliriously blissful time.

Yes, she remembered their first connection, their first passion. It had driven her all these weeks to return again and again and again, tempting the flames of discovery. It was her fourth trip to the bistro, but when she had walked in that night, she knew something was different. She hadn't realized what it was until she made eye contact with the guitarist on the stage.

CHAPTER 2

When she sat at the table and saw him on stage the first time, the air in the bistro had been different, electrically charged with energy. She'd ordered her usual drink, a vodka and tonic, and settled back in her chair to survey the room.

Something in the music had drawn her eyes back to the stage, to the sensual, singing chords of the guitar. But it was the guitarist's eyes that held her mesmerized throughout the number. His voice was deep, soothing, melting her bones into simmering liquid, causing wet heat to pool between her thighs. The range of his voice was intoxicating. As it deepened she felt the vibrations in her bones, between her pussy lips, the pulsing of the cadence driving deep inside her.

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Who was he? She'd never seen him here before. She had a feeling she should recognize him—the music was not that of an amateur. One thing she did plan to do was find out who he was, because she wanted to hear more, time and time again.

Her drink arrived and she sipped at it. A stranger wanted to buy her another, but she refused with a shake of her head, her total attention riveted to the stage.

She had come here seeking something she'd never been able to name. She always left alone. But the music of this guitarist spoke to her, his voice stroked her senses. The others in the group faded into the background and it was as though the guitarist and she were the only ones in the room.

She finished her drink and another took its place. Until the set ended and the world again came into focus. *This must be what enchantment feels like.*

And then he was there at her table, standing above her, looking down at her, a seductive smile on his lips. He pulled out a chair, sat across from her, and her heart started pounding in her chest. The waiter brought him a bottle of water. She watched him drink it down quickly.

“What’s your name?”

She licked her lips, afraid to answer. Afraid to break the spell. Afraid not to answer. His gaze reached inside her soul. She'd never experienced anything quite like this. She tried to analyze her attraction to the man sitting across from her. She'd never thought of herself as someone who would become star struck—never thought of herself as the groupie type. But for this man, she might just need to re-evaluate those thoughts.

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She stared at him for long moments and something told her it wasn't just the musician on the stage that drew her, there was something else beyond that. It was probably the alcohol that glazed her brain. But right now she didn't care. She wanted to touch him, to be touched by him. Even if it was for only a second, one moment.

"It's Evie," she managed to respond.

"Evie." He smiled and reached out to clasp her hand. "It's a nice name. Mine is Reuben. I've never seen you here before." His fingers stroked the back of her hand and it felt like pure heaven to her, sending shards of fire up her arm.

"I haven't seen you either. I've been here a few times over the last few weeks. It's a nice place. But you've never performed when I've been here."

"Must have been on tour. We've been gone for several months. But this place is like home. When we're in town we like to jam here. The owner is almost family." He turned her hand palm up and stroked the center. She shivered in reaction.

"You live here? In Boston, I mean?"

She shook her head, having lost her voice.

"Too bad."

"I-I've been coming here for the last several weekends. To get away from the usual grind."

"Live far away?"

"Not too far."

He leaned closer and it was again as though there were only the two of them in the room. "I really want to get to know you better, Evie."

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“I think I’d like that.”

“I take it you’re not here with anyone?”

She shook her head. “No. No one at all.”

He rose to his feet and pulled her to hers. Taking her hand in a firm grip, he strode across the floor and behind the stage. He drew her behind the backdrop and pressed her against the wall. His mouth descended over hers, branding her with his taste. Hot and male seared through her.

Like a lit match, she flared to life, twining her arms around his neck, a trail of gunpowder that had been lit and was about to explode. She heard the murmur of voices from the other side of the backdrop, but it didn’t matter. Nothing mattered but feeling this man pressed up against her, demanding her complete attention.

His hands drifted beneath her T-shirt, scorching her skin as he cupped her breasts. It didn’t feel wrong; it felt so very right. His hands belonged on her skin and in this moment she belonged to him. She drew him closer, rubbed against him, the friction sending sparks bouncing along her nerves, heat pooling between her thighs.

She needed him to fuck her now and it didn’t matter what else happened beyond this moment, she needed to feel him inside her.

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“I need you there,” she said as she gripped his hard length. She felt her juices drip in anticipation of feeling him filling her. “Please.”

He lifted her skirt and ripped aside her panties, then plunged his fingers between her wet labia lips. “Oh, God, yes.” He pushed her deeper into the corner, pulled her legs wider, lifted her, and sank inside her with one thrust.

She wrapped her arms more tightly around his neck as he thrust in and out. His hand tangled in her hair, pulling her head back while he consumed her lips, thrusting his tongue deep inside.

He drove her higher and higher toward the stars, his hard cock pressing deep, retreating, driving inward again and again, fast, short thrusts, until finally he pushed them both over the edge into a mind-blowing climax. He held her like that for long moments.

She stiffened as someone knocked on the other side of the wall. “Hey, Reub,” someone said softly. “We’re on again in five minutes.” Then she heard footsteps moving away.

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“Oh, my God,” she breathed, feeling the hot color flood her cheeks.

Slowly Reuben withdrew from inside her and helped her to readjust her clothing. She’d never experienced anything so earth shattering...or embarrassing in her life.

“It’s all right. He didn’t see us.”

“But he’ll know who I am. What will they think of me?”

He cupped her face and kissed her. “It will be okay.”

She eased past him, trying to make her escape. “I-I—”

“Don’t freeze up on me, Evie. I want to see you again. Don’t disappear.”

But she couldn’t do it. She couldn’t believe what she had just done. She raced out of the bistro and back to her hotel room, her body still trembling from the pleasure mixed with the embarrassment, although it had been fast and furious, steamy and hot. And exhilarating.

She sat in the darkened hotel room and stared across the street at the bistro. How would she ever get the nerve to go back in there knowing everyone probably would know what had occurred behind that stage.

Her pussy still spasmed from the memory of the climax, from being filled with so much hot, hard cock. What did she do now? She could never go back there.

A week later she had done just that. Her heart pumped fast and furiously as she took her courage in hand and walked across the street and into the bistro. She chose a table way in the back, in a dim corner. Again, he was on stage, and she sipped at her vodka and tonic, watching from a distance.

