



AWAKENED

By
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Chapter One

Maybe it was corny. It was *definitely* cliché. But ‘the bitter agony of defeat’ popped into my mind as I stared at the cursor on my computer screen, mesmerized by that tiny, blinking bar that reminded me of the ticking seconds, minutes, and hours I’d spent staring blankly, my mind devoid of inspiration. Necessity might be the mother of invention, but desperation wasn’t the motivation I needed to write.

I’d been writing and selling little articles and short stories, mostly for my own entertainment, for years. The money wasn’t much, but it was a thrill to see my work in print, to treat myself to a little shopping spree once in a great while.

Divorce had been a life altering experience. All the while I’d been wrapped up in my little fantasy world, my ex had been moving in for the kill shot and I’d been caught in his crosshairs like a deer shot by a hunter a half a mile away. I hadn’t seen or heard it coming, and it had been a pretty damned thorough wipeout.

I pounded away at the keyboard night after night now because I needed the money to supplement my pitiful wages and I was too ‘lazy’ to take on a second, ‘real’ job, mostly because it took every ounce of energy I could muster just to make it to the one job and back every day.

My friends in my writing group had been gently suggesting I take on a full length book, specifically a romance. Frankly, after what my ex had done to me, a murder mystery would probably have better fit into my frame of mind. The only reason I hadn’t tried it was because I had this hope that someone would grant my deepest, darkest wish and do my ex in, and I suffered from the paranoia that they’d decide to use my story as a blue print for the dastardly deed if I was stupid enough to give them ideas, and I’d end up in jail.

One kind soul had finally suggested erotica as a tremendously growing market that was in need of writers, which meant my chances of selling were better.

I’d vetoed that idea, as well--at first.

It occurred to me, though, that horny was an emotion I could relate to after a year and a half draught.

I’d thought so until I sat down and tried it anyway, but just as romance was beyond me, my mind failed to conjure ‘sexy’ male either. I could’ve used some visual imagery inspiration--a hunk next door sunning on the terrace, mowing the lawn--but the house was vacant and I couldn’t see anything from my office window anyway except the side of the house that faced mine and a couple of blank, curtainless windows.

Yawning, I decided to just rest my tired eyes for a few minutes. Frequently, all I had to do was try to sleep and my mind instantly began performing calisthenics.

It was pitch black in the room when I woke. My arms and lower legs were asleep from lack of circulation. I had no doubt that my face bore the imprint of the desk.

Groggily, I sat up and looked around, wondering how long I’d been out.

A flash of light outside my window caught my attention and my gaze moved automatically toward it.

It was the light going on in the room in the house across the way, the window almost directly across from my office window. I didn't have time to assess my surprise at discovering that someone had moved in. (Big shock, that I hadn't noticed! I went around in such a fog most of the time, I probably wouldn't have noticed if I'd fallen over the boxes in the driveway!)

The naked man that stepped from the bathroom, scrubbing the towel he held in one hand over his wet hair totally annihilated any possibility of thought. I don't think I even blinked. In an almost detached sort of way, I stared at the dampness glistening on his body. My gaze crawled over his broad chest and shoulders and down the perfect 'six pack' of his belly to the 'beast' nestled in the dark, curling thatch of hair at the apex of his thighs. His testicles were drawn up snugly to his body, probably from the chill in the room after a steaming shower--I could see faint, cloudy drifts of steam coming from the door. His cock, even at ease, was bigger than anything I'd ever seen at attention, almost as big around as my wrist and hanging damned near a quarter of the way down his muscular thigh. I hadn't known they came in extra large.

If my ex's five actually *was* five, this was definitely a ten, but then I'd always suspected my husband used metrics to measure, not inches, and he'd just left that little detail out.

I was vaguely aware of nicely shaped legs, muscular but not knotty, big hands, muscular arms, but most of my focus was on that perfectly lovely piece of meat--just lying there, currently untaken.

Awe probably most nearly described my state. It was a mixture of disbelief, fascination, and ... ok ... trepidation. Rambling around my stunned brain were various images of trying to mount that monolith and mental calculations of whether or not it was even actually possible for the average woman to take something like that on without risking serious injury. Jostling those thoughts and images was a sense of disbelief as to whether or not my eyes were actually seeing what I thought they were seeing or if it was possibly some sort of distortion from distance, shadows, the window glass, or a starving woman's brain.

Lust canceled out whatever good sense I might otherwise have had and I realized that all of the doubts were immaterial as I allowed my gaze to soak in the whole package again, from the sculpted muscles on his chest, arms, and belly to Mount Everest. If there'd been any way in hell to get my hands on that beautiful piece of man meat, I would do or die trying.

Heat washed over me, and then a wave of cold as it occurred to me that I was staring and he might see me, and then a heated wave of embarrassment as he glanced toward the window briefly.

Instead of looking startled, he merely looked away again and I realized even as I flinched all over in an instinctive urge to dive for cover that I was sitting in the dark.

He couldn't see me.

I could look as much as I wanted and he'd never know.

It wasn't right. I should just leave the room, close the drapes.

I got up and moved a little closer as a thrill of excitement moved through me.

He was beautiful. I couldn't really get a good look at his face, but from this distance even his face was handsome and his body--whoa!

Tossing the towel aside finally, he moved to a mirror and began combing his hair.

“Nice profile,” I murmured, staring at his tight, rounded ass for several moments before my gaze was drawn once more to the pretty thing sprouting from his belly. As cocks went, his was a definite ten. Even from this distance, I could see the head was fractionally bigger than the shaft and wondered if that would make it feel differently. My heart fluttered at the thought.

My husband’s penis had tapered from root to tip, the head being smaller than the root. I’d never really considered whether the shape might have any effect on the overall experience. Size, of course, mattered, regardless of the little myth, but technique, I suspected, had a good deal to do with it, too. My husband hadn’t been a terribly considerate lover. He’d figured his penis was above average in size and just being allowed to look at it ought to be enough to make me cum. If I wanted anything out of the experience besides the clean up job, I had to work at it.

This guy, though--just the way he moved excited me. I didn’t have any trouble at all imagining his moves in bed and I had a feeling ‘thorough’ more nearly described his credo.

I wanted to think so anyway.

I was really disappointed when he dragged a T-shirt out of a drawer and struggled into it, but the way it hugged his body was a thrill right by itself. I liked the shorts he wore, too--not the silly looking tidy whiteys or the boxers that fell to the knees and didn’t touch anywhere between besides the waist, but trim knit boxers that hugged his nice ass and cupped his package.

Sighing with regret when the show ended, I tiptoed out of the room and leaned shakily against the wall of the hallway for a few minutes, trying to calm my racing heart, trying to gather my scattered wits.

I’d spent ten minutes trying to think of some reasonable excuse to knock on his door before it occurred to me that there was nothing I could come up with that wouldn’t immediately smell like a put up job.

My conscience might have deserted me, but my damnable pride stood firm. No way was I going over there looking needy.

I was pretty sure I couldn’t meet him face to face without looking desperately needy.

Finally, I wandered downstairs and stared at my kitchen cabinets for a while, fighting the temptation to make up a ‘welcome’ basket for my new neighbor. Slowly, my brain kicked into a more or less functional mode and I went into action. I was well into preparation before it dawned on me that I was trying to entice my neighbor over with the smell of cooking food.

The realization made me giggle like an idiot, but my mind was still on lust mode and food immediately became sexual toys in my imagination.

Either the wind wasn’t blowing in his direction, the smell wasn’t enticing enough, or he just had a lot of resistance. He didn’t show up at my door with an excuse that sounded like something I’d manufactured. I wasn’t exactly hungry, not for food anyway. My entire body was a buzz.

My mind went into overdrive while I nibbled at the food, producing an entire plot line for a story I hadn’t even thought of. It would be bondage, naturally, not that I could imagine a guy that looked like him having to tie a woman up to get anything he wanted, but the idea of being completely at his mercy made me breathless. I was so excited about

it, I wanted to leap up immediately and head for my keyboard. It hit me, though, that entering my 'writing cave' might scare the wild life off and I might not get another peep show.

A sense of possessiveness moved over me. I needed him. My muse needed him. I thought his image was printed indelibly on my mind, but what if I didn't get another peek? Would it fade from my memory? Would I be able to recall every wonderful inch of him?

I couldn't contain my inspiration, however. I feared if I didn't get it down on paper I'd forget something really important. Finally, I grabbed the notebook I carried around with me to jot down ideas in and headed for my room. I wrote until my back and neck ached from the strain of hunching over the notebook in my lap, until my fingers were so cramped I could hardly grip the pen, then flexed my fingers and changed positions.

Finally, I reached a point of exhaustion and decided to 'think' with my eyes closed again. I woke to the sound of my alarm. Lifting my head, I stared at the clock bleary eyed and discovered I had one of the pages of my notebook glued to my cheek. I peeled it loose, fell out of bed and staggered toward the bathroom.

When I was finally able to open my eyes, I discovered I had ink stains on my face from sleeping with my cheek on my notebook. By the time I'd managed to scrub it off, dab on a little makeup and dress, I was running late. Grabbing the notebook, just in case inspiration hit me again at work, I dashed downstairs, grabbed a bottle of water and a donut and headed out the door.

I raced the clock all the way to work and still arrived in the parking lot almost ten minutes late. Brushing donut crumbs off my face and my clothes, I grabbed my pocket book and my notebook and dashed toward the employee entrance. I was so frantic to get to the time clock before the fifteen minute 'you're dead' mark that I plowed into a man in the hallway and almost sent both of us sprawling. He recovered first, grabbing me to steady me.

I sent him an embarrassed, apologetic smile. "I'm so sorry! I'm running late...." I completely forgot the thread of my thought. It was my neighbor--long dong hunk! I felt my jaw drop.

"You OK?"

"Uh." I managed to get that much out before my mind shut down again. When I realized he was staring at me quizzically, embarrassment flooded my face with color again. "I'm sorry. Yes! I'm fine. Are you OK? Did I break anything?"

He chuckled. "Not even my dignity, but it was a near miss."

I realized he was referring to the fact that I'd almost leveled him in the main corridor and the color that had only just started to abate, flashed neon again. "I'm so sorry. I'm late. I have to punch in."

Pulling away from him, I fled in complete disorder. I got a glimpse of him a few minutes later, but I'd recovered enough by that time to realize that I'd completely destroyed any chance, if there ever had been one, of actually getting to know the guy. Now, all I could think about was how was I going to manage to avoid him.

"Did you see *him*?" Nancy demanded in a loud whisper the moment my ass hit my chair.

"Him who?" I asked blankly, my mind still on the humiliating episode of my first

encounter with my fantasy hero.

“The new guy. The one they hired last week that I told you about? He started today.”

I stared at her, feeling my face turn red again. “About six foot? Dark? Drop dead gorgeous?”

“Yeah!”

“I knocked him down on my way in,” I said wryly.

Nancy gaped at me and then giggled. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Oh how I wish! I was all over him. I thought for several unnerving minutes that we were going to be wallowing around on the floor together.”

Nancy looked horrified and enthralled at the same time. “God! I wish it had been me!”

“No, you don’t. You just think you do because you didn’t actually witness my grand entrance. I just hope he doesn’t recognize me the next time he sees me. I *knew* I should’ve gone on that damned diet!”

By lunch time, I’d almost calmed down. Needless to say, I hadn’t made it to the damned time clock and my supervisor had had a little ‘chat’ with me, which had further ruined my day. Depression had settled in by the time me and Nancy headed for the dining hall. After counting my change twice, I opted for a coke and a big cookie for lunch, not because I particularly wanted it, but because I didn’t have enough money to buy anything that was more nutritious. I figured the calories would keep me going till time to knock off anyway.

“Dieting?”

I glanced at Nancy, resisting the urge to roll my eyes. “I’m not really hungry,” I lied as we moved to the corner table we’d staked a claim to.

It was the nature of the beast, I reflected. Nancy and I were ‘anti-social’, not because we particularly wanted to be, but because we fell below the curve. Despite the fact that I felt like a beached whale whenever I got around the skinny little young things, I knew I wasn’t much more than ten, maybe fifteen, pounds over what I should weigh for my height and bone structure. I also knew that I was at least average looking, maybe even a little better than average. Neither point helped one iota. I suffered from ‘long time marriage to jerk’ syndrome, which meant I was insecure and living on the fringes of poverty didn’t help my self esteem at all.

Nancy was in pretty much the same boat, except she’d been married longer before she got dumped and therefore was older, more out of shape, and had more reason to consider herself unworthy even than I did.

It was quiet in the corner. I didn’t feel like everyone was watching every morsel of food I put in my mouth and counting the calories for me.

“Oh my God!” Nancy said when I was halfway through my second cookie and already feeling a little unwell from all the sugar.

“What?” I asked, glancing at her.

“He’s coming this way.”

“Who?”

“Don’t look!”

I kept my face locked in her direction, trying to cut my eyes far enough sideways to see who she was talking about. I couldn’t see anything. “Who?” I asked again,

leaning forward to whisper.

“Shhh!”

“Hi! Mind if I join you?”

The deep male voice sent a shiver down my spine. I knew even before I looked up who it was. He was grinning down at me, waiting. I choked on a cookie crumb.

“Sure!” Nancy exclaimed enthusiastically. “You just start today?”

As if she didn’t know!

He sat down in the chair with his back to the dining hall. “Yeah. Ryan. Ryan Holt.”

“I’m Nancy Cline. And this is my friend, Charly Stephens.”

I’d managed to catch my breath by then and smiled uncomfortably at the introduction. I knew I was red faced, but at least this time I had an excuse ... I’d choked while stuffing my face.

“We ran into each other this morning,” he said, grinning, then turned and looked directly at me. “But I didn’t catch her name.”

Nancy glanced from Ryan to me and back again as if she suspected undercurrents. I sensed more than saw the quick movement as she divided a look between us. The moment Ryan had turned to look at me I’d looked down and was studiously folding the wrapper from my ‘lunch’.

My eyes nearly bulged from their sockets when Ryan slapped something down on the table and scooted it toward me.

“Is this yours?”

I stared down at my notebook disbelievingly, feeling a coldness wash over me at the realization of how closely I’d come to losing my precious notes. I’d missed it the moment my nerves had stopped rattling my brains, but I couldn’t seem to remember anything from the morning with any clarity, and I’d decided I must have left the notebook in my car.

Almost like a sleepwalker, I picked it up, flipped through it to reassure myself that it was my notebook. “Yes. How did you ...?”

“I noticed it lying under the table in the hallway after we bumped into each other. I didn’t realize you’d dropped it. I was going to turn it in to lost and found, but I got to thinking it over and thought it might be yours. You write?”

I looked up at him, feeling as if I’d been caught in slow motion as my brain tried to grasp something that seemed just out of reach. “Yes,” I said slowly.

“Sell anything?” he asked with interest.

“Uh ... now and then.” I looked down at my notebook and finally slid it off the table and into my lap. “An occasional magazine article. A few short stories.”

“I need to run out to my car for something,” Nancy interjected. “See you back in the office.”

I looked up at Nancy with a dawning sense of panic as I realized she was abandoning me, but she was gone so quickly I didn’t have time to think of anything to say to stop her.

“I read some of it. It’s good.”

I glanced at him. “What?”

He shrugged. “Sorry. I flipped through it to see if there was anything that would give me a clue of who owned it and I just got caught up in it. I hope you don’t mind.”

I felt the undercurrents then. I was just too stunned to grasp what their meaning was. “No. Of course not. I write things for people to read. It’s just ... well, notes you know. They’re pretty rough.”

