



MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S STEAM
HEAT WAVE

SECOND WIND

DEE S. KNIGHT

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Dee S. Knight

Dedication

Pat, what would I do without you? For sure, there'd be no Second Wind—the ms would be sitting on a shelf. Always love and thanks to Vanessa, Skully, Jenn, Chris, Amy and Terri. You all are a godsend. And Jack, you give a second wind to my whole life. Thanks for being my hero.

Chapter One

“Cathy, don’t, babe.” The plaintive note in Rafe’s voice almost stopped her, almost made Cathy Walker take her suitcase stuffed with nearly everything she owned back out of the car.

Almost.

“You’re not being fair, Rafe. You know using that tone curls my toes and your little-boy look turns me to mush.” She slammed the trunk lid and turned to face her husband. “But I won’t be swayed this time. You have to make up your mind what you want. When you do, I’ll make up my mind if I can live with your decision.”

“What I want? I want you to be happy, God knows I do.” He lowered his head and rubbed the back of his neck until she thought he might not leave any skin. “It’s just...”

“You knew I wanted to work, you’ve known all along that’s what I planned.” She flung her arm out toward the wide-open spaces that represented their ranch. Correction, *Rafe’s* ranch. “We *need* me to work. Yet you make me feel guilty for every minute I give to my job.”

He looked up, his eyes ignited with emotion. “Of course I knew you wanted to work, don’t you think I’m proud of you? Of what you’ve accomplished? At the same time, can I help it if I wish you didn’t have to? I want to be able to support us, to provide for you in the way you’re used to. I’d move heaven and earth for you, you know that. I can’t be the kind of man you want, I guess.”

The fire lighting his dark blue eyes dimmed, replaced with despair. “I don’t have fine words and fancy manners you deserve. Hell, I never even understood why you married me in the first place, we’re so different. I

didn't want to think about it too much, but I guess I needed to. Maybe then I'd know what would make you stay."

"It's easy, Rafe." She dropped her voice to a whisper. "I know in your own way you love me, but...I need to be part of your life. Not a piece of fragile porcelain held at arms' distance, but nestled in a corner of your soul. And I need—" Looking over the extent of his property, she felt insignificant. This was what mattered to him, keeping the ranch, making it work. She was no more than a piece of the puzzle entitled *Rafe's Perfect Life*, like a tractor or brood hen.

Just as multiple generations of her family had practiced law and dallied in Boston's political arena, generations of Walkers had farmed and raised cattle on this land. Being a lawyer in Boston didn't make one a Fitzgerald, and marrying a Walker didn't make one a rancher. In truth, she felt no more an integral part of the holding now than she had when she arrived as a new bride, four years ago.

He'd needed her trust fund to help pull the ranch out of a hole the previous year, and her salary helped keep them in the black. Still, as he'd asserted in the heat of their most recent argument, the ranch wasn't in her blood.

To bring the point home—he'd never told her, but she knew it to be true—her name wasn't on the deed. She wasn't really a Walker. That was his implication, and his belief.

That was the way of life here. Men took care of the important things, such as supporting their wives and maintaining the family legacy. If they'd had children, maybe their relationship would have been different, but she'd wanted to wait. Then, she'd devoted so much effort to her job. The job he'd encouraged her to accept but now seemed to resent.

Shrugging, she said, "Maybe you're right. Maybe what we have isn't enough."

“It’s all I have, damn it, all I can give. All I know how to give.”

Cathy shook her head and walked to the driver’s door of the Ford Thunderbird. If only he could say the right words, make the right gesture to change her mind. At this point she wasn’t sure there was anything “right” enough.

“Wait!”

She stopped, hand on the latch, but she didn’t turn. *Maybe, maybe...*

“Where will you be, you know, in case something comes up?”

In case something comes up. Not, “Where will you be in case I discover I can’t live without you.” In a nutshell, that was their problem and Rafe still didn’t see it.

“If something should come up...?”

Her tone must have alerted him to her thinking because he lashed out. “You know what I meant.”

“Yes, sadly, I do.” She got in and started the engine, then lowered the window. “I’ll be at The Hartman until I figure out what I’m going to do, and I’ll be in the office as usual.” Her work in the Hartman County prosecutor’s office had kept her sane during the past year. It had also kept her away from home more than she’d expected. Her time at the office provided most of the grist for their arguments, but if she didn’t feel comfortable at home, what else should she do but work?

One other time during the year, she’d packed her big Louie Vuitton Pullman bag. Before she even got it to the car he’d lured her back up to the bedroom where his probing, magic fingers and the incredible sensation of his thick cock slipping into her, blocked all other thought. Not this time.

The enormity of her actions weighed on her shoulders. She wanted to cry, to pound her hands on the steering wheel and scream in pain and

frustration, but she wouldn't. Not in front of Rafe. Rafe, who loved her the only way he knew how but not the way she needed.