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When he thrust his hips in a punctuation of the music, she felt her pussy pulse, remembering how he had filled her. She squeezed her thighs together trying to halt the sensations, but that only made it worse.

Apparently he knew she was there, because at the end of the first set she found herself looking up at him as he stood before her table, his intent gaze staring down at her.

"I'm glad you came back," he said quietly as he sat across from her.

"I couldn't help it."

He reached out and gripped her hand. "I want to get to know you better. You've haunted me all week."

She nodded and glanced down at the table. How could she tell him that the woman sitting across from him wasn't who she really was? He couldn't possibly be interested in a small town spinster librarian.

"I've thought about you as well."

"Don't go disappearing on me again. I panicked big time, just ask the others."

"I'm not sure I can face the others after last week."

"Don't worry, they won't say anything. They'll just be thankful I found you again. Believe me, I've been like a bear with a sore paw."

So it had begun, with her skirting the issue of having to tell him too much about her background. Bottom line—she'd lied to him. And she knew one day she was going to have to pay a steep price for her pleasure in his company.

CHAPTER 3

Thirty more minutes to closing. Three days until she could see Reuben again. She felt the heat of the blaze razing closer and closer. She was going to get scorched—she knew it. But she was mesmerized by the glow and the heat, and it kept drawing her closer and closer to the heart of the flame.

What was it her father used to say? A clean image and your standing in the community is everything. Don't rock the boat and you'll do okay. She'd tried so hard to be the daughter he wanted. But she had known inside there was a part of her that was drowning. She wanted her father to respect her as much as she had always respected him. Her mother had left when she was a little girl, and she hadn't seen her again. Her

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father had been ripped apart by the rampant gossip and had never been the same after that.

She'd heard bits and pieces of the talk surrounding her mother's disappearance. It seemed it had coincided with the disappearance of one of the very attractive real estate agents in town. It wasn't until she was in high school that she'd discovered they had been lovers and run off together. Her mother had shamed her father before the whole town, and in a small town it didn't take much. She'd sworn never to cause him another moment of anguish or embarrassment.

So far, she had been successful. She'd remained circumspect and maintained an impeccable, lily-white reputation, even when her father had turned to the bottle to ease his suffering. She feared loving anyone to so great a depth that they could destroy you completely, given the opportunity. And she had remained stalwart in her determination. Just look at what she had managed to accomplish and still remain heart-whole.

But it hadn't been enough. When her father died last year due in large part to the alcohol he'd consumed, he had been a broken man. The balance of his life after her mother's disappearance had been wasted. He'd only looked for death to catch up to him. Even Evelyn's love and dedication hadn't been able to snap him out of his depression.

And then she had turned twenty-nine, still alone, her life a never-changing routine that garnered her public respect, but little warmth when she was alone at night. She had known her life had to change. She needed something more. Thus the trips

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into Boston had begun.

She wasn't looking for love, just a little companionship. But what she'd found with Reuben was something she hadn't expected, and was afraid to name. She didn't want to become like her father.

Then she would wonder about her mother. How could she leave and never try to contact Evelyn? Had she never loved her daughter? Was she not worth loving? Her mother had left without a backward glance. Her father had sunk himself into alcoholism, eager for death with no thought of his daughter. Was she destined not to be loved?

She gave herself a mental shake. *Stop wallowing in self-pity.* She was beyond that. She had a firm control of her life and she could take it in any direction she wanted. She had done so. Her parents were not her.

Reuben.

She couldn't get him out of her mind. She wanted to be the deeply sensual, adventurous woman he saw, the one she became on weekends when she was with him. But she knew deep down it was all a facade, it wasn't real. What would he do if he ever found out how she had lied to him? But then, what did she really know about him? He was a musician, a very good one, but she didn't know much else beyond that. He could be hiding things from her.

Still, she had to be honest. Unlike her, he had wanted to share himself with her and she'd put him off with excuses.

She wheeled the cart loaded with books needing to be reshelfed from around the desk and toward the back of the

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library. There were only one or two patrons left in the library at this hour.

This was the career she had chosen for herself. Safe and respectable. She was reliable, always helped out on committees when asked, had chaired a few on occasion. And returned to a house that held the ghosts of her parents, constantly surrounding her with their unspoken demands and expectations.

When she went to Boston she shed all the restrictions her small-town life required. She didn't have to be Evelyn while she was there. She could be anyone she pleased. She allowed herself to experience life in ways she never would have done in Esmerelda. People allowed their children to go to the library knowing it would be safe and Evelyn would watch over them as they searched for excitement and knowledge within the pages of the books on the shelves.

She now knew that excitement could be found outside the pages of books. But if anyone ever found out what she had discovered, would they allow their children to come to the library? Would they continue to consider her worthy of her position? It was too much of a chance to take. Life in a small town wasn't as elastic as it could be in a larger city. If she were to change now, no one would understand. And they would probably think she had lost her mind. It was far too risky to wager her livelihood, her whole way of life, on what was probably just a beautiful, chance encounter with a rock musician.

She slipped the biology book into the appropriate space in

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the nonfiction section. She sighed. Her life had become far too complicated, but she couldn't bring herself to give it up. She would continue until the last possible moment, savoring each second until there were no more seconds left and it all came crashing down around her head.

But unlike her father, she vowed to herself she would not wallow when the fantasy was over. She would go on, embrace her memories, but she would not allow them to become twisted and destroy her. Her relationship with Reuben deserved better than that from her. She respected him and what they shared, and would honor those memories.

It tore her up inside to think of their relationship ending, but she knew that one day it must. Whether because he found out the truth about her, or because he was called away on tour never to return. In any event, she would squeeze out every speck of pleasure she possibly could before it all came to an end.

She wheeled the empty cart back behind the main desk and prepared to close things down, tidying the desk up and putting everything in its place.

"Excuse me. Could you tell me where I would find books on music history?"

Without glancing up, she pointed to the right. "In the nonfiction section. Is there something specific I can help you with?" Only then did she look up, and her heart plummeted in her chest.

"Reuben," she gasped.

His face was expressionless, his eyes hard, dark with deep

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emotion as he stared at her across the desk. “Yes, Reuben. You lied to me, Evie. If not directly, by omission at the very least. Now I’m here to find the answers.”