“You do research?”

I looked at him, trying to decide whether I was being insulted. “Of course I do research. It depends on what I’m writing, naturally. Some things require a lot of research--the articles. Stories not so much--usually.”

He nodded, propping an elbow on the table and studying me. “I particularly liked the story you’d written at the end.”

A heated tide started somewhere around my breasts and rose upward until my face felt like I’d had my head in the oven. “It’s a new market I’m exploring. A friend of mine said there was a big demand for ... uh ... erotica--and good money.”

He nodded, not seeming the least uncomfortable and I began to relax fractionally, realizing he hadn’t recognized himself from the story. Inside, I was dying, however, of acute embarrassment.

“Erotica?”

“The target audience is women, so it’s designed to appeal to them.”

He frowned. “Don’t take this the wrong way--it’s really good--it just seemed to me that some of the things you described might be difficult or impossible.”

The writer in me immediately leapt to the challenge. “Really?” I said, frowning as I tried to go over what I’d written in my head. I wasn’t terribly fond of criticism, but I knew it was next to impossible for anyone to view their own work objectively. A fresh, unbiased viewpoint could be valuable. “It’s not always easy choreographing things completely in your head. Sometimes you just get so caught up in the story, you forget about reality. Then, too, you don’t want to get the story bogged down with too much clinical detail.”

“I could help,” he said, almost idly.

“Help?” I repeated blankly.

“It’d be easier to sort of act it out, wouldn’t it?”

“Like a play, you mean?” I asked, trying hard to suppress another rush of blood to my face. “Oh, I wouldn’t think of imposing! It’s sweet of you to offer, but”

He shrugged. “It’s just a suggestion. I’ve never tried anything like that myself, but I just don’t think it could be done in that position.”

I would’ve almost welcomed the idea that he was coming on to me, but there was nothing in his expression, or his body language to suggest anything more than curiosity. “You’re serious?”

Again, he shrugged. “I wouldn’t have offered if I wasn’t. If you’re not comfortable with the idea”

I wasn’t generally inclined to be impulsive, but there was a little voice in my head screaming ‘take a chance!’. I smiled with an effort. “You’re sure?”

“I’m sure.” He smiled. “My car’s in the shop. I was thinking you could give me a ride home.”

“Oh! I’d do that anyway. Uh. My car’s sort of like a junkyard reject, but, sure, I’ll give you a ride. You don’t have to go to all that trouble....”

He favored me with a slow smile that made my heart treble its rate. “You’re not going to back out on me, are you? I was really looking forward to helping you with your

research.”

Chapter Two

As days went, I was pretty sure mine ranked high enough on the ‘totally fucked up’ scale that it was damned near a classic. Paranoia set in almost as soon as I’d managed to put enough distance between myself and the gorgeous Mr. Long Dong Hunk (or as he referred to his alter ego, Ryan Holt) to catch my breath and gather my wits a little. I began to go back over the conversation, as much as I could remember of it, over and over like a broken record, trying to figure out if I’d misinterpreted something he’d said, or his body language, or both.

Maybe it was just a joke and I was the punch line?

I cringed inside, immediately imagining him regaling a group of his buddies with the hilarious details, or snickering with some of the office ‘young things’.

What had I been thinking!

I’d been way too disordered to pay much attention to details at the time, but I realized after I’d thought it over a while that he must be at least five years younger than me. It was hard to say because men, damn their stinking hides, always aged far more gracefully than women. To me, he’d looked no more than late twenties.

Of course, he could be a lot closer to my age, maybe even a year or so older, but I didn’t believe that. Besides, even if he was, thirty something men chased young girls, not thirty something women. And twenty something men chased teenage girls. And forty and fifty and sixty year old men chased young girls. They might settle for a thirty something woman if they couldn’t get anything younger--because pussy was still pussy even if it was aged pussy and they all wanted that--unless they were gay--but they didn’t go out of their way to get it. They ‘accepted’ the wind fall of thirty something women while they were looking around for fresher tail.

Trying to write erotica was ‘sully’ing’ my mind I realized, because before I hadn’t been able even to think in terms of pussy or dongs, dicks, or cocks! Even in my mind I’d whitewashed it to ‘thing’ or ‘stuff’ or ‘privates’.

Ok, well maybe that was only half of it. The other fifty percent was probably from ‘fasting’. I’d always thought of myself as a ‘good girl’, not because I’d particularly wanted to be but because I’d grown up in the Bible belt and it had been pounded into me practically from birth. I’d been raised that way--meaning I had wicked thoughts like everybody else, but I was too inhibited by the early brain washing years to act on anything. Mostly I just suffered over those that took action and tried to convince myself that I had virtue to comfort me.

It was damned cold comfort, though, especially since I’d been dumped for a ‘slut’

damned near young enough to be my daughter.

I'd been trying to convince myself to fling off the 'chains' of suppression ever since and 'go wild'.

Maybe it was that deep seated desperation to 'live a little', or the erotica I'd been struggling to write that had sent me off the deep end and made me misinterpret a perfectly innocent conversation for a come on? Maybe I'd been 'living' a fantasy?

Or maybe he'd been having a laugh at my expense?

How was I going to save face, I wondered miserably? I needed this job. They didn't exactly grow on trees, except for those same 'young things' that were responsible for my non-existent love life.

I was scaring the shit out of myself for nothing, I realized toward quitting time! Nothing had happened! Sure, he'd probably just been amusing himself toying with me, but we hadn't actually crossed a forbidden line or anything. All I had to do was keep my head and act like nothing had happened, regardless of whatever knowing looks or snickers came my way and they'd at least begin to have some doubts that whatever story he told was true.

Assuming, of course, that it wasn't just paranoia on my part.

And assuming he hadn't decided to share my notes with one of the big mouths in the office.

Oh for the old days when men were gentlemen and didn't boast about their conquests!

Needless to say, I was a nervous wreck by the time I gathered my belongings and headed toward the time clock. I clutched my notebook and purse to me as if they were bullet proof shields that could offer some protection from verbal bullets that could further undermine my shaky ego.

I got looks. Try as I might to ignore everyone around me, I caught more than one speculative glance as I filed out with the rest of the cattle, and it fed my paranoia. It took an effort to hold my head high and stalk across the parking lot to my car, pretending to be completely at ease and unconcerned.

"Charly!"

That voice traveled down my spinal column and turned my legs to jelly. I jolted to a halt because I was afraid my knees wouldn't hold me if I took another step. Thankfully, I was even with the hood of my car by that time. As causally as I could, I placed a hand on the hood to help support me as I turned a questioning look in the direction from which the voice had come.

Ryan was striding purposefully toward me across the parking lot. A quick survey of the area told me everything I needed to know. I had an audience.

I managed a polite smile of inquiry as he neared me and stopped a couple of feet away. "I've got a meeting," he said sounding vaguely irritated.

It took me several moments to try to decide the best way to react. "Oh," I finally responded non-committally.

He frowned, scrubbing a hand across the back of his neck as if trying to banish a tension headache and then ruffling his hair until it stood up in adorable spikes here and there. "They said it would be short, but you never know"

Ok, that was definitely a 'youthful' gesture, I decided, and then, too, the lighting was good enough now that I could see his face matched the gesture. My heart sank. I'd

been right. Twenty something.

I was so caught up in my age tabulation that I'd only just registered that he'd left his sentence hanging when he prodded me. "Guess I shouldn't ask you to wait, though?"

I managed a credible shrug of indifference if I did say so myself. "I don't have anything pressing. I could hang around a bit if you want?"

He rewarded me with a smile that made my heart go pitter patter. "Sure you don't mind?"

I always was a sucker. "Not at all," I found myself saying, resolutely dismissing all the chores I had waiting for me at home and all the hours I'd spent telling myself I wasn't going to let myself be charmed into making a complete fool out of myself.

It was just plain rude to offer somebody a ride and then leave them to their own devices, I told myself, just because it was a little bit of an inconvenience.

He scrubbed his hand through his hair again, his expression wry now. "Look ... if it takes longer than I expect, just go ahead. I'll catch a ride with someone else."

I nodded, wondering if I should wait or not as I got into my car. I didn't really like the idea of taking off after I'd offered to give him a ride home any more than I liked the notion of looking like a sap if I just waited and he came out to inform me he'd made other arrangements.

Dilemma--go or stay? I tapped the steering wheel while I wrestled with the pros and cons and finally picked up my notebook to study the 'work in progress' that he'd critiqued for me. *Was* that position possible, I wondered, trying to picture it in my mind? It wasn't easy. The classic 'missionary' had been about the only position I'd ever actually tried. Occasionally, I'd gotten the 'masterful' position, but rarely, because my ex was usually in too much of a hurry to get his 'cookie' to have the patience to let me struggle for my own. We'd done sixty-nine even more rarely, because I just wasn't comfortable with having his face in my pussy and his half hearted attempts to get me off that way generally just made me want to scream with frustration.

Not that I'd ever told him, because I'd been taught to pander to the male ego.

Not that he'd minded telling me that I sucked at giving head which was the *main* reason we'd hardly ever done it, not because I didn't particularly care for it.

Shoving those thoughts to the back of my mind, I struggled to summon Hollywood's hottest love scenes--not that there were a lot that I could actually work with for an erotica. Then, too, I had to take into consideration that Hollywood dealt with fantasy as much as I did. They had to make it look hot, realistic, and fantastic, but that didn't mean it was actually doable. They were playacting.

I was so caught up in my mental acrobatics I nearly had heart failure when the passenger door was abruptly snatched open and the young god planted his ass in my ragged car seat. "Thank god that's over ... Did I scare you?"

It must have been written all over my face. I chuckled shakily and lied. "No, no!"

He gave me a disbelieving look.

Shoving my notebook in the crevice between the seats, I busied myself with a search for the car keys. "Startled me a little," I muttered.

"I thought you'd be long gone."

Having managed to find the key at last and ring the ignition hole, I sent him a startled glance. "You did?" I frowned, wondering how long I'd been 'waiting' for him

and noticed for the first time that I felt cramped from having been sitting so long.

"I'd asked Carl for ride, but I saw you were still here"

I stared at him. Carl? My supervisor, Carl Johnson? Oh god! Why hadn't I realized that 'Mr. Holt' was management? Peons were *not* supposed to associate with management!

I was going to get canned if they even *thought* I was trying to get above myself!

Thankfully, I was too preoccupied with my nightmare to think about the car not starting because the damned thing was psychic and usually refused to go at the most inconvenient times possible ... like when I was sitting in a vacant lot with a man above my pay grade and completely off limits!

The engine caught and expelled a cloud of smog from its tailpipe directly onto Mr. Johnson's windshield I discovered when I reached to adjust my rearview mirror.

He turned on his windshield wipers, glaring at me through the cloud of noxious smoke.

Long dong, I discovered, was searching his pockets. He pulled out a folded piece of paper and gave me an address. "I hope that isn't too much out of the way for you."

I felt my jaw slide to half mast. A multitude of thoughts skittered through my brain all at the same time, colliding like a multi-car pile up.

He didn't know he was my neighbor.

What were the odds, I thought, fighting a bout of hysteria?

Act surprised, I wondered, staring at him with a frozen look?

Mentally, I kicked myself, trying to jog my brain into some semblance of functioning. Of course he didn't know! I'd seen him. He hadn't seen me. Why hadn't I considered before that this could be *really* awkward?

He frowned. "You don't know the street?"

I could feel the blood surging into my cheeks like a flashing neon sign. "Uh ... actually"

I was making him uncomfortable. Even as disordered as my mind was, I could see that.

"If it's out of the way"

I managed a chuckle. "It isn't," I said firmly, putting the car in drive and gripping the steering wheel with both hands.

"You're sure?"

"Positive," I managed, knowing I should probably just go ahead and confess that I was his neighbor. Somehow, though, I just couldn't seem to get it out, probably because I was suffering guilt over the fact that I'd been leering at him out of my bedroom window the night before like the pathetic pervert I was.

He looked confused when I pulled into my driveway, glancing from his house to mine and finally at me as I killed the engine--possibly because it was a cookie cutter neighborhood and all the houses were virtually identical, but probably because he could see that the driveway I'd pulled in to wasn't his.

"That was easy," he finally said. "You missed my driveway, though."

I gave him a weak smile. "I rang mine, though."

He stared at me while that slowly sank in, his expression quizzical. "You're joking?"

"I'm as serious as a heart attack," I responded, parroting one of my ex's favorite

phrases and then wishing I hadn't because it only seemed to emphasize the fact that I'd lost the ability to think for myself.

He chuckled, making no attempt to get out. Instead, he twisted in the seat to face me more fully. "You're serious?"

"I've got the key and everything." The 'everything' being the mortgage that was pressing down on me like a huge boulder and threatening to crush the life out of me. I'd actually thought, a lot, about putting it up for sale, but my pride wouldn't let me. I knew my ex was just waiting for me to 'admit' I was as useless as he'd said I was and couldn't do anything on my own.

Or do anything right.

We'd started out with the idea of having an 'old fashioned' marriage. I was going to be a housewife and soccer mom and he was going to be the bread winner. The nest had remained empty, though--my fault, of course--so I'd finally gone to a tech school to learn a skill and taken a job until 'it' happened, except it never had.

"We still on for tonight?"

I blinked, trying to recall my brain from Neverland. "Sure," I said a little doubtfully.

"You don't sound very sure."

I wasn't. I was still distinctly uneasy about the prospect and even more uneasy about the possible consequences than before now that I knew he was in a management position at the company. "I wasn't sure you were serious."

A slow smile curled his lips and then spread into a full fledged grin. "Eightish?"

I thought it over. "Unless you want to come for dinner?"

He looked interested. "Home cooking?"

I smiled. "Absolutely."

"You really cook?"

I laughed. "I really do."

He shook his head, his expression one of wonder. "A woman of many talents. If you're sure you feel like it after a long day at the office?"

He was so polite! And he actually seemed to *want* me to show off my domestic skills. I glanced at my watch. "You'll have to reserve judgment until you've tried my cooking. Around seven?"

"Good deal."

It was nothing short of amazing how energized I felt! Ordinarily, it was all I could do to drag myself in at the door in the evenings. It was almost ... a date! And I hadn't had one in forever! My mind was already whirling with possibilities as I dashed inside and hurried to the kitchen to search for something to cook that would make a good impression.

My cupboards weren't exactly well stocked. I hadn't cooked for anyone but myself in ages, but I lucked out and managed to find the ingredients for lasagna. I set to work at once without waiting to change although, ordinarily, I wouldn't have considered going *near* the kitchen in any of my office clothes for fear I'd end up with a stain I couldn't get out. As nervous as I was it was nothing short of a miracle that I managed to get the lasagna in the oven without mishap.

As soon as I'd shoved it into the oven, I dashed upstairs to bathe and primp. By the time I'd gotten out of the shower, though, I was starting to come down from my high.

It wasn't a date, and I was going to look really pathetic if I greeted him at the door dressed as if I thought it was. Reluctantly, I abandoned the plan to wow him and decided to go casual. A new problem arose when I discovered my jeans had shrunk.

"Damn it to hell!"

I lay down on the bed and managed to get them fastened and zipped but one look in the mirror at the mushroom of flesh oozing from the waistband was enough to kill the last of my enthusiasm. After staring at my reflection glumly for several moments, I tried deep knee bends to loosen the fabric a little. It helped, but the overflow didn't magically vanish.

"Fuck!" I muttered, using my new favorite word--out loud.

My mother would have passed out if she'd heard me use it. I think that's one of the reasons I really liked it.

Stripping off the jeans, I fought the urge to weep and searched my chest of drawers for a pair of knit pants and a top. I was so depressed by then, though, that it hardly seemed worth the extra effort to try to find something pretty.

I stared at myself critically when I'd dressed, wondering if there was any point in doing my face. There didn't really seem to be except for the fact that I had coon eyes from the shower. Trudging back into the bathroom, I used lotion to remove the mascara smeared around my eyes and let it go at that.

At least he couldn't get the idea that I was laying in wait for him like a spider waiting to pounce!

I rushed down the stairs to the tune of the doorbell ringing and the timer going off on the stove. Dashing to the door, I snatched it open, greeted my neighbor distractedly, and raced into the kitchen.

"Something smells good," Ryan said from the door of the kitchen just as I pulled the rack out of the oven.

I studied the slightly over-browned top of the lasagna with a sense of doom. "Hopefully it'll taste good," I said, doubting it. "It's been a while since I cooked," I added apologetically as I removed the dish from the oven and set it on top of the stove, trying not to think about the side salads I'd planned to have chilling and the perfectly set table.

My dining table had become a 'catch all', however, and I hadn't gotten around to cleaning it off. I'd been too busy crushing the last of my ego by staring at myself in the mirror.

Fighting the urge to flop on the floor and wail like an infant, I pasted a false smile on my lips and glanced around the kitchen instead of meeting his gaze. "Hope you don't mind eating in the kitchen."

He chuckled. "Not if you'll feed me. I'm starving," he said cheerfully.

His easy manner soothed some of my ruffled feathers. "Good! My mother always says the key to making people think you're a really good cook is to make sure they're starving when they get to the table."

He chuckled again at my attempt at humor. "Smart woman. Sounds like something my mother would've said."

I didn't miss the 'would have', but I didn't feel comfortable asking him about it.

The lasagna, to my relief, wasn't half bad. It wasn't exactly stellar, either, but he didn't seem to mind. He polished off about half and I had to wonder where he put it.

There wasn't an inch of flab on that body anywhere--I hardly ate anything and I was running to fat if my jeans were any indication, and I was pretty sure they were.

I had the metabolism of a slug, I thought glumly.

He made a face of such ecstasy when he took his first bite I knew he had to be exaggerating. "Good!" he pronounced when he'd swallowed.

I resisted the urge to fish for more compliments. "Thanks."

"You live here long?"

I looked at him in surprise, partly because I wondered if he was really interested or just trying to be polite. "The house? About five years I guess."

"I meant in Middlebrook."

"Oh. My whole life."

He lifted his dark brows as if encouraging me to elaborate. When I didn't, he prodded. "You like it here?"

I hadn't really thought about it. I shrugged and told him as much.

He gave me an assessing look when he'd polished off the portion he had in his plate.

"More?"

He nodded, watching me while I cut him a second helping. "Have you always been such a chatterbox?"

I looked at him blankly. It took me several moments to realize he was teasing. Pleasure filled me when it dawned on me he was. "I'm pretty sure," I replied with a faint smile instead of telling him I hadn't really had anybody to talk to for a very long time. Anyway, my ex hadn't been much for conversation. He hadn't been interested in any of the things I was, or hearing how my day had been ... hadn't actually been interested in me, I realized, at all. Little by little I'd begun to retreat into my own world, spending most of my time in my head with the characters of whatever my current project was even when he was around. I don't suppose I'd ever been much for talking if it came to that.

"How about you?" I asked after a moment, realizing I needed to make an effort to help him carry on polite conversation. "I guess you just moved here?"

He nodded. "Moved back, actually. I lived here when I was kid, up until I finished middle school. I don't remember you, though," he finished, tilting his head slightly and studying me as if trying to jog his memory.

I reddened. I did *not* want to get into a discussion that would pin down my age! "I usually had my nose in a book. I don't think very many people remember me."

"See, that's the part that puzzles me. I always went for the brainy chicks and I had you pegged for one right off."

I blinked repeatedly while I tried unsuccessfully to assimilate that. "You did?"

He chuckled, not looking the least bit repentant. "I needed *somebody* to do my homework for me."

My jaw went slack. "You"

"Yeah, I was an asshole."

I went back to blinking. "Now I remember you!" I said, teasing.

He looked surprised. "You do?"

I laughed. "No. I was kidding."

He reddened, but laughed with me. "You have a nice laugh. You should do it more often."

I shook my head instead of answering and got up to clean. To my surprise, he got up to help. “So ... this fascination with books, that’s how you got into writing?” he asked as we finished up.

I thought it over. “Actually, I don’t think so. I loved stories before that, before I could read. My grandmother used to tell me all sorts of stories about ‘the old days’, people she’d known, places she’d visited, things that had happened when she was growing up and her kids. She just had a way of relating events in her life that fascinated me. She was interested in people--what made them tick--She would’ve made a great psychologist.”

We moved into the living room after we’d finished clean up. He settled in a chair across from me, sprawled more like, looking perfectly at ease. I wished I could say the same. I’d relaxed a good bit while we were chatting, but I began to tense again the moment we left the kitchen, thinking about his offer to help me ‘choreograph’ my love scenes. Right up until that moment, I hadn’t given a lot of thought to how he meant to ‘help’. I suppose I’d just been too bowled over by his looks ... by everything ... to wrap my mind around the root of the connection.

I wished I hadn’t thought of ‘root’ at that particular moment because he was sprawled in the chair across from me, his legs splayed, and my gaze went right to his crotch, or more specifically, the bulge there.

He saw it, too. I could tell by the slow grin that created enticing laugh lines in his handsome face, making him look even more appealing, and the way he began to slowly wave his knees back and forth. “Where’s your notebook?” he asked, his voice changing inflection subtly in a way that sent a tingling warmth through me.

Chapter Three

Unfortunately, it also sent a shaft of uneasiness through me and I was pretty sure that was reflected in the wide eyed look I sent him. “Upstairs. I guess we need it. I should have thought about that,” I said shakily, shooting to my feet.

He followed me out of the living room and up the stairs. Panic flooded me, but to save my life I couldn’t think of anything to deter him that didn’t sound horribly rude. This, I thought a little hysterically, was how people became victims. They were so conditioned in acceptable social behavior that, even when they felt uncomfortable, they clung to it, unable to bring themselves to behave ‘unacceptably’. Most people were so fearful of creating an embarrassing scene, they couldn’t even bring themselves to scream for help when they needed it.

With a strenuous effort, I fought down the hysteria. He hadn’t behaved in any way at all that hinted at danger. I was just scaring myself.

Nancy knew he’d shown an interest in me even if she didn’t know all the details, and he knew Nancy did. He couldn’t have anything diabolical in mind, I assured myself.

A thought dawned on me abruptly that hadn’t occurred to me before. Why, I had no clue, except that I was clueless period!

He’d read my erotic story! He must think I was a ... hot mama!

Oh god!

Little did he know how far that was from the truth!

I was practically a throw back! I had almost no experience with men at all, certainly not sexually.

It was almost worse to think of him expecting fireworks and having an uncomfortable encounter with a cringing pseudo-virgin!

Breathe! I commanded myself when I discovered I was huffing as if I’d run a marathon.

The skin prickled all over me, but mostly up and down my back as I became less absorbed in myself and more aware of his nearness behind me. I threw him a frightened smile over my shoulder as I grasped the doorknob to my room. I’m sure it looked more like a grimace than a smile. “I’d sort of thought we would discuss this downstairs,” I said shakily. “The room’s a mess.”

His dark brows rose. “I thought I was going to help choreograph the scenes? They took place in the bedroom, didn’t they?”

My jaw sagged. “Oh,” I managed, wrenching the doorknob finally and pushing the door open, my imagination running wild as it finally sank in that he had meant that he

would ‘act out’ the scenes ... with me. Oh god! Why hadn’t I realized that before? It was disconcerting enough to consider *discussing* placement of body parts with a man that looked like Ryan, whom I hardly knew. But I’d thought I could pull that off--just view it sort of clinically. No way was I going to be able to go through the motions and manage any sort of objectivity.

A wave of dizziness swept over me as we entered my room, and I thought for several horrifying moments that I was going to faint from lack of oxygen--or maybe it was too much air? I was hyperventilating.

I was too embarrassed to draw attention to it by sticking my head in a paper bag, or sitting down and putting my head between my knees. Instead, I wilted gratefully onto the edge of the bed and reached for the notebook I’d tossed there earlier.

Instead of sitting down beside me, he strolled to the window and looked out. “This is almost directly across from my bedroom,” he said idly. “I wasn’t too crazy about how close the houses had been built together.”

My eyes widened. Inside I cringed. My office *was* directly across from his bedroom, but I wasn’t about to volunteer that information. Abruptly, I was glad we’d come to my bedroom instead of going to my office. He might have begun to suspect that *he* was my inspiration if he’d seen how close that room was to his bedroom.

“Really?” I said, trying to sound off handed about the remark while I flipped frantically through my notes. “Which one did you think didn’t sound possible?”

He crossed the room and took the notebook from me, studying the pages with a faint frown and then stabbed at the page with one finger. “I’ve never tried this myself, but it sounds a little improbable.”

I took the notebook back and tried to read that segment, but he pulled it from my hands and tossed it to the bed. Grasping one hand, he pulled me off the bed, looked around speculatively and pulled me toward one wall, shoving me up against it. I stared at him in wide-eyed dismay as he caught my wrists and lifted my limp arms, manacling my wrists to the wall on either side of my head.

He leaned in. I plastered myself against the wall, putting as much distance between us as possible, which was a fraction of an inch. Agonizingly conscious of his pelvis lightly brushing my belly, I struggled to catch my breath. “This seems doable,” I said shakily.

“Not the way you described it,” he countered, easing back slightly. “You described the guy as being over six foot. I’m six foot two.”

“Really?” I said uneasily, tipping my head back to look up at him. It was a mistake, because he hadn’t moved back as much as I’d thought and he was looking down at me and the movement brought us almost nose to nose. When I sucked in my breath, I brought his into my lungs. A wave of heat and a fresh ripple of dizziness went through me.

“And the woman is about five two. About your height, I’d guess.”

I swallowed with an effort. I was closer to five four but it didn’t seem worth arguing over an inch and a half. “And?”

Instead of responding verbally, he leaned in again and I could feel his genitals digging into my belly. I sucked in my stomach. “We don’t match up,” he murmured huskily.

“Match up?” I echoed, scrambling to recall what I’d written and completely

unable to think about anything except for the fact that I could feel his cock growing hard.

“Maybe on your toes?”

“My toes?” I parroted blankly, but obeyed like an automaton, my throat closing like there was a fist around it as I felt his erection shift further down my belly at the movement.

He held me like that for a long, long moment. “Maybe if she was taller, or he was shorter?”

“Different heights,” I repeated obediently, having no idea what I was talking about anymore, my voice sounding strangled even to my own ears.

“Because obviously it wouldn’t work exactly the way you described it.” He dipped his head lower, until his lips were little more than a hair’s breadth from mine. They began to tingle, either from his proximity or the heated caress of his breath, or both.

“Is it warm in here to you? Because it feels a little warm to me,” I babbled mindlessly, trying to redirect my mind from the cock digging into my lower belly like a firebrand.

His lips curled faintly. He released his hold on my wrists. Instead of moving away, though, he slipped one hand down to cup it beneath my buttock and reached down to grasp my opposite thigh, hauling it upward and shoving me up the wall until his cock was pressing almost brusingly against my cleft. The instinctive fear of falling brought both of my legs to his waist and my arms around his shoulders before I even had time to consider what I was doing. He dropped his head until he was breathing against my neck, his hot, moist breath sending shivers along my skin.

“This could work,” he murmured, just grazing my sensitized skin with the tip of his nose as he curled his hips into me. “Except I can’t reach your breasts, not to suck on your nipples anyway.”

If I hadn’t been so far gone, that comment might have embarrassed me. As it was, I searched my mind frantically for some way to offer them to him and finally realized with a great deal of disappointment that he was probably right.

Along about the time I came to that conclusion, I realized that the tremors I was feeling weren’t entirely mine. Sudden self-consciousness cooled me with the thought that it was probably the strain of holding my weight up rather than *his* ardor that was causing the tremors I could feel running through him. “I should probably write this down,” I said abruptly, dropping one leg and searching for the floor with my extended toes. I couldn’t find it until he bent slightly.

Uncomfortable, now, with the realization that I’d been wrapped around him like a vine, I dragged my arms from his shoulders as my feet finally found solid foundation. Unfortunately, that was when I discovered my legs had acquired the consistency of gelatin. I had to lock my knees to keep from continuing the downward slide until I sprawled limply at his feet. Throwing a tight smile in the general direction of his face without making eye contact, I slipped away from him and headed for my notebook.

He followed me. Taking the notebook from my shaking hands, he dropped it onto the floor, sprawled beside me and then caught my waist, dragging me to him. I was too stunned to do more than gape up at him when he rolled the two of us until I was on bottom and he lay on top of me, looking down at me quizzically.

“You haven’t had much experience, have you?”

It took me several moments to figure out what he was talking about. My brain

was so much mush by now he might have been speaking a foreign language for all the words meant to me at first. Once it finally jelled in my mind, I attempted a scoffing laugh. I didn't know why I wanted so badly to appear worldly and experienced, but I did. "I was married for *years!*"

His lips curled in that knowing smile that both charmed me and set my teeth on edge because I could tell he'd figured out that I was writing about something I knew next to nothing about. "Really? Me too."

He dipped his head and nuzzled my neck, freezing the breath in my chest. A jolt went through me when I felt his lips, ever so lightly, plucking at the tender skin there and then he traced a lazy circle with the tip of his tongue. "You taste good," he said huskily.

My heart couldn't decide whether to gallop or stop. It did both, alternating until I was convinced that any minute I'd have an aneurism from the uneven oxygen flow through my brain.

He lifted his head after a moment, shifting so that he could prop one elbow on the bed next to me and support his head in his hand. "So ... how do you feel about the three date rule?" he asked, his eyes narrowed on my face with lazy interest.

"Three date rule?" I asked blankly, completely at sea.

He chuckled huskily and I realized I'd given something away that I'd probably rather have not. His gaze slid over my face almost caressingly. "Woman, I want you so bad I can taste it."

I should have been shocked and appalled that he'd been so blunt. Instead, heat surged through me. My skin drew up in a prickling rush of sensation until it felt too tight for my body.

"I should go before I do something stupid. But," he murmured, leaning toward me to nibble teasingly at my lips, "I'm expecting the three date rule to apply between me and you--because I don't think I can handle more than that--and this is one."

I was in something of a state approaching catatonia as he led me downstairs to the door. Everything in me was screaming for satisfaction. I'd been teased until I was as jittery as a speed freak. I needed *more*.

I looked up at him with a lost, forlorn gaze, I knew, as he paused at the door to tell me goodnight, because I *was* feeling lost, wondering what had just happened. He stared at me for a long moment and finally leaned close. I didn't even hesitate when he paused, as if waiting to see if I was similarly inclined. I lifted to meet him.

There was nothing tentative about his kiss despite the fact that he'd seemed almost uncertain of his welcome. He dragged me into his arms and laid one on me that made every bone in my body go all rubbery and weak. I was hot and wet inside of two seconds. My heart went from fifty to light speed. If he'd started dragging my clothes off right then and there I'd have been helping him--the neighbors be damned.

It was all I could do to stand on my own when he released me. "Night Charly," he murmured, his voice a little hoarse.