She whirled away from him and felt her world collapsing at her feet. Why now? Why here? “I-I—”

“No more putting me off, Evie...or Evelyn.”

“How did you find me?”

“Turn around and look at me. Did you really think you could keep this part of your life secret from me forever? Are you ashamed of me, Evie? Ashamed of what we feel for each other?”

She wheeled around. “No, of course not. It’s just...just. Oh, God, I can’t do this right now.”

He tossed something onto the desk and she watched as it slid toward her. It was her driver’s license.

“That’s how I found you, how I found out you’ve been lying to me. It must have dropped out of your wallet the last time we fucked.”

She felt the hot color flood her cheeks. “Please, Reuben,” she whispered as she glanced frantically around the room. “Not here. I can’t do this now.”

“Right now.” She saw the angry glint in his eyes.

“It’s almost closing time,” she pleaded with him. “Just give me a few minutes.”

He leaned across the desk. “I’ve given you weeks to come clean and you haven’t. I think I’ve been damned patient. I love you and if you haven’t figured that out by now, maybe you never will. But I want the truth. And I want to know whether

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there's any chance at all that you love me. Or have you just been using me to add a little excitement to your life? If you can tell me you don't feel anything for me, then I'll walk away right now and I won't come back. But think carefully before you answer, because I want the truth."

This was the moment she had not wanted to come. She wasn't prepared for it. She opened her mouth to tell him she didn't love him, but there was something in the look he gave her, something in his expression that stopped her.

"Please, Reuben. I'm afraid—"

"That's just it, isn't it? You're a coward. You're afraid to come face-to-face with what you feel for me. What I make you feel. You return to this safe, little town and forget about me all week long until you can't stand it any more and then you coming running back because you can't stay away, can you? Even though you don't think I fit into your nice little life here, you can't give up what we have between us—even if it is only make believe to you."

"That isn't true."

He straightened from the desk glaring down at her. "Prove it."

"Prove it? How?"

"That's for you to figure out. It's time for you to make a choice, isn't it? Come clean, Evie, and face who you are and what you really want."

She was terrified at what the people in Esmerelda would think of her. She could lose her job, her reputation, everything she'd built her life around.

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Or she could lose Reuben.

What was really important to her? Could she step outside her safe world and make the right choice that would lead to her happiness? Could she risk ending up like her father?

She straightened her spine and met Reuben's glare, eye-to-eye. What a spineless idiot she had been all these months. She glanced behind him at the door and envisioned him walking through it and never seeing him again—never experiencing his hands on her body, his lips on hers. Beyond that, his presence in her life. In her mind it was as though a light was snuffed out and she would be left in total darkness.

If everything else fell into ashes at her feet and he was left standing at her side, it would be enough. It all became so clear in that one instant. And like that instant when she had first seen him on the stage, she knew she needed to have him now. To show him exactly how she felt. She could always get another job if it came down to it, but she could never replace her lover.

She walked around the desk and looked up at him, holding out her hand, palm up. "Come with me?"

CHAPTER 4

She led him to the back of the library to a special room. She unlocked the door and drew him inside without flipping on the lights.

“Do you know what this room is?” she asked him in a hushed voice.

“I can’t see a damn thing. I have no idea.” He reached out through the darkness, somehow divining exactly where she stood, and drew her close, then dipped down to kiss her. It made her want to forget everything outside this room—past, present, and future.

Unwillingly, she pulled back and peered up at him through the darkness. “This is the genealogy room. This is where the

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records of our history are maintained. The computer ties into the Internet for genealogical research and we have a microfiche reader so people can peruse the historical records stored on film. The documents and books in this room are in many instances rare and brittle and require special and careful handling.”

“Okay. What are you trying to tell me?”

“You want my history. The past of Esmerelda is housed in this room. It’s one of the first communities established here in Massachusetts. Its history is long and prestigious. Hiring someone to care for it is an important job. The community wouldn’t entrust it to just anyone. It’s my responsibility to see to its safety and well-being.”

“I understand you have an important position here. How does that affect how you feel about me? How we feel about each other?”

She turned away from him. “It’s somehow all gotten twisted inside me. The weight of Esmerelda can be a heavy burden. Small towns carry a lot of baggage. People judge and I’m in a particularly vulnerable position.”

“Do you think if they know about us they’ll think less of you?”

She sighed. “I wish it was that easy to explain. Or that simple. There’s so much more. I carry so much baggage inside me. When I go to Boston, when I’m with you, the burden somehow lessens and I can keep going, keep doing what I’m expected to do—be who I’m expected to be.”

She felt him rest his hands on her shoulders. “Do you want

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me to leave you alone? I can't be just a dark, naughty corner of your life any longer, Evie. I want us to be together—I know we're meant to be together, but you need to see it and accept it as well."

"I knew I was walking a tightrope by spending time in Boston. It was never made more clear than when I met you. I can't begin to tell you what came before—not in just a short time. I should have been honest from the beginning, but I was afraid—of myself, of you, of everything."

"What now?"

"When I looked up and saw you across that desk, I knew I'd finally reached the end of the rope. I either cut you and my feelings for you loose, or risk losing everything I've built thus far in my life, of maybe letting everyone down in the process. But at the thought of you walking out that door and never seeing you again, it all fell into place." She whirled around to face him. "I couldn't do it, Reuben. I couldn't let you walk away."

He gripped her arms. "Why, Evie? Tell me why you couldn't let me walk out of your life."

She hesitated for a moment, then reached up to cup his solid jaw. "I love you, Reuben. I was afraid of loving you and then having you leave me. I saw my father destroyed because of his love for my mother. But when it came right down to it, I would rather risk it." She threw herself into his arms, wrapping her arms around his neck. "Oh, Reuben, I'm so sorry it took me so long to realize what I almost gave up."

He cupped her face and pressed his lips to hers. His hands

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held her close and she could feel the ridge of his cock through their clothing. Shocked with her own thoughts, she knew she wanted him to make love to her right now, here, in her library, bringing their love into the here and now of her life. She pulled back and looked up at him.

“Make love to me.”

“Here?” She heard the surprise reflected in his voice.

She ripped at his shirt, buttons flying in all directions as she pressed her lips to his hard chest, nipping at a small beaded nipple. “Now,” she growled, rubbing against him.

He lifted her up. “You’re going to blow the whole chaste librarian image. What if someone should walk in?”