I blinked, reluctantly loosening my grip on him as he pulled away. "Night Ryan," I managed to say as he went down the steps. As he left the walkway it dawned on me I'd forgotten to thank him. "Thank you for helping me with my research."

He stopped and turned to look back at me. After a moment, he shook his head and chuckled. "Any time, Charly."

Chapter Four

“What’s the ‘three date rule’?” I demanded of Nancy as soon as I’d made certain nobody was close enough to hear me.

Nancy gave me a glassy eyed look from her seat across the table and changed colors three times. I could see the wheels turning in her head. “You don’t know?”

That clued me that she did but I was impatient to hear the answer before someone settled close enough to hear the discussion and it irritated the pee out of me that she was wasting time in internal speculation. “Would I ask you if I did?” I responded testily, almost sorry now that I’d asked her. But who else could I ask? My mother, for crying out loud!

She licked her lips and leaned toward me across the table. “Where did you hear it?”

I gave her a look. “Do you know or not?”

She looked torn, not averse to telling me, but fearful she wouldn’t get the low down if she gave out the information without fishing for the dirt first. Finally, she shrugged. “It’s kind of like the old ‘first base, second base, third’ except warped, if you ask me. Or maybe warp speed would come closer to describing it. I can’t believe you haven’t heard it. Is that why you aren’t eating?” she finished with unerring accuracy.

“I’m dieting,” I said stiffly.

“But for who?”

She was almost shaking with excitement by now and I realized I didn’t exactly trust her. Of course, like me, she didn’t really have anyone else to talk to but that didn’t mean she’d be able to keep a juicy piece of office gossip to herself, or that she couldn’t find somebody to listen. “Me,” I responded irritably. “My jeans are getting tight.”

She settled back in her seat. “Fasting at your age is the worst thing you can do.”

She *looked* like somebody who knew dieting! I thought uncharitably.

“If you’re gaining it’s because your metabolism has slowed down and fasting is only going to make it worse.”

I resented the comment about my age. I hadn’t thought I was overly sensitive about it, but I’d been wrong before. Maybe I was wrong about her not knowing about dieting, too? A person could know something without actually putting it to practical use. Maybe I should look in to this metabolism thing?

At the moment I was far more interested in having her explain this three date thing, though. I wanted to be sure I understood it. “So ... you’re saying third base on the third date?”

She pursed her lips. "It's men. You know how they are anyway. So the young ones have this attitude these days. If a girl doesn't put out by the third date, they're off to greener pastures."

I was outraged. "You're not serious!"

She shrugged. "Where have you been? Dating's turned into a total rat race."

Stuck in the outer limits, I thought irritably, wondering how she could know so much about these things when she was older than me. Of course, she had kids, but I couldn't imagine them confiding things like that to 'mom'. Then again, maybe that was because I'd never been able to talk to my own mother about *anything* really useful. As uptight as I was, she was ten times worse. She was such a total prude I'd always had a hard time figuring out how she'd managed my conception, to be truthful. We'd never even gotten around to talking about menstruation. I'd had to find that out from snippets I overheard at school and it had still come as an unpleasant shock when it had happened to me.

"The three date thing is almost dated now, if you can believe it," Nancy continued after a moment. "I saw this special about it. Nowadays they have f-buddies, do hook-ups, and most horrifying of all, these groups of kids that are 'saving' themselves for marriage. Well, they do everything *but* the actual ... you know, saving that for marriage but doing things I would've been mortified if my *husband* had wanted me to do them."

OK, this was almost like talking to my mother. She'd told me just enough to shatter my nerves and nothing that was actually useful. What things? My imagination failed me. I was really going to *have* to buy some books on the subject! "What's a hook-up?" I whispered.

She snickered. "Think lovebugs."

I blinked several times. They say hello and hang up? As in one night stand? "That's not really new," I said uneasily, because it wasn't, but I had a feeling if they'd come up with such a casual term for it it was probably a bit more common now than it used to be. Furthermore, it wasn't something I'd ever tried, or even been tempted to try, first because I'd been married out of high school and never really sown any 'wild oats' as my father had referred to it, and secondly because it had taken me a long time to actually get used to 'doing it' with my husband. I couldn't imagine getting naked and naughty with a complete stranger.

So maybe that wasn't strictly true, I mentally amended, because I was pretty sure Ryan would've nailed me easily if he'd been so inclined. I'd been putty in his hands.

It had come as a jolt to find him waiting for me the next morning--which just showed I lived in a world all my own. He'd told me his car was in the shop. That was why he'd asked me to give him a ride home to start with--which meant he needed a ride to work, too. I'd been running late, as usual, this time because I'd spent my night tossing and turning because of him, too hot and bothered to sleep worth a damn.

It was probably just as well. I'd have been a bundle of nerves sharing the close quarters of my car with him after what had happened between us if not for my anxiety about getting to work on time. He seemed disinclined to talk, but I'd begun to suspect that was because he didn't want to distract me from my driving. He'd been working the passenger side brake all the way to work and since I didn't have 'oh shit' bars in my car, he'd gripped the arm rests tightly enough to leave permanent finger prints.

I had to say this for him, though. Unlike my husband, he hadn't spent the drive

directing me on when to change lanes, when to brake and slow, where to turn, and which parking space I should take once I got to the office.

I discovered when Nancy and I got up to return to work that he was sitting at the table with the 'chiefs'. I guessed he'd gotten the 'don't fraternize with the Indians' speech at the meeting the day before, or in orientation. He tried to catch my eye as I disposed of my cup, but I pretended I hadn't noticed.

At least, I thought he might have been. I'd caught the movement of his head turning in my direction. Since I refused to try to meet his eye, I couldn't really be sure he had.

It would've been a lie to say it didn't bother me. I knew there was a strict pecking order in the office. The 'gods on high' had decreed that there would be no fraternizing between employees because they didn't want any of us with our minds on flirtation when we were supposed to be dedicated to our tasks--which I could understand. I could even understand the 'class' system because of the sexual harassment laws that had finally been passed in response to years and years of complaints by women that they were being used as a private harem by their bosses and coerced into putting out just to keep their jobs.

As usual, too little, too late--that. There was a new breed of women out there. I might, personally, be living in the dark ages, but I was a people observer. What had once made women powerless had become power in the hands of the newest generation. That wasn't altogether new, of course, either. There'd always been women who used their bodies to get what they wanted. Now it was a force to be reckoned with, though, because there were more who did use it than who didn't. Now it was pay for play and the men knew the women would not only hold out without the pay, they could easily go elsewhere and get what they wanted. There was always a man somewhere desperate enough to get hold of a 'sweet young thing' to promise, and deliver, just about anything their sweet little hearts desired.

It didn't bother me ... not too much anyway. I would probably have admired it except for the fact that I didn't seem to have the commodity in hot demand--youth.

And except in this instance.

So I spent most of the day worrying. I was pretty sure I'd totally bombed at trying to pretend I was something I wasn't. I hadn't been in any condition to observe my own behavior, but I didn't think he'd been as afflicted as I was which meant he'd been in a much better position to notice things.

I was fairly certain that I'd flubbed my big break and he'd lost interest after discovering I wasn't a sex goddess.

The other side of the coin was no comfort either. Assuming he hadn't and meant to make good on the 'deal' he'd proposed, I'd set myself down squarely in one of those 'dirty little secrets' situations that I wasn't comfortable with. By day, I'd be invisible, a secret that had to be maintained to keep my job--I didn't delude myself into thinking the management would 'break it up' by firing him, even if I *had* been around longer. Peons like me were a dime a dozen, as disposable as a tissues. Brilliant young men like Ryan were highly desirable assets.

He was a highly desirable asset to me, too, but should I even consider something that would be so potentially disastrous for me--financially and emotionally?

By mid-afternoon I'd picked the situation apart from every conceivable direction and mentally examined every smile, look, and muscle twitch that I could recall.

Somewhere in the rounds an epiphany hit me.

Attitude was the key.

I'd been broadsided with a situation completely alien to me and I'd been busy trying to fit it neatly into familiar, deeply ingrained behavior. This wasn't possible. I had to look at it from an entirely new perspective.

I couldn't be a 'dirty little secret' unless that was the way I felt about it. It would be a *shared* secret for the sake of comfort and security for both of us because it wouldn't be comfortable for either of us if everyone in the office knew and snickered about it behind our backs.

Ryan wasn't talking about a relationship, not in the sense I thought of relationships, anyway. It was strictly physical and intended for nothing more than to assuage needs I had just like everybody else whether I'd ever actually acknowledged them or not.

I was a grown woman and answerable to no one but myself. My mother-- everyone else, lived their own lives. I was allowed to live mine the way I wanted, too.

And, as I understood the situation, I had an opportunity that I hadn't had before.

I could be wrong on all counts, of course, but I felt that I was finally on the right track here.

The suspicion nagged at me that I'd misinterpreted something somewhere along the line, but I had not imagined Ryan was aroused. He might be amusing himself at my expense, but there again, attitude was the key.

If I could keep my head and refused to look for signs of something more 'meaningful', if I could stick to the spirit of the game, I couldn't be hurt.

I had some doubts that I could. I very much feared that I was as ripe for an emotional wipe out as I was for sex, but I could at least try. I'd always been very good at pretending. All I had to do was convince myself I *was* the femme fatale in my story.

If I could carry it off, I would be saving face no matter what happened, and in the meanwhile I might actually get to have some fun for a change.

I'd never really understood the hoopla about sex, in all honesty. Everyone behaved as if it was tremendous fun, but ten years of marriage had only served to convince me they were lying. There'd been times when I'd actually enjoyed it, even looked forward to it. But as often as not it was annoying or inconvenient.

If anyone could make it exciting and wonderful, though, I was pretty sure Ryan could.

The pep talk I'd given myself actually sustained me in spite of the curve Ryan threw me that afternoon. I saw him as I clocked out. After a brief internal debate, I approached him. "Did you need a ride?"

He looked torn. "I was coming to look for you to tell you not to bother waiting. Another meeting, and I think this one'll last longer."

I hoped my disappointment didn't show. "Oh. Ok then. See ya!"

He frowned, glanced around and spied several other women dawdling in the hall, no doubt to see if they could catch anything, and merely nodded.

Trying to look completely unperturbed, I headed for my car and left. Paranoia, I wondered as I drove off, or had they really been hanging back to see if Ryan or I said or did something that would be fodder for gossip?

Maybe, maybe not, but it was safer to be paranoid, I decided, than not and find

out the hard way that I hadn't been imagining it. The only thing that could make working there worse was to have to work there and have people whispering and snickering behind my back.

Disappointment dogged me all the way home, but I determinedly ignored it, never allowing it to get a firm grip on me. The long, hot shower I took when I got home helped. I'd been jittery as hell ever since the night before, had hardly slept for the need thrumming through me, and all I really wanted to do was crash and sleep. After looking at my bed longingly for a few moments, though, I trudged downstairs and took care of the tasks I'd ignored the night before, fixed myself a sandwich and finally went back upstairs to my office to stare at my computer screen, my mind perfectly blank. Finally, I retrieved my notebook and propped it on the desk and started typing.

I'd gotten 'in' to the story again by the time I'd managed to decipher my almost illegible handwriting and commit the tale to electronics. Studying the scenes Ryan had questioned, I fought another round with my wayward libido, envisioned the two of us plastered against the wall the night before, and finally managed to shake the image and actually think.

I realized then that, although I'd fantasized about Ryan, I'd fallen back to actual experience when I'd started writing. My ex had only been about five nine, although he'd claimed variously to be anywhere from five ten to 'almost six foot', which meant he was less than a head taller than me and the 'fit' I'd described was comparable to him and me, not a woman my height with somebody as tall as Ryan.

Ryan had been right. This wasn't doable in that sense, for certain. I was still debating whether to change the guy's height and go with what I knew or try to figure out how to rewrite the descriptions given a totally different height ratio when I happened to glance out my window.

Ryan had just stepped out of the bath. It was almost a replay of the peep show I'd enjoyed before with one notable difference.

He looked straight at me and I wasn't sitting in the dark this time.

He looked disconcerted. Lifting a hand in my direction, he disappeared and I found myself staring at an empty window.

Heat crept into my face as I turned to stare at my computer again, struggling with the urge to giggle like a teenager. I was still struggling to throw off my embarrassment when I heard the doorbell.

My eyes widened. I don't know why it hadn't occurred to me that he might come over, but it hadn't. I looked down at myself in dismay. I'd thrown on a sloppy big t-shirt and a pair of knit slacks that were almost as baggy.

Consternation went through me but when the doorbell rang again I realized I didn't have time to do anything about it unless I opted for just ignoring the doorbell. Leaping from my chair as the chiming stopped the second time, I headed for the stairs.

He looked a little taken aback when I snatched the door open. Slowly his lips curled into a smile and his eyes began to gleam. "Hey."

I couldn't help it. I smiled back at him like a goof. "Hey, yourself."

"Can I come in?"

"Sure!" I stepped back to allow him in, embarrassed that I'd just stood like a dolt without saying anything while he slowly surveyed me from head to foot.

"I thought I'd invite you to dinner since you fed me last night."

“Oh,” I said, disappointed. “I had a sandwich a while ago.”

He looked disconcerted. “You could come with me anyway.”

It dawned on me that he was on foot since his car was still in the shop. “I could fix you something,” I offered.

He considered it a moment and then seemed to dismiss it with a shake of his head. “I can scrounge up something at my place.”

But that meant he was going to be leaving and he’d just gotten here.

“Come on. You can keep me company. I hate to eat alone,” he said, urging me toward the door. I was already outside before I realized I was barefooted.

“I should change, put some shoes on,” I said doubtfully.

“Don’t worry about it. It’s just going to be me and you.”

But that was exactly why I was worried about it. On the other hand, it was a little late to worry. He’d already looked me over thoroughly.

Dismissing it, feeling almost hedonistic since I hadn’t been outside barefooted in years, I allowed him to persuade me. I did a double take and stopped dead in my tracks as we entered his foyer, however, and I caught a glimpse of myself in the hall mirror.

I’d caught my hair up on top of my head when I went in to take my shower and had left it that way. It was sticking out all over the place. What really caught my attention, however, were my raccoon eyes. Oh god! No wonder he’d looked taken aback when I’d opened the door!

He’d come up behind me. He caught my shoulders in both of his broad palms, chuckling at my expression. “You look fine. Come on.”

I did *not* look fine! I looked like an escapee from a zombie movie! “I look like the wrath of god!” I exclaimed with a mixture of dawning anger and complete dismay.

He laughed outright at that. Dipping his head down, he nibbled along my neck causing a rash of goose bumps to leap to life all along one half of my body. “You look good and you smell even better. Maybe I’ll just nibble on you instead of the sandwich I was thinking about.”

It was almost enough to divert me.

Almost.

“Where’s the bathroom?”

He released me almost reluctantly and stepped back. “Under the stairs ... Or you can use mine. I think you know where it is.”

I’d already headed down the hallway, but that parting shot jolted me to a halt. He grinned at me and tapped my slackened jaw as he passed me on the way to the kitchen.

There were a lot of things in life that just puzzled me--like why did mascara migrate in the shower when it was supposed to be water proof and *was* if one actually tried to wash the damned stuff off? There was no lotion. I managed to get it cleaned up with soap and water, but got the f--ing soap in my eyes. By the time I emerged from the bathroom my eyes and my eyeballs were red.

Ryan studied me with frowning intensity when I appeared in the kitchen. “You ok?” he asked finally.

He thought I’d been weeping! I sighed. “I got soap in my eyes, but I’m fine.”

I could tell he wasn’t completely convinced. As sweet as it was that he seemed concerned that he might have upset me, I had no desire to encourage that line of thought. I’d spent most of the day trying to get myself into the role of ‘super woman’. I didn’t

want him to consider me a creature of no backbone.

Ignoring the searching look he sent me, I settled on a barstool and divided my time between watching him and looking around the kitchen. Boxes were everywhere. There were a half dozen stacked by the back door. I'd glimpsed at least that many more in the front room--no furniture except for a chair and big screen TV. No curtains on any of the windows yet, either.

I wondered if he'd moved in before and I just hadn't noticed because the windows were still bare, or if he'd only just moved as I'd first supposed.

"How's the book going?" he asked as he settled across from me.

"It's actually just a short story," I qualified. "But, OK, I guess. I figured out what was wrong. I'm just trying to decide if it'd be easier to go with what I know ... Well, actually, it would, I'm sure," I muttered, instantly sinking into the internal debate I'd been waging since I'd picked up the work again. I knew how important it was to suspend disbelief. Readers wanted to really get 'in' to the story and writers had to make that possible for them by making certain their story didn't contain flawed details that would totally throw them for a loop and make that impossible, carefully blending their imagination with reality. If I made my hero physically proportioned to my ex, I wasn't as likely to fuck up and describe something completely impossible, but I would run the risk of having the jerk pop into my mind at an inconvenient moment. And the only passion I could arouse for him was the urge to do something violent.

I wasn't writing a murder mystery, though, and the surest way to lose my 'hard on' was to think of my ex.

I discovered when I emerged from my brief mental vacation that Ryan was looking at me quizzically. It took a frantic search to recall my place in the conversation I'd allowed to lag. "The ... uh" I stopped, uncertain my confession would be received well. Finally, shrugging mentally, I decided to just point out the problem. "Events and scenarios in a story can be, and usually are, totally imagination, but, for the foundation and realistic details, an author has to go with what they know to keep from making a big time blunder that would ruin it for the reader."

I cast around in my mind when he merely lifted his brows questioningly.

"For instance choosing a place setting you're completely unfamiliar with. There are all sorts of little details you might throw into the story that are totally inaccurate if you choose to go exotic and everybody that read the story that *was* familiar with the place would know it. Instead of getting 'in' to the story, they'd be instantly diverted by the realization that you didn't know what you were writing about and then they'd have a hard time 'believing' the rest of it."

He was frowning at his food. I couldn't tell whether he'd discovered he'd spread a hair onto his bread with the mayo or was thinking over what I'd said, but he didn't look particularly happy. He didn't seem inclined to pursue it, though. He merely nodded, almost absently, and I relaxed fractionally.

I was just congratulating myself on my diplomacy, which I hadn't realized I had, when he fixed me with a look I couldn't interpret but that instantly made me tense all over. It was sort of speculation, desire, and determination all rolled together.

"So, what you're saying is you need to get familiar with new territory?"

Chapter Five

I gaped at him, wondering a little wildly if that was what I'd meant and how he'd come to that conclusion when I was pretty sure I hadn't been hinting in that direction at all. Was he just swifter on the uptake than I was? Was it that his mind was traveling in that direction anyway and he'd put it together? Or had I unconsciously been asking for experience?

Maybe I had at that. I couldn't be around the guy without my body humming and my mind drifting to erotic delights I hadn't yet experienced. The 'choreographing' session the night before had added fuel to the fire. I was working with half my mental capacity because at least half of my brain was totally focused on sex and I was no mental giant to start with.

I was still trying to decide how to answer that rhetorical question--I thought it was rhetorical--when Ryan finished his clean up and came to stand next to me. I got up when he grasped my hand and tugged, following him into his living room in a sort of daze.

"I thought we could watch a little TV together."

TV?

He pulled me into the oversized chair with him and flipped it into the recline position before I'd entirely decided whether I was comfortable wedged hip to hip with him. Dragging a remote from a convenient side pocket of the lounge, he resituated me so that I was sprawled across his lap and wielded the scepter.

The moans and gasps issuing from the big screen TV's speakers caught my attention immediately, diverting me from my discomfort to the screen. There in life size, were two people fucking like rabbits--or maybe dogs. She was bent over--something--He was pumping into her like a pile driver, his balls slapping her bare ass. I couldn't tell what she was bent over because it was a zoom shot and I couldn't see much besides pink pussy lips, hairy balls, and the glistening moisture on the veined cock sliding in and out of her. I'd never seen genitals in such ... glaring, unflattering detail, not even my own.

I stared at the screen with all the horrified fascination of someone watching a train wreck, feeling heat slowly creep into my cheeks. When I finally managed to unglue my eye balls and turned to look at Ryan's face, I saw his color was heightened, as well. He was looking distinctly annoyed.

"What is that?"

"Adult station," he responded tersely.

"They have *this* on TV?" Maybe I shouldn't have given up my cable?

"Not regular TV--the adult channels--Pay Per View. Damn it," he muttered,

looking as if he would say more. Apparently, he changed his mind. “You want to watch this?”

Did I? I was instantly torn. The prude in me wanted to vigorously deny any interest. The polite guest wanted to be agreeable. Curiosity that I couldn’t completely deny urged me to watch the ‘forbidden’, because I knew it was a porn movie, and I’d never seen one, and I had always wondered what the draw was. “Do you?” I asked cautiously.

He shrugged. “I’m not really in to spectator sports,” he responded dryly.

So why was the TV already tuned in to this when he turned it on, I wondered? Pay per view meant it had to be purchased. Or was it some sort of special promotion where they gave out free days just to encourage buyers? “Oh, well,” I hedged, deciding I didn’t want to go there. If he actually *did* like watching them but didn’t want to admit it

....

Apparently that settled it, but not the way I expected. He dropped the remote and dragged me back so that I was leaning against his chest instead of perched on his lap tensely. I was still tense, but I was inclined to enjoy snuggling.

He smelled absolutely divine and felt even better.

Besides, he couldn’t see my face if my head was on his shoulder.

The neighbors could, I discovered when I averted my gaze from the cum shot and discovered I was staring at a dark, curtainless window.

It was night, though. Everyone would be inside, going about their own business.

In any case, I realized I didn’t particularly care. If they were revolted, they could close their curtains.

There didn’t seem to be much of a plot. The woman was pretty, and built like a brick shit house--as my ex would’ve described such a perfect body--and the guy was what I would have termed a dog--except hung like the proverbial horse. Obviously, this was for guys, unless the women were just supposed to be so bowled over by that magnificent cock they had eyes for nothing else, because the guy it was attached to was completely unappealing.

The woman couldn’t act. She simpered and posed and begged for more, licking her lips until I was surprised they weren’t chapped.

Ryan might or might not have liked watching others cavort, but he was hard when he dragged me against him, pinning his cock between my hip and his belly. He shifted me again after a moment and I politely ignored his discomfort--or tried to. It was hard to get my mind off of his erection even while I wondered whether the female on the screen was turning him on or me.

I stared down at the bulge in his pants surreptitiously, chanting ‘seize the day’ in my disordered mind and trying to get up the nerve to pet it.

The longer I sat on his lap while he, almost idly, stroked one large hand along my back the hotter I was.

Fuck the three day rule! I was ready now! The walls of my pussy were clapping together in a ‘here boy, come to dinner’ fashion that was hard to ignore.

He turned his head to look down at me. I looked up questioningly. For several heartbeats we merely stared at one another. Tipping his head, he drifted closer. I wasn’t the least bit conflicted. I tipped my head in the other direction and offered my lips, wondering if the kiss the night before had been as fabulous as I’d thought, or it was just a

fluke of the moment.

If it was, I was still in receptive mode. A cloud of steam seemed to rise up between us as his hot mouth covered mine, as he thrust his tongue between my parted lips. A shot of one hundred proof vodka couldn't have annihilated my senses any more completely. Heat speared straight through my core and wafted outward, warming everything. My skin seemed to tighten, the fine down all over my body lifting. My mind clouded. Awareness seemed to shrink to focus only on the heat and taste of him and the feel of his tongue stroking mine. The rush of blood and our ragged breaths filled my ears until the moaning and grunting on the TV were a distant, barely recognizable background noise.

Dimly, I realized his stroking hand had found its way beneath my clothes. He stroked upward to where my bra strap would've been if I'd been wearing one. I didn't realize it was a search until he rolled onto one hip, shifting me from his lap and pressing me into the corner of the chair. His hand slipped from my back with the move, drifted up my rib cage, and settled over one breast. The tip instantly responded, tightening into an almost painful, hard little knot and pressing against his palm, craving attention. Another wave of heat rolled over me as he gently massaged the breast he held.

As good as it felt, I couldn't get my mind off of his joy stick. I wanted, in the worst sort of way, to mount it immediately to assuage the deep ache inside of me. It wasn't until a *lot* later, though, that I was able to consider that uncharacteristic, almost primal urge and realize how very unlike me it was to want to go straight for the punch line. Ordinarily, foreplay would have had to be really extensive, I was sure, to get me to that point--certain because I never had before.

Ryan was like nothing I'd ever experienced, though. He was a total turn on. All he had to do was look at me a certain way and I was already simmering. A little bit of touchy/feely and I was about ready to cum without any further ado.

Either he didn't get the message, or he was playing by his own rules and he was determined not to be rushed. He pushed my shirt up above my breasts and studied them, stroking first one and then the other, plucking at my tender nipples until I was a mindless bundle of raw nerve endings, but otherwise remaining almost distant.

After a few moments, he pulled away, studied me a long moment and finally pulled his shirt off and discarded it.

I commenced to licking my lips like the celluloid sex bunny on his TV, because my mouth watered at the sight, which, impossibly, looked better up close than it had from my window. I wanted to lick and suck on every inch of him ... maybe twice or three times. The same thought must have been running through his mind, because he grasped my shirt once he'd discarded his and tugged at it. It didn't occur to me even fleetingly to object. I lifted my arms for him to remove it.

When he'd tossed it aside, he stroked his hands over my upper body until I was panting so hard it ate up the oxygen in my brain and made me dizzy. He leaned down after a few moments of teasing me unmercifully with his fingertips and, compressing my breasts between us, covered my mouth again in a kiss that very quickly had me writhing beneath him in desperation. The feel of his hard chest pressing against my breasts was wildly exciting and my movements only increased the pleasurable thrill of feeling his skin against my own.

I sucked his tongue as he stroke the tender inner surfaces of my mouth, feeling

one heady rush after another as I absorbed the intimate taste and feel of him. It made me burn to feel his cock thrusting into me even more, in my mouth, spearing through my channel. I couldn't decide which I wanted more ... just more of him, all of him.

When he broke the kiss at last and lifted his head, I could see he was as fevered with need as I was by the drawn, taut lines of his face and the feverish glitter of his eyes. I saw doubt there, too, reluctance.

I followed him when he leaned away to catch his breath, regain his grip on his control. No way was I allowing him to stop now. Surprise flickered in his eyes briefly as I moved to straddle his lap and then his eyes glazed with heat as I rode him, rocking back and forth across his groin, his hard cock nestled against my cleft. He reached between us, slipping his hands down the front of my pants to cup my sex. He sucked in a shaky breath as his finger parted my nether lips and found my hot, damp core.

"God, baby! You're so hot and wet," he muttered huskily.

An understatement if I ever heard one. I was on fire, single minded in my pursuit of mounting that rock hard shaft currently nestled against my cleft. My pants and his were both in the way, though, and neither of us had enough brain power left to figure out how to get rid of the barriers without breaking contact.

I dedicated a fraction of my mental powers to the problem and finally came up with the unwelcome conclusion that it defied a solution short of ripping the crotch from the pants. His wouldn't be a huge problem. I could just drag them down and mount his cock.

Leaning against him, I gnawed the edge of jaw, his neck and ear while I struggled to get rid of my pants one handed. They were loose enough it was no great problem to get them as far as my thighs but there I met my Waterloo. I had a knee on either side of his hips and I couldn't get the damn things off my knees without a real fight.

I nearly rolled out of the chair in my struggle to get just one leg free of the things. We were both sweating and gasping as if we were suffocating by the time I managed it, but triumph filled me as I succeeded and dove for the gold, shoving one hand down the front his pants and wrapping my fingers around his engorged member.

He grunted, with a mixture of pain and pleasure, I feared, and reached between us to unfasten his jeans and unzip them. The moment I unearthed his rod I rammed it home and began struggling to engulf it, impaling myself on his shaft with the grunting and heaving of the truly desperate.

I think we both realized at about the same moment that this was going to be less than satisfactory. I'd shoved my panties out of the way, but they were still cording both of us and, as big as the chair was, it still wasn't big enough for me to get his cock as deeply inside as I needed it.

He grabbed the crotch of my panties with both hands and ripped it, solving the first problem. Hooking an arm behind my hips to support me, he guided first one leg and then the other over the arms of the chair. It was still awkward, but I shuddered with delight as I sank, finally, over his cock until he was so deep I could hardly catch my breath.

I sank my teeth into the meat of his shoulder as we began the awkward humping, lurching attempt to find a rhythm that was all the chair allowed for. It was almost more of a tease than an assuagement for either of us. Briefly, it entered my mind to move to the floor, but I was too close to consider it with any real seriousness. The deep massage was

wonderful. Within moments I felt my body soaring toward its peak. I groaned as I felt the first twitching spasms of the muscles along my channel.

I heard him grinding his teeth as he felt my muscles clench around him, milking him. "I can't hold it, baby," he ground out.

A shaft of excitement went through me at his words. They pushed me over the edge and I uttered a mournful, keening cry of rapture as I climaxed so hard I felt consciousness hanging by a thread. Light and darkness flickered inside my mind as I came explosively.

He uttered a choked sound that was part growl, part grunt, tightened his arms around me so hard several bones along my spine popped and drove upwards in a series of short thrusts as his body gave up his seed.

We melted limply together as the convulsions passed, panting for breath.

Sanity returned slowly, accompanied by twinges of pain from the awkward, cramped position. My mind, treacherous thing that it was, began a mental inventory of the situation, vividly reproduced an image of my position in my mind--the clothes scattered here and there and bunched around one leg--and concluded that I'd just participated in the most animalistic coupling of my entire life. Embarrassment, of course, followed that estimation of the situation.

Mortified, I didn't even want to guess what Ryan's thoughts were on the matter.

This was only our second 'date' and I'd just torn half his clothes off and mounted him! More accurately, pulled his cock from his pants and mounted him. I could feel his jeans zipper digging into my upper thigh. We hadn't even undressed like civilized people or found a bed to copulate in!

He shuddered, dragging in a deep, steady breath at last. "That was ... wild," he murmured, amusement threading his voice.

I couldn't tell from that comment what he thought about my behavior--it wasn't condemning, exactly, but the amusement bothered me. "Mmm," I responded non-committally, stalling for time and trying to decide what face Charly was going to be wearing for the occasion. I wanted desperately just to escape, but I wasn't about to flee. I had to put a good face on this, I reminded myself.

Charly, free spirit. Charly, woman of the world--slut extraordinaire and completely comfortable with that self-image.

"Are you all right?" he asked after a moment, apparently having tumbled to the fact that I was tense even though I was still draped over him like a shawl.

"Mmmhmm," I murmured, still trying to decide whether I could manage to act off hand about the fact that I'd jumped him.

"You aren't mad because I didn't use a condom?" he said a little uneasily.

Condom? "Oh Fuck!" I bounced off him so fast it was as if I'd been catapulted from the chair. My pants dropped down to my ankle as I hit the floor. Grabbing them, I shoved the other foot in and yanked them up almost to my chin, looking around a little frantically for the top.