She threw her head back. “I don’t care. I need you right now. I’ve been so afraid of the moment when I knew you’d disappear from my life. I need to know this is real.”

“This is a rare book room, sweetheart. We’re about to commit sacrilege, aren’t we?”

“Baptize,” she laughingly corrected. “We’re going to baptize this room. Maybe we’ll infuse a little life into history. The old ghosts of the Esmerelda elders will be so shocked at our behavior, they’ll turn over in their graves. Do you really love me, Reuben?”

He lifted and pressed her against a bookshelf containing old, rarefied books. She could smell the essence of the library, of history, of polished, old wood. And the scent of love.

The word tumbled around in her mind as she savored its presence, enjoying the feel of it. Reuben rubbed his cock against her cleft and she felt her juices flow, scenting the air

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around them, melding with the smell of historic tomes. Her laughter was filled with adventurous deviltry as she reached down to slip her panties off. This room could use a little passion to infuse it with life.

“You’re sure?” he asked.

“Never more so. Fuck me, Reuben. Oh, God, I want to feel you inside me. And I don’t care who knows it. Not anymore.”

CHAPTER 5

He began to undo the tiny pearl buttons of her demure white blouse, exposing her to his lips, his tongue, his teeth. She arched toward him, eager for more of his touch. Closing her eyes, she leaned back, savoring his scent as it mingled with her own and that of the old leather and memories of ages past.

“Reuben,” she breathed as she tilted her head back, offering him better access to her neck. She felt his hot tongue and sensuous lips possess her as he peeled back her blouse and slid it down her shoulders, binding her for his pleasure. He sucked at the throbbing pulse at her neck and sent tendrils of desire zinging throughout her body.

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"You have such sweet, silky skin, Madam Librarian," he murmured into the darkness, his voice twining a sensual net around her.

"And you have such a seductive way about you, Music Man, how can a woman resist?" she teased back. "Oh, yes," she moaned as his mouth found her nipple through the silk and lace of her bra. He sucked hard, drawing her deep into his mouth. She hissed at the exquisite ache of sensation.

"You like that."

"More, please."

His hands gripped the curve of her spine, arching her deeper, offering him better access. He lifted his head and his eyes glittered in the darkness. "I want to spread you out. Tell me where."

"The table," she gasped. "Behind you."

He lifted her and pivoted, carefully stepping in a straight line until he stopped before the shadow of the solid outline of a table. He shoved aside several chairs and set her on top of the old oak surface. She let him have his way. Whatever he wanted to do to her was fine with her.

He did just as he said he would, and spread her out, arms above her head. Then he proceeded to remove her slip and skirt. He reached up to unclasp her bra and removed that as well until she was totally naked, displayed in a fashion for his pleasure.

"This isn't exactly the time and place to savor your body, is it?"

"Whatever you want, I'm yours," she answered as she

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stretched more fully beneath his inspection. “I’ve moved far beyond worrying about the risk of being discovered.”

Once she was divested of her clothing, she felt his hungry lips at the arch of her foot and she wiggled her toes. “That tickles.” She giggled. He played his lips up over the curve of her calf, to her knee, working inward to her pale inner thigh, and she sighed with pleasure.

Her pussy juices flowed, aroused by his attentions, by the very sacrilegious nature of being made love to in the library where they could be discovered at any moment.

Her attention was diverted away from those thoughts and the possible risk to her reputation when Reuben separated her legs and planted her feet firmly on top of the table. She felt the cool air feather across her exposed, wet labia lips.

He leaned forward and stroked his tongue over her hot center. She arched up, inhaling sharply at the exquisite sensation. His tongue penetrated her, driving into her sensitive vagina as he sucked at her juices, while his hands stroked along her legs, and up over her abdomen. A soft moan escaped her lips when his tongue circled her clitoris, pressing against and around the stiff little nub, her body singing with steamy arousal.

He did that to her. He had from that first moment when they connected, and wherever he led, she followed willingly, a woman following the music of her piper. He made her want to do things she never would have attempted before—to take risks she never would have considered otherwise. But only with him. Only for him. That should have told her something

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long ago. She would risk anything for him, even here, in her own domain.

She shifted her feet, offering him better access, wanting him deeper inside her. His tongue receded and then she felt two of his fingers enter her, driving deeper, curving upward, pressing against that secret, sweet spot, and she couldn't hold back the scream of pleasure that erupted from her throat. If there were anyone left in the library, they would surely know what was taking place in the venerable history room.

And she didn't care.

His tongue swept over her clit, driving her higher, her cream flowing around his fingers, and his tongue lapping them up. His demanding tongue traced her crease, stroked up over her mound, feathered through her dark curls, and then back down to suck at her engorged clit once again.

Her body tightened, readying itself. She closed her eyes, sinking into the ecstasy of the moment with his hands and mouth playing her body like a beautiful instrument, coaxing the melody free that he sought.

And finally it did explode and everything shattered around her, sparks flew in the air, charged particles of electricity snapping throughout her body as she floated free, her body pulsing with the pleasure he wooed from her.

"Now, Reuben," she pleaded. "Now."

She needed no other words. He knew exactly what she wanted. Her eyes now accustomed to the dimly-lit room, she watched as he lowered his pants and his cock sprang free, ready for action. His flesh was beautiful and she had savored it

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many times over the last weeks, in many places, including her hotel room. She wanted to feel him inside her right this minute.

Then he was pulling her toward the edge of the table and repositioning her legs. She felt his teasing presence, the tip of his thick tool pressed between her slick lips, poised at her opening.

“Is this what you want?” he asked as he circled the tip, driving her wild with need.

“Yes. You know it is.”

He pressed deeper, and her pussy blossomed to accept him, to accommodate his wide girth inside her.

Oh, yes, but he was going too slowly. She wanted to feel all of him, jammed deep inside her. She wanted it fast and hard and she wanted to feel so damn full, just the way only he could do.

“Fuck me,” she pleaded.

But he refused her, instead retreating from inside her, and she whimpered with frustration. She fisted her hands, wanted to force him to do what she wanted.

Then suddenly her eyes shot open as he slammed home, sending her spiraling into another hot, hard orgasm, her body pulsing around him, responding to the pleasurable impact.

And then he was moving, a fast, deep rhythm that kept her soaring. She lifted her hips, meeting him thrust for thrust, grinding her pelvis against him, in a fast, staccato primal mating rhythm.

She felt his fingers digging into her hips and she lifted her

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legs to anchor around his waist. They were caught in a firestorm of desire, primitive and passionate. Her nails dug into the wood of the table seeking purchase. Then suddenly the world shifted as he lifted her into his arms and his cock sank so deep inside it seemed to touch her soul and another orgasm ripped through her. Fast as a brush fire she went up in smoke.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, needing to hold on to something solid to keep her from skyrocketing away. Without thought she bared her teeth and bit his chest as the primal urges raged through her, claiming her mate in an age-old manner.

She heard his hiss of breath and then he grabbed her hips as his orgasm overtook him, and she felt him filling her with his seed. She wrapped her legs more firmly around his hips, riding out the crest of the passion.

He stroked her back and held her close as they both floated down to earth. Carefully, he settled her onto the table and pulled his softening cock from inside her. He pushed her hair from her sweat-soaked brow as he looked at her through the darkness.

He leaned his forehead against hers. "So, Madam Librarian, where do we go from here?"

CHAPTER 6

She eased away from him and slid off the table to put on her clothes, trying to buy some time before answering him. He had the habit of making her lose all perspective, of remembering who and where she was. It wasn't the first time and she doubted it would be the last. The only thing she could be certain of right now was that she did love him and she needed to admit it to herself. But what did come next?

Surprisingly, he gave her the space she needed. She was nervous as they carefully exited the history room and she re-locked the door. Fearfully, she surveyed the expanse of the library, and then breathed a sigh of relief as she realized it was empty except for them.

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Reuben waited patiently as she finished up what needed to be done, checking all the corners for any possible stragglers and then turned off all but the security lights. Only then did she turn back to find him seated at a table leafing through a rock magazine. He looked up as she walked over to where he sat. Closing the magazine, he set it aside.

“Ready to go?” he asked as he rose from his seat.

She nodded, nervous now that the heat of passion had subsided. He took her arm and guided her out the door. She turned and locked it, making sure everything was secure. Silence again loomed between them. All the things they were leaving unsaid hovered between them.

“Did you drive?” he inquired as they stepped off the porch and onto the paved sidewalk.

“No, I don’t live far from here. I usually walk to and from work.”

He looked up at the sky and frowned. “At this time of night? All by yourself? That’s not safe, Evie.”

She had to laugh. “This isn’t Boston, Reuben. It’s Esmerelda. Very little ever happens around here.”

“Still...I don’t like to think of you walking home all by yourself at this time of night. I don’t care what town it is.”

“Does that mean you’re going to escort me home tonight? I can take care of myself, you know. I don’t take unnecessary risks.”

He stopped abruptly and swung her around. “This isn’t funny, Evie. You’re an adventuress at heart. You take chances you shouldn’t. Look at the risks you take driving to Boston

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every weekend. Do you have any idea what could happen to a woman alone in a city like that?"

"I do not take risks. I'm very careful. The hotel I stay at when I come to Boston is right across the street from the bistro. You know that. What's up with you?"

They were standing beneath a street light and she could see the expression on his face very clearly. It was an intense, glittering look, some sort of panic seemed to be lurking beneath the surface. She reached up to cup his face.

"What is it, Reuben? Why are you doing this? I'm fine."

He gripped her arms and drew her up close. Their breaths mingled and hovered between them in the cool, autumn night.

"I don't want to lose you, that's what this is all about. For months you've been putting me off, refusing to share very little of who you are. And now that I've found you, I'm afraid you'll disappear or that you'll pull away from me. I love you, Evie, and I want to marry you."

He caught her by surprise with that last statement. He wanted to marry her? Why hadn't she seen it coming? For months they had been lovers, their passion burning so hot each time they were together that it scorched her. Yet, she had denied the depth of emotion she felt for Reuben, justifying it as just a passing fling.

Looking into his eyes now, she knew it had never been that. Not really. And she had tried to hide from her own deep feelings for him.

"Oh, Reuben, I'm so sorry."

She saw a bleak devastation enter his expression as he

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slowly released her and shoved his hands into his pockets. “I guess that’s it then. I had to give it a shot. I’ll walk you home and then I won’t bother you again. I thought we had something more—something special.”

Her heart stuttered in her chest. “What are you talking about?” Her thready question was tinged with panic and confusion. She had just come to accept her feelings for Reuben and now he was leaving her? What the hell had this all been about?

“You said you’re sorry. I assume that means you don’t feel the same way I do. And I’m not going to try to force it. You don’t want me around, then I won’t bother you. You’ve had your fling and you can now go on with your nice life.”

She grabbed his arm and whirled him around this time. “That isn’t what I said at all.” She licked her lips. She had to be very clear on what she said next or she was going to blow it for sure. “Reuben, I love you. What I meant to say is I’m sorry that I didn’t realize it sooner. That I was afraid to accept my feelings for you. Bottom line is that what I feel for you scared me spitless.”

She saw the relief flood his gaze as he stared at her. He leaned down and kissed her, all his uncertainty expressed in the passion she felt as his hard mouth possessed her. “Why, Evie? Is it because I’m in a rock band? Is that why you’ve been holding me at arm’s length?”

“You aren’t the problem. What you do isn’t the problem. It’s me. It’s this town. It’s all the expectations for the head librarian in such a small town.”

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She saw the questions in his eyes. “Do you think marrying a rock musician will hurt your reputation? Is that it? We can live anywhere you want. Here or Boston or wherever. I want to be with you, Evie, wherever that is.”

God, how did she explain the baggage she carried. The history of her parents haunting every step she took.

He shook her and she looked up at him. “Don’t shut me out, Evie. Tell me what’s going through your mind.”

She threaded her arm through his and they began walking again. “Come home with me and I’ll try to make you understand . But it’s never been you...only me.”

They walked along in silence until they stopped in front of her father’s house—the one she had inherited and still lived in. They halted at the end of the steps and she looked at it with different eyes.

For the first time she realized what a sad house it was—so many ghosts from the past lived there with her, and suddenly she didn’t want to go inside. Tears spurted from her eyes, the pain of watching her father disintegrate over the years and finally die of a broken heart.

“Evie, sweetheart, what is it? Talk to me.”