"I'm safe. Swear to god!"

I sent him a panicked look. Safe as in how? I wondered, trying to remember when I'd last taken any birth control pills. A year? At the very least! I was too damned old to do anything this stupid!

Not that there'd seemed any reason in the world to take the damned things! I'd

tried for *years* to get pregnant and no enchilada. The only reason I'd gotten on them at all was because the break up of my marriage had seemed to indicate the need for a safety net ... just in case I wasn't as infertile as I thought and I might get the opportunity to get laid.

Then I hadn't, and the damned pills, besides making me slightly psychotic, had also made me gain weight and I'd figured--fuck it! I didn't need the aggravation.

One thing I knew about Murphy's Law, though, was that a person could count on everything going wrong that could go wrong. I killed the urge to laugh a little hysterically.

"I was trying to put one on when you climbed in my lap," he pointed out, obviously irritated now.

I sent him another frozen look as I found my shirt at last and thrust my head through the neck. Anger began to displace my panic.

Right! I thought. Blame it on me!

Ok, so maybe it *was* my fault. Condoms were the furthest thing from my mind at that moment. I'd been married forever. "Hey, don't sweat it!" I managed at last. "I'm a big girl. This was fun ... really. But I need to get home now." Where I can have a nervous break down without an audience.

I was crawling around on the floor searching for my shoes for a good five minutes before I remembered I'd come off without shoes.

Barefoot and pregnant instantly popped into my mind.

"See you tomorrow," I said breezily as I headed for his front door.

He followed me to the front door, hitching his jeans over his hips instead of fastening them. I stared at his flat belly with a mixture of renewed hunger and revulsion--aimed at me, because I wanted to jump him all over again.

"We should talk," he said as he grabbed my arm and pulled me to a halt in the doorway.

"Not now," I said absently, having abruptly remembered that I'd heard the infamous 'morning after' pill had finally been made available in the U.S. "I've got something I need to do."

He let me go. I was in too much of a panic at that moment to even attempt to interpret the emotions evident on his face. I couldn't think of anything except making a run to the local pharmacy. Fortunately, I realized as I dashed into my house that I was not really decent for the excursion. Dashing upstairs, I stripped down, bathed and changed into something less slovenly, slipped a pair of shoes on, grabbed my purse and headed to town.

Four pharmacies later, my nerves completely shattered, I found myself facing a smug faced twenty something year old across the pharmacy counter. "The store does carry them, but it's against my beliefs to sell them."

My jaw slid to half mast. "What?"

"It's against my religion. The courts ruled that I have a right to object and to refuse to sell anything contrary to my beliefs."

Fury slowly usurped my shocked disbelief. "Against ...? Who the fuck died and made you god, you sanctimonious, self-righteous bitch?" I growled, resisting the urge, just barely, to leap across the counter and choke her until her eyeballs popped out.

Either the language, or the murder in my eyes, unnerved her. She reeled back as

if I'd slapped her. "I'll call security."

Resisting the urge to inform her that I could rip her head off and shit down her neck before the security could get there, I whirled on my heel and stalked out of the store.

I stood outside fuming for a while, trying to get a grip.

Finally, I got in the car and drove home, reflecting that there was never any easy way out of 'totally fucked up'.

Chapter Six

Somewhere in the middle of the night I finally stopped wrestling with my personal demons long enough to rehash the episode from a different perspective. A cold sweat engulfed me as I finally faced another possibility that hadn't occurred to me before.

I'd had unprotected sex and I had more to worry about than the old fashioned baby and no husband thing that had first hit me between the eyes.

He'd sworn he was safe. I had no reason at all to believe that, though. I hardly knew him. What I did know was that every woman in the office was panting over him. Sure he *pretended* to be oblivious, but he looked too damned good not to be a cocksman. I might not be that experienced, but I wasn't an idiot.

He was divorced, too. Due to my personal experience, I immediately leapt to the conclusion that there was another woman, or possibly several, in that equation.

Ok, well, not immediately. My pants had been on fire since I first spied him and burning brain cells like that just didn't leave a lot of room for rational thought. I should have been thinking about all this *before* I jumped him.

Why, I wondered angrily, had he targeted me? There were so many more women available that were prettier and younger. Sure I was desperate and easy, but any of them would've been just as easy. I'd seen it in their eyes. He couldn't be *that* oblivious to his sex appeal.

The hunt, I finally realized. Men that looked like Ryan usually ended up being the hunted and that just didn't set well with their manliness. They wanted to be the hunter. They wanted a challenge.

Not that I'd been much of a challenge, I realized, mortified, but I supposed I'd been just wary enough to present *some* challenge.

Ryan wasn't waiting to catch a ride with me the following morning. I should've just been relieved. Instead, I did an immediate about face and went from embarrassment and anger and the burning desire never to lay eyes on him again to feeling dumped. By the time I got to work I had managed to convince myself I'd fallen to the mighty warrior and he was off again on a new hunt.

This theory seemed borne up when I nearly ran him down at lunch and he merely begged pardon politely and looked at me as if he'd never laid eyes on me before.

Stunned as I was, anger erupted almost immediately, though I suppose most of it arose from hurt and anger toward myself. I glared at him instead of behaving like a civilized person and pretending nothing had happened between us. "Oh no, no, no," I said, dripping sarcasm. "My fault entirely for getting in the way when you obviously had

your eyes on one of the women over there.”

He looked down at me then with a mixture of surprise and dawning irritation, but he actually looked at me that time instead of looking through me. In fact, although there was obvious puzzlement in his gaze, he gave me a thorough once over that would have had me simmering with anticipation if I hadn't been so upset. “I beg your pardon?”

I tamped my anger with a strenuous effort. “Never mind,” I said. “I ... uh ... I'm sorry about last night.” I was really, really sorry.

He reddened slightly and looked around uncomfortably. “This probably isn't the best time or place to talk about it,” he said finally, lowering his voice.

“No. You're right. I just ... never mind.”

I caught him watching me speculatively several times that afternoon. Each time I did, he pretended to be looking at something else, but I knew he was trying to figure out how to handle the ‘psycho’ chick he had on his tail. He was probably envisioning me as the nut case stalker in that movie that had had every man in America thinking twice before dropping his pants.

It turned out I was wrong.

He followed me into the restroom and yanked me into one of the stalls. I gaped up at him in absolute disbelief as he pinned me against the door, looming over me.

“Now, what exactly did I do that so thoroughly pissed you off?”

My eyes widened. “Ryan!” I hissed. “Have you completely lost your mind! Somebody's going to catch us in here together!”

“So ... talk fast. We don't have much time.”

I reddened, trying to make order out of complete chaos. “It was my fault about the condom,” I blurted out. “I wasn't really mad about it ... not with you, anyway.”

I could not *believe* I'd just relieved him of all responsibility! That I was apologizing to him when he'd dumped me like a hot potato the moment he got into my pants.

To my surprise, he lifted a hand and stroked my cheek. “I think we both lost our heads,” he murmured, leaning down to brush his lips lightly along mine.

Heat suffused me instantly and my brains went out the window. Part of it was just plain old relief that he didn't seem as anxious to dump me as I'd thought, but most of it was just chemical reaction and pure animal attraction.

Plus, it took no more than a light touch to remind me instantly of all the fire that had exploded between us the night before.

It was a truce, I told myself, and I wanted it in the worst way.

Sucker!

Ignoring the little voice, I rose to meet his kiss.

It started out as an apology, but within moments heat was clouding my eyeballs and my brain. He already had one breast out of my bra and a nipple in his mouth before it dawned on me where we were. “Someone will come in,” I gasped breathlessly, half heartedly attempting to regain control of the situation that was well on its way to being completely out of control.

“No, they won't. I put the ‘out of order’ sign on the door and locked it when I came in,” he muttered disinterestedly as he released the nipple he'd been torturing and nuzzled his way toward its twin.

Afterwards, I wasn't really clear on how it went from make up kisses to getting

my brains fucked out against the bathroom stall door, but somehow his hand found its way up beneath my skirt and then inside my panties. He was groaning about how hot and wet I was as he burrowed one finger inside of me, and then I was wrapped around him like a vine and his cock was plowing into me. I buried my face against his jacket and moaned as my weight, gravity, and his thrust came together and he drove inside of me so hard and deep I felt as if I'd just been impaled on a fence post. I wondered, briefly, how it was that I hadn't noticed how huge his cock was the night before.

Well, I had. I'd been lusting for it from the moment I set eyes on it, but it hadn't seemed like quite as uncomfortably tight a fit the night before.

It was as wild and violent and distressingly brief as it had been the night before because we were both ready to explode by the time we managed the awkward connection. It didn't take much bumping and grinding to send us both over the edge.

Fortunately, because I don't think either one of us could have held that position long. He kissed me again as he came, drowning the little sounds I couldn't contain to save my life as my body climaxed in convulsions of keen pleasure.

Limp in the aftermath, I dragged one leg from his waist and felt around until I found the floor. He released my other leg, withdrawing his cock from me with obvious reluctance. A shudder went through him as he leaned heavily against me.

"What did you say your name was again?" he asked gustily.

I drew back to stare at him and finally chuckled at the gleam in his eyes. "Ass!" I said without heat.

Chuckling, he dragged me against him and kissed me until he'd stirred the heat inside of me again. "My place or yours?" he asked when he broke the kiss.

"What?" I asked, all at sea.

"Tonight. Whatever I did, I'm resolved to make it up to you tonight if it takes all night."

The anxieties I'd so blithely dismissed in pursuit of lust instantly rose up to plague me again, but his teasing charmed me and anyway I was becoming adept at ignoring the little warning voice. "We'll figure it out later. Did you get your car back? Or do you need a ride?"

"I've got a car. I'll follow you."

Something about the way he said that struck me as odd and I frowned in puzzlement, trying to figure out why, but I dismissed it as my mind shifted abruptly to the current dilemma. "How are we going to get out of here?"

"Carefully," he said, grinning as he moved me away from the door and went out.

I hoped he had a plan because the moment I was released from the spell of his charm, I began to rue the impetuosity that had gotten me into this latest mess. When I'd cleaned up the best I could and straightened my clothes, I left the stall to examine my reflection. Aside from looking as if I'd just been fucked silly, I looked fine.

After repairing my hair and makeup the best I could, I moved to the door where he waited, looking up at him hopefully. His gaze flickered over my face.

"Bad?" I asked uneasily.

Something flickered in his eyes. He cupped my cheek in one hand and kissed me briefly on the lips. "Beautiful. I think I'm in love," he murmured huskily.

I smiled tentatively at his teasing. "Seriously, Ryan! Do you think anybody will notice?"

"I am serious, baby. You look good enough to eat."

I couldn't help but chuckle, but shook my head. Obviously, I wasn't going to get a straight answer out of him.

Placing a finger to his lips to caution me to be quiet, he put his ear against the door for several moments. "Get ready," he whispered.

I nodded, tensing all over. The sense swept over me, though, of being conspirators on a juvenile level, as if we were high school kids skipping class, which was strange considering I'd never had the nerve to do anything like this when I'd *been* a teenager.

Nevertheless, I felt more excited, almost giddily so, than frightened, as I should have been.

Jerking the door open abruptly, he snatched the sign off the door and stepped briskly into the hall. He'd barely cleared it when Ms. Kilgore, my supervisor, rounded the corner at the other end of the hall. My heart leapt into my throat. Fighting the urge to burst into juvenile giggles, I dashed back toward the stall on tiptoe.

It was as well I did. Ms. Kilgore marched through the door and entered the stall next to me. Since I had no desire to have to exchange pleasantries with her, I flushed the toilet and vacated, washing my hands quickly and darting out of the bathroom.

Ryan had stopped at the end of the hallway. He lifted his brows questioningly. Smiling, I shook my head and turned down the other hall, heading back to my desk.

I felt amazingly light hearted for the remainder of the day. God only knew why, because that was no more sensible than the funk that had depressed my spirits before.

Ryan did follow me home, all the way into my drive way. When he'd parked and gotten out, I looked at him quizzically. "Why didn't you park in your driveway?"

He glanced from his house to mine and then looked at me and shrugged. "I had my mind on something else," he said, grinning.

The way he looked at me made it pretty clear what he'd had on his mind. I grew warm beneath that look, but vaguely puzzled, too. He seemed different somehow. Of course, his outlook might have been brighter for the same reason mine was ... I'd gotten laid and it was good, very good. "You coming in?" I asked hesitantly.

He leaned against the car next to me, studying my face. "That depends."

I lifted my brows questioningly.

"Are you going to feed me before you breed me?"

I reddened, uncertain of whether I was more shocked or amused. "Ryan!"

He chuckled. "Why don't I take you out?"

I thought it over--cold sandwich? Or dinner out? "I'd like to bathe and change first."

"Can I scrub your back?" he asked with interest.

"No!" I said, smiling to soften the blow.

"Well, how about your front?"

Such much for softening the rejection! I found myself chuckling, though. "What do you think?"

He looked me over. "I think we might not get dinner. You're right. Meet you out here in say ... thirty minutes?"

I mulled that over. "It might take me a little longer. Where are we going?"

"You pick."

“Some place casual?”

Nodding, he pushed away from the car and headed home. I stared after him a moment and finally, remembering he'd said thirty minutes, dashed inside to take a quick shower and change. It was the weekend and I had a *real* date, I thought happily!

I was so excited about being asked out that my fingers were almost shaking too badly to apply makeup. I decided to keep it low-key anyway. I'd opted for casual.

I searched until I managed to find a pair of jeans I could fasten and zip while standing up. They were still snug, but I figured if I could breathe now I could manage to eat a little bit and still breathe. Since it was warm out, I decided to wear a skimpy top with spaghetti straps and combed my hair, leaving it loose and casual. Finishing up with a pair of sandals, I headed outside again.

Ryan was waiting by the car, also in jeans. His cologne, or aftershave, nearly bowled me over when I reached him. I'd never smelled anything quite that heavenly and I my heartbeat instantly hitched upward a notch.

To my surprise, instead of picking one of the local restaurants, he headed out of town. I looked at him quizzically. “Where are we going?”

He slid me a speculative glance. “A place I know in the city. You game? Or would you rather turn around and try something local?”

I was a little startled, but it didn't take much consideration. Just about any place we went in town there was a risk of running into someone from work, and since I didn't particularly want to chance an uncomfortable meeting, I nodded. “Where ever you want to go is fine,” I responded, relaxing.

We whiled away the time during the first part of the drive chatting about first one thing and then another, mostly childhood/school days experiences. I discovered we actually knew a few people in common from those years, though, of course, I didn't know them nearly as well as he did since I hadn't been one of the ‘in crowd’ and besides had been several years ahead of him in school. He regaled me with some of the more sordid scandals that I'd either been completely ignorant of, or heard very little about, bringing me to the realization that school might have been pretty boring to me, but he, at least, had had a fairly wild time.

When we'd run out of old gossip to chuckle over, he asked me how my story was going. I hadn't actually made a lot of progress, but I told him his help with the research had been invaluable. He sent me a seductive grin then and promised to be even more helpful.

The look he gave me was enough promise to rouse me to a warm buzz of anticipation that still had my heart rate elevated when we at last reached the restaurant.

“I hope you don't mind,” he said easily as the hostess showed us to a table. “My brother's meeting us here.”

Startled by that information, I sent him a quick glance. “Your brother?” I repeated, dismayed to discover this wasn't going to be a ‘date’ as I'd thought after all.