“I can’t go in there,” she sobbed out. She wrapped her arms around his waist and hugged him tightly. He was so warm and vibrant. He loved her and she wanted to trust that love. She couldn’t bring him inside that house. She just couldn’t do it. “Take me someplace else. Anywhere. I just can’t go in there. Not right now.” She buried her face in his chest.

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He held her close, rubbing her back. "It's okay, sweetie." He guided her back the way they came. "I left my car in the library parking lot. We can go anywhere you want."

The further they got from the house, the tightness in her chest started to ease and the panic began to subside. How had she not realized how suffocated she had been all these years? How living in that house only magnified the pain of the abandonment she'd suffered by both her parents? First her mother, then her father as he drifted deeper and deeper into depression and alcoholism. From the moment her mother left, Evie had been alone and without support. She had become the caregiver, the nurturer, and everything had gotten twisted around inside her.

Somehow she needed to make Reuben understand, even if she didn't fully understand it herself. At least not yet. But she would, because she loved Reuben enough to take the risk. But how did she begin?

CHAPTER 7

Evie sat in the shadowed back corner of the bistro sipping at a vodka and tonic, watching Reuben as the group finished up the last song of this set. She looked down at her left hand, adorned with an emerald and diamond engagement ring.

Back in Esmerelda she had been a seven-days' wonder when she had introduced Reuben to everyone at a local fundraiser for the library. She accepted the fact that she and Reuben would be the subject of town gossip for at least the next few months. But that was okay. Yet, surprisingly, it hadn't been as bad as she expected.

She had admitted to Reuben that she wanted to stay in Esmerelda—it was her home and the place where she worked.

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She enjoyed her position at the library.

But she had put the house up for sale. It was a sad place—too sad for them to live in. Someone else needed to flood it with happy memories—there was just too much history there for her to stay. She and Reuben were in the process of purchasing a small parcel of land just outside the city limits, near the MacKenzie homestead. It was as though some great weight had been lifted from her shoulders, and she felt light and happy because of it.

She still mourned the loss of her father and for her own youth that in many ways had been ripped from her, but she looked forward to a future with the man she loved. Her gaze caressed him as he stood on the stage, fingering the chords to the song. Oh, yes, she loved his hands, and his voice, and pretty much everything about him.

He had surprised everyone last week when he showed up at the library in the afternoon and had read a story to the children in the story corner. He had such a wonderful voice and it wasn't just the children who'd gathered around the storyteller that day. At one point, he'd actually begun to sing the story to them. It turned into a wonderful afternoon, and he was an immediate hit with all the young mothers.

She knew that being the wife of a rock musician was not going to be easy and there were going to be a lot of challenges down the road. But she now felt she was ready to take the risk. His roots were in Boston; his family resided in the suburbs on the other side of the city. He had taken her to meet them shortly after his first visit to Esmerelda. She'd been

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overwhelmed by their generous spirit. It was then she found out from one of his four brothers that Reuben was the baby of the family.

She remembered the way they had teased him, calling him the Sandwich King. After about the third time she had to ask why they called him that. That was the first time she'd seen him blush. One of his other brothers eagerly told her that Reuben was named after the sandwich. She couldn't stop laughing when they told her Reuben's mother had developed a craving for Reuben sandwiches all during her pregnancy with her youngest son, and her husband had spent more time at the delicatessen than at home. His mother had been absolutely certain there had been a message in that and had subsequently named her youngest son after the famous sandwich.

It had endeared her to him even more and she loved his name. But she didn't hesitate to rib him on various occasions as the need arose.

He had a wonderful family and he was a wonderful man. How she had been so lucky to find him she would never know. Her rebellious spirit had brought her to Boston in desperation to escape her loneliness. In doing so, she had been so richly rewarded there were times when she was certain it was all a dream.

In six months they'd be getting married. They were already in deep discussions with the builder on their new house, which would include a soundproofed music room for Reuben and, of course, room for a library for herself. It was going to be a beautiful home filled with love, and when

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Reuben returned from his road trips, he would find her waiting for him.

The set ended. Reuben set his guitar on the stand, jumped down from the stage, and made a beeline for her. There was something in his eyes when he reached her and she wasn't quite sure what it was.

"Is there a problem?"

"No," he said as he reached over to clasp her hand and pull her to her feet. "There's someone I want you to meet. You might be mad at first, but I think you need to meet her."

She accompanied him across the room, curious as to the identity of the person he wanted to introduce her to. Her steps slowed and she pulled back as she saw an older woman sitting at the table they seemed to be headed for.

"Reuben, I don't—" The woman couldn't be who she thought it was. How had he found her?

"Honey," he gripped her hand tighter and pulled her forward, "you need to resolve this. It will stick with you forever unless you face it. You know that. You need to know the truth about what happened."

She twisted her hand, trying to yank it from his grasp. "I'm not ready for this. I can't do it."

"Of course you can. You're a lot stronger than you think you are. And she needs to talk with you as well. Please, babe, do it for me. I'll be right here for you."

Finally, she allowed him to guide her toward the table. The woman seated there was still beautiful. The years rested well on her—unlike they had done with Evie's father. She looked

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up at Evie. Her eyes—the same swirling gold and green as hers—mirrored back the uncertainty she, herself, felt at this unexpected meeting. Slowly, she rose to her feet and held out a tentative hand.

“Hi, Evelyn,” she said softly. “I know it’s been a long time, but I’m glad Reuben got in touch with me. I’ve missed you.”

Evie’s laugh was more of a bark of disbelief than one of amusement. “You’ve missed me? You left me. You just walked away.” All the pain and frustration came pouring out of her. She ignored the outstretched hand. “You just disappeared from our lives. What you did destroyed Dad. You demolished our family. And now you say you missed me? You’ve always known exactly where you could find me. Why now?”

Her mother dropped her hand to her side and lowered herself back into the chair. She took a quick gulp from the glass resting in front of her. Evie had to wonder if her mother used the same method her father had for years to anesthetize the memories and the pain.

Her mother stared up at her, and this time Evie saw solemn determination in her gaze. “Your father had his chance to turn you against me all these years. Won’t you allow me a moment to hear my side? I don’t think it’s asking much.”

Evie lifted her chin defiantly. “Are you married to that broker you cheated on Dad with?”

She saw the pink flush fill her mother’s face, but her gaze didn’t waiver. “Yes, I am. Not everything is quite what you

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think. I didn't abandon you willingly. If you can't give me a chance to explain my side of things, then I guess there's no reason for me to stay. You can keep your father's bitter memories of me alive, but I have something to give you." She reached down on the floor for a small bag and slid it across the table to Evie. "These are yours. They were all returned to me unopened." She looked up at Evie, tears in her eyes. "You see, I wrote to you for a number of years after I left. There were presents as well—for your birthday and at Christmas. Your father returned every one of them to me. He always knew where I was and how to reach me. And he could have shared that information with you at any time."

Automatically Evie accepted the bag and looked inside. She pulled out the beribboned bundle. Each letter was addressed to her with the return address of Lissa Morrison. She glanced back up at her mother. "I don't understand." She put the bundle back into the bag and slowly sank into the empty chair at the table.

She felt a strong, supportive hand on her shoulder. "Do you want me to stay?" Reuben asked her softly.

She shook her head. "No. I think I need to hear what she has to say, but you have another set to get ready for."

"You're sure?"

"I'll be fine." She glanced up at him. "But we'll talk later about how you managed to pull this off."

She saw the hint of a smile. "I expected no less." He leaned down to brush a gentle kiss against her forehead. "I love you, babe."

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Quietly, he left them. Evie turned back to face the mother who had abandoned her so many years before. It was time to find out the whole story.

CHAPTER 8

Reuben must have ordered her a drink because the waitress came over and set her usual drink in front of her. A peace offering from her lover? She would discuss that with him later. She leaned back in her chair and looked at the woman who sat across from her.

Unlike her father, her mother looked content with her life. In fact, she practically bloomed with health and well being. Evie didn't know what she'd expected. But then again, she had never expected to see her mother again.

"Well, I'm here. Did you know that Dad passed away? Do you even care?" Evie knew she was being surly, attacking her mother, and that it came from the years of pent up impotent

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anger and frustration with no outlet.

When her mother left, her father had forbidden her name to be uttered in front of him. He destroyed all the pictures of her. In later years, when he had often been clouded in an alcoholic stupor, Evie would hear him rant at night, calling her mother a whore and a tramp. Those were the nights when she closed and locked her bedroom door, hiding beneath her pillow, hoping to drown out the horrible words. It was never enough.

“Yes,” her mother said quietly, “I knew he had died. I had sworn I’d never set foot in Esmerelda again, but I went back for the funeral.”

Evie’s head shot up. “You were there? I never saw you.”

“No. I stayed hidden. I’ll admit I went more to see you than out of respect for your father. You looked so sad, but I didn’t think it was the proper time to approach you. So many years had passed and I wasn’t sure if you even wanted to see me. I didn’t know what he’d told you about me.”

“He loved you so much he drank himself to death at losing you,” Evie informed her bitterly.

Lissa offered her a sad smile. “It wasn’t like that. If that’s what he told you, it was a lie to cover himself.”

“He didn’t have to tell me, I could see how distraught he was.”

Lissa straightened in her chair and in almost a mirror of the same action Evie often did, jutted her chin. “It wasn’t my leaving that made him distraught. It was at the thought that the image he had in the community would be irreparably harmed. I was merely a possession to him. Oh, there was pride—pride

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of ownership. Pride in owning something beautiful and flaunting it to his peers. At home, in private, he was very different. Even before I left, he had started drinking.”

“That’s not true,” Evie protested.

“You were so young.” Her mother looked at her sadly. “He hid it very well when you were small. His image mattered a great deal to him, but in private he ran me down every chance he got. There was no love between us. Whatever there had been faded quickly. He suffocated me.”

“You aren’t describing the man I knew as my father. But he was very different after you left. He withdrew and became so bitter.”

“I’ll admit, I shouldn’t have fallen into the affair with Charles. It was far too easy. Looking back, I was too vulnerable to someone who showed me the least bit of compassion—which soon turned to passion, then to love. I left with him, knowing I’d be burning my bridges, but it felt like I was dying by staying there. Charles was planning to leave Esmerelda anyway and I knew if I didn’t go with him, I would die.”

“Aren’t you being a bit dramatic?”

Lissa shook her head. “Not in the least. I can’t expect you to understand all of it. He was your father, after all, and I know you loved him. When I left, I expected to be able to come back for you, but he stopped me. He said if I tried to get custody of you he would make sure I was declared an unfit mother because of my adulterous affair with Charles.” She shook her head and wiped a tear away. “I couldn’t put you

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through that. I refused to rip you apart fighting over you. It was better that I stayed away. But I couldn't help writing to you." She raised her head to look at Evie. "I'll understand if you can't forgive me. But I needed you to know my side of it. I've been very happy with Charles, even though I've missed you very much. We have two children—you have a half-brother and a half-sister who would love to get to know you. I'm not perfect—far from it, but I do love you."

"I don't know—"

"Oh, I know you aren't ready to forgive me yet, but maybe someday?"

"This has been a lot to take in. I know Dad wasn't perfect, but I couldn't understand why you stayed away and never tried to contact me. I have to think about all of this."

Lissa nodded. She pulled a piece of paper from her purse, scribbled something on it, and slid it across the table toward Evie. "That's our address and phone number. We've moved since I wrote those letters. I don't want to crowd you, but I hope you'll give us a chance."

Evie picked up the piece of paper and stuffed it into her pocket. "I'll think about it. Give me some time."

"Of course. We'll be there when you're ready." She turned and looked at the stage as the band prepared for their last set. "He seems like a good man. I was surprised when I received the call from him."

Evie turned to look at Reuben, who kept anxiously glancing their way. "He is a good man. I've been very lucky to find him."

CLOSING TIME

Lissa stood up. “I think I’ve said all I came to say. I’ll let you get back to what you were doing. I’m very glad I had the opportunity to spend some time with you, even if you can’t forgive me for leaving you.”

It was too much to take in. So much had happened to her over the last few months—almost too much to absorb. Now, over the shock of being confronted by her mother, she found she wanted to get to know her, and the rest of her new extended family, better.

If she were honest with herself, her father had been quite taken with appearances in the community—at least until the alcohol had finally taken control. She just needed a little time to come to terms with everything.