“I didn't know you had a brother.”

He frowned slightly as we settled across from one another at the booth the hostess led us to. “I didn't mention it?”

I thought it over. I couldn't recall that he had, but then I couldn't be absolutely certain he hadn't. “Actually, I suppose you might have,” I said slowly, unwilling to make waves when I wasn't completely certain.

He smiled easily. "He's just meeting us for dinner. We'll ditch him before we head to the club."

I blinked several times as that comment blindsided me. We were going to a club? Ditching his brother?

I could feel my face reddening. "Oh! That wouldn't be nice!" I said uncomfortably. "He probably wouldn't want to join us anyway, but I wouldn't be comfortable not inviting him."

His smile broadened to a grin. "There's where you're wrong. He'll want to go with us."

He knew his brother better than I did, of course, but I couldn't imagine him *wanting* to be a third wheel. Before I could think of any comment to make on the subject, Ryan lifted his head and signaled to someone behind me. "There he is. Why don't you slide down and then you can sit between us?"

It was a fairly large booth, one of those where the seat formed a C, but it didn't occur to me to argue. I moved down as I heard him nearing the table. He'd slid into the booth beside me by the time I'd resituated.

A shockwave rolled over me with the force of a steamroller when I looked up at last, a polite smile pasted on my lips.

"This is my brother ... Bryan," Ryan said.

The shock was so profound, I felt as if I heard Ryan's voice from a great distance, or maybe from underwater.

With the single exception that he was wearing a different shirt, the man staring back at me, a faint smile curling his lips, was absolutely identical in every way that I could see to Ryan.

I was still trying to swim out of my frozen shock when the waitress appeared at the table. "Whoa!" she exclaimed, looking from one man to the other and then back again. "Twins."

Ryan and Bryan exchanged a speaking look. "You can bring us a pitcher of beer while we're deciding what we want," Ryan said dismissively.

No. Bryan, I corrected myself.

Both men turned to look at me when the waitress, who'd reddened at the mild rebuke, disappeared in disorder. I looked from one to the other and back again. It was on the tip of my tongue to inform Ryan and I knew damned well he hadn't mentioned he had a twin, but then neither of them had seemed especially pleased about the waitress' reaction. It occurred to me that that must be extremely tiring and annoying to be stared at whenever they were together and to have people stating the obvious.

I smiled back at them weakly. "It's so nice to meet you ... uh ... Bryan," I said politely.

The two men exchanged another look. I had a feeling they did that a lot. "Does this make you uncomfortable?" Ryan asked.

What? I wondered. Being seated between two men I couldn't tell apart? Or discovering my 'date' had become a threesome? Or just not having been informed ahead of time to expect such a 'surprise'?

Civility won out. I forced a polite smile and denied any discomfort. "It just takes a little getting used to."

Beer wasn't my drink of choice. In fact, I loathed it, but I didn't object when the

pitcher arrived and Ryan poured me a glass full. I needed *something* to settle my nerves and if that was all that was available, I'd damned well take it.

Due largely, I suspected, to the beer, I was considerably more relaxed by the time the food arrived. I was relieved when it did, not because I was particularly hungry but because I already had a buzz from the beer by that time and knew it was going to be a bit more than a buzz if I didn't get some food into my stomach.

I couldn't help but notice, despite the beer buzz, that both of them tended to focus on me very flatteringly throughout the meal, giving me looks I couldn't help but interpret as appreciative if not downright seductive. They regaled me during the meal with tales of their exploits. They'd discovered early on that no one seemed to be able to tell them apart, even their mother a lot of the time, and they'd taken shameless advantage of it, switching places sometimes out of necessity, but often purely for amusement. It helped that their mother had been kind enough to give them names so similar. Although they'd gone through a point where they'd hated that, for the most part it was an advantage because it made it easier to carry off the subterfuge of switching places.

They'd also gone through a period where they'd gone to the other extreme, trying to look as different as possible by changing hair style and color among other things. Ryan had gone through a motorcycle stage, grown his hair down his shoulders, grown a moustache and beard, and gotten tattoos. Bryan had gone punk, worn his hair in spikes and changed the color every week--to something neon.

They were both so clean cut, boy next door--gorgeous boy next door--that I found myself chuckling at the images.

By the time we'd finished eating, I'd forgotten all about Ryan's promise to ditch his brother. We left the restaurant together and headed for their favorite night spot.

This was a totally new experience for me. I'd been to a few clubs, but my ex hadn't really cared for it so it wasn't something we'd done a lot of. The main reason it was different, though, was because I'd never been to one on an actual date.

And I'd certainly never been to one with two men!

About halfway through the evening I discovered I couldn't remember which was which anymore. It didn't seem to bother either of them, but I couldn't tell if that was because they just couldn't hear me well enough to tell what I was saying or if they didn't particularly care.

I drank sparingly. I didn't have much of a head for liquor and I didn't want to spoil my evening by getting so drunk I was good for nothing but curling up on a bed and sleeping it off. I was extremely relaxed, however, by the time Ryan--or maybe it Bryan?--suggested we call it a night.

The cool evening air outside the club revived me just enough to make me realize I'd had a little more than I needed to just relax. I still had enough wits about me, though, to realize that none of us ought to be driving.

"Who's driving?" I asked as we strolled across the sidewalk.

"We're taking a cab," Ryan responded.

"Good!" I said decisively. "Where we going now?"

Both of them chuckled at that. "The room."

I glanced up at Ryan questioningly as Bryan got into the cab and slid over. "Room?"

"We figured we'd help you with your research."

I stared at him blankly but finally got into the cab since the driver seemed rather impatient.

Ryan gave the man the name of a hotel.

“We’re going to a hotel,” I whispered to Bryan, leaning against his shoulder companionably as the car turned the corner and threw me against him.

“Unless you’d rather not?”

I straightened and stared at Ryan owl eyed. “Why would I object?”

“We’ll discuss it when we get there.”

“Ok,” I said agreeably and settled back for the ride.

Chapter Seven

The cab ride wasn't a long one, which, I suppose, explained why I wasn't a lot more sober when we got there. I wasn't drunk by any means, but I admit it required a good bit more concentration to walk steadily that it usually did.

I focused on not appearing drunk as we crossed the lobby to the elevator.

"You didn't check in," I pointed out as Ryan, or Bryan--I couldn't remember which was which anymore--punched the button and the doors closed.

"I got the room earlier."

"Really?" I asked, surprised, and trying to figure out how he'd managed that when I couldn't remember stopping. "Oh!" I said finally, realizing it was Bryan speaking. "You did it before me and Ryan got here?"

"You and Bryan. I'm Ryan," he responded with amusement.

I frowned at that. "Me and Bryan? I rode here with Ryan," I reminded him. I wasn't so drunk that I didn't remember *that*!

The two of them exchanged a look.

"Actually, you didn't," Ryan said as we left the elevator and headed down the hallway, stopping at a door part of the way down. Ryan fished a key card from his jeans pocket and inserted it.

"I work with Ryan," I pointed out.

"Me," the one wearing the black shirt agreed.

I frowned, because even though I couldn't remember which was which anymore, I distinctly remembered Ryan had been wearing a navy blue shirt when I'd met him outside my house.

"I'm confused," I muttered to myself as we entered the room. I dismissed the confusion, though, as I looked the place over. "This is nice. There's only one bed, though."

"It's king size--plenty of room for all of us."

That comment stopped me in my tracks. "The three of us?" I gasped, abruptly sobering a good deal more than I wanted to.

"We won't do anything you don't want to do," Ryan said soothingly.

Feeling weak kneed, I sank onto the edge of the bed, glancing from one to the other as it slowly sank into my mind that they were suggesting that all three of us were going to spend the night together.

"We're going to sleep? Together? All of us?" I asked, needing clarification.

Bryan and Ryan exchanged another look. This time Bryan, I thought, spoke.

“We can. I had something besides sleeping in mind.”

I mulled that over, which was pretty damned hard. My mind was clouded with just a little too much alcohol for much in the way of logical thought. On the other hand, it occurred to me that I would probably have had a hard time wrapping my mind around it anyway. If I'd been stone cold sober, shock would have inhibited my ability to think.

Two things did occur to me, though.

One, in spite of all the pep talks I'd given myself, I had still been thinking in terms of 'relationship' with regards to Ryan. I knew I was old fashioned, but I couldn't believe the world had changed so much while I wasn't looking that any man considering a real relationship would also consider sharing me with his brother.

That made me feel more than a little upset, bringing it home that I'd hoped for a relationship regardless of lies I'd told myself.

Second, I wasn't exactly horrified at the idea of being with both of them. Surprised, a little shocked, definitely nervous, but not revolted.

Was it some sort of 'test', I wondered? Maybe the two of them had had so many bad experiences with people confusing them they'd devised some sort of test before they committed themselves to a relationship? As in, they had to know beforehand if the female in question would be willing to swap around and therefore wasn't faithful?

I looked up at Ryan unhappily. “If I agree, it'll ruin everything, won't it?”

Ryan settled on the bed beside me. Slipping an arm around my shoulders, he pulled me against his side. “Why do you think that?”

“I really, really like you,” I said slowly, still wrestling with the idea. Finally, I tilted my head to look up at him. “We aren't going to have a relationship anyway, are we?”

His gaze flickered over my face. “I thought we already did.”

I blinked in surprise, feeling my heart flutter with hope. “We do?”

“Unless you don't feel the same things I do when I'm with you?” he asked tentatively.

I swallowed, feeling warmth flood me. I studied his expression carefully. “You don't want me to ... uh ... sleep with your brother, then, do you?”

His gaze flickered to his brother and back to me. “You already did.”

Stunned, I turned to look at Bryan. Slowly, my mind did a replay of the day and it abruptly clicked. He'd said several things that had puzzled me, and yet it hadn't occurred to me to question the oddness of his comments. “It was you at work today?” I gasped.

I dragged my gaze from Bryan's smoldering expression to Ryan's. It was on the tip of my tongue to deny culpability for the simple reason that I hadn't known the difference, but somehow that didn't seem like the sort of comment that either one of them would find pleasing.

“You're angry with me,” I said, facing Ryan again.

“The question is, are you pissed at us?”

That rocked me back on my heels, figuratively speaking. “You knew?” I asked, stunned.

The two of them exchanged another look. “It was almost a foregone conclusion that if Ryan found you attractive, I would, too, but we wanted to be sure we both felt the same way about you,” Bryan said.

"I don't think I understand," I responded after several moments, fearing I did. "Is it ... you two are just playing a prank on me?"

Ryan's face hardened. "We are not!" he said firmly. "I know you don't really understand this, but believe me when I say we're both serious about this relationship. We want you to give it a chance to work."

"The three of us?" I asked doubtfully. "You want this?"

Ryan stood up, drawing me to my feet. "If you're upset, we'll stop right now."

I was upset, but that was because I thought, despite what he'd said, what both of them had said, that it was still some sort of test, or a prank, and I was the punch line, or the dumpee, whichever way it went. I was too muddled to think at all clearly. "I'm drunk," I announced to no one in particular. "I think I'll take a shower."

Ryan and Bryan exchanged a look.

It was almost as if they were telepathic, I thought wryly as I headed toward the bathroom. Adjusting the shower once I was inside, I undressed and relieved myself. I was on the point of stepping into the shower when someone tapped on the door. Grabbing a towel, I wrapped it around myself and opened the door. "Can I join you?"

I didn't especially want company, but there was something about Ryan's expression that gave me pause. He looked ... upset.

Well! I was upset myself. On the other hand, it was hard to believe he'd be upset if this was, as I'd first suspected, a nasty trick the two of them had thought up to amuse themselves. Giving myself a mental kick for being such a sucker, I nodded and moved away from the door.

Dropping the towel, I stepped into the shower.

Ryan joined me after discarding his own clothes. I'd already begun lathering myself, but he took the cloth from me, pulled me back against his chest and began to slowly stroke the soapy cloth over my breasts and belly.

I relaxed under the soothing massage, and tensed, too. I couldn't get this close to Ryan, naked, without feeling everything inside of me revving with excitement. He turned me around after a few moments to face him and began soaping my back. His head drifted to my shoulder and he began to nibble and suck at little patches of skin along my neck. The heated desire that went through me made me feel weak and heavy, dizzy than when I'd gotten in.

The shower rings rattled. Cool air wafted across my back, and then I felt another body pressed against my back. I tensed as another pair of hands moved over me. I quickly discovered, though, that no matter my misgivings, my body was extremely receptive to the idea of being stroked on both sides at once.

Bryan massaged my breasts, tweaking my nipples until they were as hard and throbbing as they could possibly get. Ryan stroked my buttocks, exploring my cleft with his fingers. A jolt went through me as Ryan dipped his head and suckled one of the nipples Bryan offered him.

Dimly, it occurred to me that I should object, but I was so dizzy with the sensations pelting me from every direction that I couldn't do much more than gasp for breath and utter little sounds of pleasure. Bryan drew my head back against his shoulder and nibbled his way along my cheek to my mouth as Ryan moved from one breast to the other.

Heat speared through me like an electric current as Bryan's mouth settled over

mine at almost the same moment Ryan's mouth captured my other nipple. It was the wildest thing I'd ever experienced, feeling my breasts being suckled and kissed at the same time. My knees turned to water, but it hardly mattered. They held me up between them. Someone, I wasn't sure which of them, slipped a hand down my belly and stroked my cleft. With two fingers, he plucked at my clit until it was as swollen and achy as my nipples.

I shivered with the chill of the bathroom when we got out at last and dried off. Wordlessly, I followed as Bryan took my hand and led me into the bedroom. The coverlet had been turned back on the bed.

Faintly irritated that they seemed to have been in no doubt of the outcome, I still didn't object as Bryan climbed into the bed and held out his hand. Instead, I climbed up onto the huge bed and settled in the middle. Ryan climbed in behind me.

As Bryan turned to me, pulling me against his length and covered my mouth in a deep, hot kiss, I felt Ryan's hands roving over me in exploration. When Bryan broke the kiss at last, he shifted lower, massaging my breasts and teasing first one nipple and then the other. Ryan shifted closer, nibbling along my shoulder and neck until he reached my ear. Delightful shivers raced up and down my body, every hair follicle standing at attention and drawing the skin up, making me keenly sensitive to Bryan's caressing hands moving along my body.

I explored, as well, too dizzy and disoriented to have any clear idea of who I was caressing as they shifted and turned me between them. Arms and legs entwined with mine, lips and palms and fingertips moved over me, exploring every inch of my body and finding erogenous zones I hadn't even known existed. Hard, pulsing cocks delved my cleft, slipped between my thighs, pressed against my belly.

I was so hot all over I felt feverish, delirious with the fire inside my mind. Burning up, thirsting for the taste of flesh, I kissed my way down one hard belly, rippling with muscle and found a cock. Someone grasped my hips and shifted me around as I sucked the head greedily. Fingers spread my nether lips. A hot mouth covered my clit sending me spiraling so close to climax I had to fight to keep it at bay.

Focusing upon the cock I'd captured, I moved over it with the dedication of a starved woman, sucking more and more frenziedly as the tongue and mouth on my clit teased me maddeningly. Reluctance clutched at me as I felt my body reach its peak and knew I was about to cum. I didn't want to in the worst way. I didn't want it to end. I discovered I couldn't escape the determined torture of the mouth and tongue finessing my clit though. Groaning as I fell over the edge and my body was wracked with pleasurable convulsions, I sucked the cock in my mouth more frantically. It jerked. Hot seed filled my mouth. I sucked at it for all I was worth, until it ceased to jerk and I could milk no more from it.

Weak in the aftermath, I finally released the now flaccid cock, and struggled to catch my breath, trying not to think about the fact that someone had been disappointed in my efforts. Limp as rag doll, I was dragged away from the belly I'd been resting my cheek against and rolled over.

I considered protesting, briefly, when a mouth fastened over one of my nipples and began to tug at the sensitive peak with determination. To my surprise, though, I wasn't as completely sated as I'd thought. My body began to stir to life again.

Someone sucked my toes. A jolt of electricity seemed to travel up my leg straight

to my pussy. I groaned, stroking the head and back and shoulders of whoever it was plucking at my nipples and driving me up the wall, resurrecting the fire in me even though I wasn't at all certain I wanted it revived.

We shifted around the bed again until I found another cock offered. I latched onto it, sucking the head. I'd already shifted onto my knees to move over him when a head was pushed between my thighs. Grasping my buttocks, he drew my hips down until my pussy was in his face and began to work my clit over like a starving man. I hadn't thought I had another climax in me. I'd thought I was only going to return the favor and make sure both of them was pleased. Within moments, though, I could feel myself quivering on the verge of another climax. I sucked and stroked the cock I had more and more feverishly as I felt my body climbing, moaning around his cock as it hit me.

A strangled male groan preceded the eruption of the cock I was caressing so frantically. Mindless in my own ecstasy, I sucked him as frantically as I had the first, determinedly, until I'd sucked him dry.

Relief warred with satisfaction as the eruption began to dissipate in diminishing shockwaves. Replete, the three of us lay panting and gasping in a tangle while we struggled to regain our senses.

After a few moments, hands began pulling at me and I found myself righted on the bed and sandwiched between the two. I drifted lazily, pleased with myself because I'd pleased both of them, and somewhat awed that I'd cum twice. For someone who, more often than not, didn't get their cookie at all, it was borderline miraculous to discover that I was not frigid in the least as my ex had drummed into me until I'd begun to believe it.

Twice! I thought, almost as pleased with that as I was that I'd managed to please them--*both* of them!

They were lavish in their appreciation. As strange as it seemed to me, I *felt* as if the way they stroked my body was more than just a gesture of satisfaction. Bryan wrapped his arms around me, dragged me against his length and kissed me with more warmth and affection than heat. And when he'd released me, Ryan kissed me in much the same way.

Maybe I was imagining that, though?

Maybe, but I couldn't shake the feeling. I drifted lazily for a while, but just as I began to feel myself drowsing, the tone of their touch seemed to change, became arousing rather than affectionate, and then I found myself sandwiched between them, a hard cock pressing into my belly and a second one nestling between my buttocks.

Ryan covered my ear with his mouth. Heat instantly washed through me.

"You feel up to taking both of on at once, baby?" he murmured huskily.

The question instantly fired my blood. My imagination went wild. "How?" I asked hesitantly.

He nibbled at my shoulder. "Me in back. Bryan in front."

Uh oh. Back door entrance! My ex and I had tried it. I'd let him talk me into it mostly because I thought it might breathe some life back into the marriage, but I hadn't been keen on it. In fact, I'd promptly and determinedly, pushed it completely from my mind once we'd tried a few times and I realized it didn't do a thing for me. I'd dutifully prepared for it, but even though I'd gotten ready to receive, I still found it mildly revolting and completely unsatisfying.

Still, I felt certain I could handle it. Both Ryan and Bryan were far more endowed than my ex had been, but I'd gotten used to being penetrated rectally--at least in the sense that it didn't cause me a lot of discomfort.

And I wanted to please them.

"Ok," I said a little nervously.

He stroked a hand soothingly along my arm. "I don't want to do anything you're uncomfortable with."

I was lying in bed sandwiched between two men--two absolutely gorgeous men who turned me on like no one ever had before in my life! And I'd just given both of them head, and let them cum in my mouth, and both of them had had their faces in my pussy.

I still wasn't sure this wasn't some sort of game they were playing, but I resolved in that moment that, if it was, I was going to blow their minds.

"I want to," I lied, not at all certain I did, but determined I was going to experience everything now that I was neck deep in this, particularly since, in the back of my mind, I was certain this was going to be a one time deal for me.

Contrary to my expectations, they didn't instantly try to mount me. I'd begun to think, in fact, that they'd decided I didn't want to and didn't want to press the matter.

Pushing me onto my back, Ryan shifted over me and nuzzled his face against my breasts and then my neck and finally my face. Moving to my ear, he sucked at the lobe and then traced the swirls of my ear with his tongue. His hot breath sent quivers of warmth through me, charging my whole body with anticipation.

Lifting the arm next to him, Bryan began to suck my fingers one by one.

I lost track of who was doing what as heat enveloped me and my mind went chaotic with the sensations pelting me from so many directions at once. Struggling to breathe, struggling to hold perfectly still and relish the attention, I quickly found that I couldn't do either very well at all. I felt as if I was lying in a bed of hot ash.

Bryan wound his way from my fingers along my arm and up the slope of the breast nearest him and finally began tugging at the engorged tip with his mouth and lips. At the same time, Ryan nibbled a hot trail downward from my ear to the other breast until both of them were teasing my nipples at once. I gasped, shuddered at the sensations ripping through me, arched my back to lift to meet those wonderful mouths.

My body didn't seem to realize I'd already exceeded my quota and had two climaxes. The tension coiled within me again as if I was still on starvation and hadn't been touched in forever.

I was already drunk with desire when Bryan slipped his arms around me and dragged me against him. I felt a coolness on my back as Ryan disappeared, but Bryan caught my full attention as he found his way to my mouth and kissed me with a hunger that belied his own recent satiation.

Captivated by the thrust and retreat of his tongue, I hardly noticed when he reached down and lifted my thigh, draping my leg over his hips. Something hard pressed against my rectum. I stiffened instinctively and Bryan broke the kiss. "Easy, baby. Relax," he murmured, nuzzling my face and neck.

Dragging in a shaky breath, I focused on relaxing as Ryan pressed against me, focused on flexing the muscles that would open me to his penetration. I felt his cock head breach my opening and panted as he slowly, carefully, probed deeper. He ceased to

push after a few moments. I could feel him shaking all over, felt the moist heat radiating off his skin.

“God, baby,” he muttered against my neck. “You feel so good.”

Warmth flooded me at praise. I turned my head as I felt his lips seeking mine. He covered my mouth in a searing kiss as he began thrusting again, sinking deeper and deeper until I felt his belly pressing against my buttocks. He stopped then, wrenching his lips from mine and panting as if he couldn’t catch his breath.

The discomfort eased, but the sense of fullness didn’t abate one whit. I struggled to take a calming breath as he pushed my buttocks wide and sank to the hilt.

Unmoving, he held me tightly against his belly.

Bryan shifted after a moment, began to suckle my breasts, first one and then the other until the heat rose up in me again and I began to move restlessly. He lifted his head and I opened my eyes as I felt his gaze on my face. Holding my gaze, he aligned the head of his cock with my sex and began to push slowly inside of me.

My eyes widened. I was soaking wet with desire and I still felt stretched almost beyond my limits as he pressed deep and deeper. I was panting so hard by the time he’d sunk to the root of his cock inside of me that I thought I would pass out.

“You ok, baby?”

I wasn’t certain which of them had asked, but all I could manage was a groan.

“How does it feel?”

“Unimaginable,” I gasped.

They took that as encouragement. Letting out a shaky breath at almost the same moment, they both began to move, thrusting and retreating slowly at first. Pinned between them and mounted on both cocks, I couldn’t move. It tortured me. I *needed* to move. “Oh god,” I murmured. “Oh god! More!” I gasped.

Bryan let out a harsh breath. He thrust deeply, ground his belly against the mouth of my sex and then both of them set a pace that made me completely lose my mind. I came, shuddering with the force of it. The waves had barely begun to dissipate when my body coiled tightly again. Within moments I came again, and still it didn’t stop. They plowed into me harder and faster and my body coiled for another release, and then another. Each climax was harder than the one before. The fifth hit me so hard, I screamed. It triggered a response in both of them. Bryan uttered a choked cry. I felt his cock jerk inside of me and then his hot seed poured into me. Hard on the heels of his release, before he’d even ceased to convulse and drive into me, Ryan groaned hoarsely, dug his fingers into my hips and ground against my buttocks. I felt the jerk of his cock and the heat of his seed fill me there.

I was the next thing to comatose when they finally pulled their cocks from me and rolled away. I felt the bed shift as first one and then the other got up, went into the bathroom and then came back. Someone, Ryan, I thought, rolled me onto my back and very tenderly cleaned me up.

If I hadn’t been half dead from climaxing five times in a row, I might have been embarrassed when he spread my legs and wiped the semen from my thighs and sex. As it was, I just shuddered at being touched, gritting my teeth against the echoes of keen pleasure his touch evoked.

Ryan gathered me against his chest when he lay down beside me again. There was concern in his voice when he questioned me again as to whether they’d hurt me.

Shuddering, I snuggled tightly against him. “God, no,” I finally managed. “Not hurt.”

I sounded drunker, to my own ears, than I had been before we’d climbed into bed together, but it was exhaustion this time that slurred my words.

Chapter Eight

Conflicting sensations rolled over me as I drifted toward consciousness. I sense of supreme well being vied with a sense of having been run over by a truck. Finally, I lifted one eyelid to peer at my surroundings as memories flooded into my sluggish mind.

I had one cheek propped on a hard pec.

Shifting my focus upward, I stared at Ryan--or Bryan.

An arm slipped around me, dragging me off of the sleeping man. I looked up at his identical twin as he rolled me onto my back and settled to sucking lazily at the nipple nearest him. "Morning, baby," he murmured, lifting his head at last to give me a look that was filled with both affection and heat.

I stared back at him uncertainly and finally returned his smile with a weak one of my own. "I need to brush my teeth," I murmured, wiggling out from under him and climbing over the man next to me.

When I came out of the bathroom, the two of them were lounging on the bed like matching bookends. Both of them looked me over and frowned when they saw I'd wrapped a towel around me.

Ryan, I thought, rolled over, gave his brother a look and got out of bed. Passing me on the way to the bathroom, he swatted my ass.

I jumped, my jaw dropping as I whirled to look at his rapidly disappearing back.

He had a really nice ass, I thought, distracted by the sway of his hips.

Bryan was studying me when I turned back toward the bed, his expression carefully neutral. "Hungry?"

I discovered I was starving, an extremely unusual circumstance. Glancing toward the window I saw why. It was bright outside, too bright to be early morning. "Yes," I answered finally, feeling uncomfortably awkward standing in front of him in nothing but a towel.

He smiled, though the smile looked slightly uneasy. "Good. I ordered breakfast. I thought we could have breakfast in bed."

He lifted a hand in invitation.

I stared at it a moment and finally approached the bed.

The door to the bathroom opened. Seeing me standing by the bed, Ryan leaned against the door frame, folding his arms over his bare chest. "Are we all right?"

I glanced at him uncertainly. "Are we?"

The two brothers exchanged a glance. "Are you ok?" Bryan asked, drawing my attention to him.

Was I? I realized I was waiting for the kill shot. We'd romped together all night and now it was over and I was expecting them to hurt my feelings. "I was a little drunk last night," I finally saw weakly.

Again that look, and I could see this time that they weren't happy. Both of them tensed. "You're saying you don't remember?"

It was Bryan who'd spoken. I looked at him a little helplessly. "Actually, that wasn't what I was saying at all. I remember everything, just not clearly."

They both seemed to relax fractionally. "Does that mean you're pissed with us?" Ryan asked.

I licked my lips nervously feeling as if I'd been caught in a Mexican standoff, the crossfire, because I was standing between them. "I'm not mad," I said finally, because I wasn't, realizing that somebody had to try to breach the communication gap. "I ... uh ... I'm just not sure where I stand now."

Ryan studied me a moment and pushed away from the door. Striding toward me, he scooped me up and launched both of us toward the bed. Bryan evacuated before we collided with him.

"I thought you were going to be mad as hell," Ryan murmured, nuzzling my neck. "You sure you're ok with this?" he asked when he'd lifted his head.

I stared up at him. "This?" I asked hesitantly.

"The three of us," he clarified.

"You *both* want to ... uh ... date me?" I asked uneasily.

He chuckled. Rolling away, he propped his head on his hand and studied me. "You think you can't handle us?"

I felt my face reddening.

He chuckled huskily. "You seemed to be doing just fine last night." Lifting one of my hands, he slipped one of my fingers into his mouth and sucked on it, making heat curl in my belly. "Unless I'm mistaken, you came several times."

He wasn't mistaken, but I'd lost count. It dawned on me that I hadn't been wrong. I'd been tricked, but the game they were offering wasn't what I'd thought it was. Unbelievable as it seemed, they wanted me. They weren't in this to humiliate me.

Doubts immediately assailed me, but my instincts told me I was wrong. They had made it clear they'd enjoyed the three way as much as I had. "I did," I answered him finally.

He rolled toward me abruptly, shoving me onto my back and covering my mouth with his. His kiss began as a sweet seduction but rapidly developed into a hungry possessiveness as I responded.

A knock at the door interrupted us.

Bryan, wearing a towel around his waist, came out of the bathroom and opened it. "Wait here," he said to whoever was outside the door.

Ryan levered himself off of me long enough to watch Bryan bearing the huge tray full of dishes to the table near the window. Grabbing a pair of jeans from the floor, he took a bill from the wallet and returned to the door. "Just leave the next tray outside the door," he said as he shoved the bill through the opening and closed it again.

"Sustenance!" Ryan announced happily, abandoning me to examine the food.

Feeling a little stepped on to be so quickly usurped by food, I got up, adjusted my towel and followed him. Bryan came up behind me, snatched the towel off and popped

me on the ass. "I like you better naked," he said teasingly, throwing the towel across the room.

"Eat naked?" I asked, aghast at the idea.

Ryan gave me a smoldering look. "I wouldn't mind eating off of you."

I glanced at the food offered and shook my head. "Not grits and eggs!" I said firmly and then sat down primly in the chair Ryan dragged out for me.

Ryan grabbed the other chair, earning him a glare from Bryan. Shrugging after a moment, he hauled me out of the chair I'd just sat down in, flopped into it and dragged me back down on his lap.

I was hungry, but it was hard to concentrate given the circumstances. Bryan kept 'accidentally' dripping egg yolk on my breast and then cleaning it off for me by sucking it off. My belly stirred. His cock did, too, nudging my backside.

"I guess this means we're going to stay awhile?" I asked about halfway through the meal, remembering that Bryan had told the person at the door to leave the next tray outside.

"We'd thought, if you were agreeable, that we'd spend the weekend," Ryan said, lifting his brows questioningly.

I received that information with mixed feelings. It was actually a relief to realize they'd planned all the time to spend the whole weekend with me, because it laid to rest the last of my fears that they'd had an unpleasant game planned for me. It was also a little irritating to think they'd *expected* me to willingly participate.

But then Ryan had said 'if you were agreeable'. At least it didn't *seem* that they were taking me for granted.

I smiled faintly. "When were you going to ask me?"

Ryan grinned, but his face colored faintly. "I hadn't actually planned on asking. I figured you'd either cuss both of us out and demand to go back, or you'd realize you were as crazy about us as we are about you, and you'd ... just go with the flow."

I didn't know if they'd awakened a slumbering beast, or I'd aroused two. I felt warm all over with the thought of spending a whole weekend with them, though. "I guess I'll just go with the flow, then."

What else could I do? I *was* crazy about them.

The End.