Hesitantly, she held out a hand, expecting to rightly be rebuffed as she had done earlier to her mother’s offer of friendship. But her mother never hesitated and firmly clasped Evie’s hand.

“Thank you, Evie.”

“I don’t want to dwell on history,” she blurted out. “You’ve told me your side of things, but I don’t want to take sides between you and Dad, so if we do have a chance to rebuild some sort of relationship, I don’t want to rehash what happened in the past again. Okay?”

Lissa offered her a shaky smile. “More than okay. Building new beginnings, even stronger.” She released Evie’s hand. “Take care of yourself...and that young man.”

Evie looked toward the stage. “I plan to. He’s pretty special.”

CHAPTER 9

“I should be angry with you,” Evie murmured as she nipped at his belly button. She heard his hiss of indrawn breath.

“It was worth the risk,” he growled as he threaded his fingers through her hair. “You needed to know the truth.”

She razed her teeth along his hipbone and felt him shudder. “A calculated risk?”

“Something like that. Whenever you talked about her I could sense the pain. You needed to resolve it.”

She nipped at his groin.

“Ouch.”

“You could have told me what you were up to.”

CLOSING TIME

"I was afraid you'd dig in your heels and refuse to see her and we'd be going for months round and round. Just like when you hid your past from me and I had to dig you out."

She nipped him again in warning, closer to a very sensitive part of his body.

"Hey, watch that. There's such a thing as a little too close for comfort."

"Really?" she purred as she licked from the root of his exposed cock to the tip, swirling her tongue over the slit.

"Oh, baby."

"Hey, Reuben, you in there?" a muffled voice called from the other side of the door as someone rattled the handle.

Evie stiffened, trying to bury herself deeper into the shadows of the tiny cloakroom they had retreated to.

"I thought you said it was closing time and everybody would be gone," she hissed up at him.

"Shush," he whispered back.

"What do you need, Ed?" he called back. Ed being one of the other members of the band.

"Well, hell," she heard him grumble. "Just give me my coat and I'm outta here."

As she waited, still crouched on the floor, Reuben leaned over and grabbed a tan suede jacket. He reached around and unlocked the door, inched it open, then threw out the coat and slammed the door shut. Evie heard a deep chuckle on the other side and felt her face burn with embarrassment.

"I can't believe that just happened," she groused at him.

"Hey, I just came in here to grab our coats. I was all for

CLOSING TIME

waiting 'til we got home. This is your fault.”

She felt him jump when her wet lips surrounded him yet again. She'd give him something else to think about. Okay, so it had been a bit risky following him into the cloakroom, but it was near closing time. And...well...it wasn't like it was the first time.

Oh, he tasted good. He was so hot and hard, and she sucked him deeper into her mouth. She had to wonder if they'd still take chances like this after they were married.

She released him with a pop, then ran her tongue from tip to root and back again, swirling over the inflamed ridged plume. So silky. His cock glistened in the darkness, the only light filtering in through the cracks in the door.

Again she engulfed him, at the same time sliding one of her hands inside her own panties and through her creamy arousal. She slid two fingers inside her hot, needy vagina as her tongue and mouth bobbed greedily at his steely tool.

She felt him lengthen and expand even more, ready to explode. She stroked the base of his cock with her free hand as the other slid in and out of her pussy, teasing at her clitoris, and her mouth sucked at the ready-to-explode length filling her mouth. He was close, so very close, and she wasn't going to be far behind.

“Oh, hot damn, yes, sweetie, just like that,” he moaned as his hands tightened in her hair and he filled her mouth with his seed. He held on for dear life, pumping into her mouth. She swallowed every bit, licking him clean, even as her own climax swamped her and she moaned around the softening

CLOSING TIME

prick as she released him.

She collapsed against him, and he held her there as they both attempted to regain some composure.

Finally, he helped her to stand and they adjusted their clothing. When they were ready, he leaned down to kiss her, sinking his tongue past her wet lips and deep into the recesses of her mouth, driving her head back against his shoulder. Then he lifted his head to gaze down at her.

"I don't know how I'm going to survive with you back here and me on the road."

She smiled up at him. "There's always the phone."

"Not a lot of privacy though."

She reached over to press a hand to his groin. "Oh, I think you'll be able to manage something, don't you?"

She heard his soft groan. "I think we need to get out of here before they lock us in."

She uttered a soft, throaty laugh. "Would that be such a bad thing?"

Again, he leaned forward. "Hell, no, not a bad thing at all. We could really make this place sing, now couldn't we?"

"Mmm," she managed to say before pulling him down onto the floor. Home would always be there, but tonight the librarian wanted a little more adventure.

As a matter of fact she doubted very much that things would change after they were married. In fact, they'd probably get a whole lot more interesting, because when you were in love, some things were just worth the risk.

ADRIANNA DANE

Theresa Gallup uses the pen names of Tess Maynard and Adrianna Dane. Theresa has been writing since the age of 10. A legal secretary for 30 years, she is currently working on another erotic romance, as well as a full-length romantic mystery/suspense. She has been married for 30 years and has three grown children (a daughter and twin sons), and is a new grandmother.

Writing as Tess Maynard, her first published short story appeared in the ezine, *The Whispering Forest*, in January of 2004. Writing as Adrianna Dane, where adding sensual heat to romance is her motto, *Esmerelda's Secret* was her first foray into the erotic romance genre.

Having traveled and lived from the East Coast to the West Coast, Theresa receives inspiration for her stories from a variety of sources, including music and poetry, and her tastes are eclectic.

For more information about current projects,
visit Theresa's web sites at www.tessmaynard.com
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* * *

***Don't miss A View To Possession, by Adrianna Dane,
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Aurora has taken the lead since Martine's death, a role in which she doesn't feel comfortable. But she made a promise to her Mistress. She watches the monitors of Noir Dance, and for the last two months an attractive stranger has caught her eye. Something about him draws her, but having lost one mistress, she's not ready to submit herself to the will of a master. Tad, on the other hand is ready to move on and urges her to introduce herself to the man they both desire.

Con Jardine has patience and is willing to wait for the perfect opportunity to introduce himself to the attractive pair at the nightclub. He made a promise to Martine, yet he'd had no idea how much he would desire to possess this beautiful couple for himself, and not strictly as a duty to a woman he'd admired.

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