"It's someone in the office, isn't it?"

"What?" His question startled her.

"It's one of those lawyers you work with, a guy who knows how to dress and which wine to order. Someone from Boston or Chicago, who's anxious to take you back to the city." He spit out the words then waved his arm toward the road. "Well, go on, then. Go back to the high life in the East. I don't need you." Spinning on his heel, he stomped toward the barn, knocking his hat hard against his leg before slapping it on his head.

Her eyes burning with tears, Cathy raised the window and threw the car in gear. Gravel erupted from under the tires as the vehicle lunged forward, and dust filled the air. "I hope you choke on your words, Rafe Walker," she ground out, and thought she would choke herself from the ache constricting her throat.

The road into town ran straight, with nothing but the occasional lizard crossing from one side to the other to break the black ribbon. July heat rose in waves from the asphalt, obscuring the distant view as her tears obscured the near. They'd had no rain in weeks. The droplets running freely down her cheeks and off her chin were the most moisture their farm had seen since early May. Between her trial preparation and the drought, no wonder things between her and Rafe had come to a head. If only she could lay all the blame on weather and her first murder case.

With little to occupy her attention on the fifteen-mile drive, her mind drifted to when she and Rafe met and how different life had been.



“With any luck, Cathy, we’ll catch ourselves a couple of cowboys tonight,” Moira Kennedy said, as she smiled at a denim-clad man with smoky eyes and a black hat perched on his head.

He tipped the hat. “Ma’am.”

Cathy grabbed her arm and dragged her forward, squeezing through the crowd at the bottom of the stands. “Moira, don’t fall for the first cowboy you see. Besides, he’s probably a law student like us, out playing.”

The rodeo lights, noise and action had been exactly what Cathy wanted to celebrate her last night in Dallas before heading home to Boston. Not even the oppressive heat would ruin her fun. Her tight designer jeans bore no stains from hay or dirt or sweat, but they’d serve for one night of rodeo. Even less country, her ostrich-skin boots and white Stetson, under which she’d tucked her hair, screamed their newness, but she didn’t care. Probably a good number of people milling around them had never been on a ranch. At least years in an equestrian club had taught her one end of a horse from the other.

“Face it,” she told Moira, “we wouldn’t know what to do with a real cowboy if one actually took the time to talk to us.”

“Oh, I think I could figure out a few things.” Moira looked over her shoulder at the man tracking them with sexy eyes.

After a rough summer and before a rougher last year of school, Cathy wanted to let loose. So, instead of attending the country club dinner dance to celebrate the end of her summer internship in Dallas, she’d passed up filet mignon and fine wine in crystal for barbeque on a bun and beer from a longneck bottle. For tonight she’d rub elbows with ranchers, rodeo groupies and cowboy wannabees and forget about the importance of networking to a law career.

She had just crowded in at the fence demarcating the ring when the most handsome man she'd ever seen locked eyes with her from the back of a huge, black bull. The sounds and smells of the crowd faded to nothing.

Seven and a half heart-stopping seconds later, the bull tossed the cowboy to the ground like an irritating flea. Less than ninety seconds after brushing off his jeans, she looked up to find him by her side.

He stole her breath, her voice, her very thoughts.

Blue eyes so dark they seemed black shone from beneath thick, charcoal-colored lashes. He tipped back his dusty hat to reveal short dark hair. Dimples bracketed an impish grin. His body was lean and tall, and made even faded blue jeans and a worn denim shirt look good.

"Rafe Walker," he said by way of introduction, "and you are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen." If anything, his dimples deepened with the amusement in his voice. "I think I'm in love, little lady."

"Moira Kennedy." Her friend hadn't lost her power of speech. She reached around Cathy to extend her hand. "That was very impressive, Rafe."

Something inside Cathy stirred at the way Moira said his name. *Raaaaafe*. As though she whispered it after a long, slow session of fucking and the greatest orgasm in the history of the world.

"Nothing to it," he said. "Lots of guys better'n me."

"Oh, I doubt that," Moira murmured, moving beside him.

Rafe smiled at her, and then turned his gaze back to Cathy. "And your name is...?"

Somehow, in a practiced move but with calm she didn't feel, she arched her brows, flashed him a cool smile and held out her hand. "Catherine Fitzgerald."

He wiped his hands on his jeans, adding as much dust as he removed, and took her fingers in his. Warmth flooded her and her knees threatened to buckle. He used her hand to pull her closer, emphasizing how they fit together.

“Can I buy you a Coke?” Quickly he glanced at Moira. “Both of you, of course.”

Cathy also turned to look at her friend.

Moira correctly read the almost imperceptible shake of Cathy’s head. “No, I have someone to meet.”

“You do? Who?” The two of them had come to the rodeo alone.

Moira smiled and flipped her dark hair over her shoulder. “Don’t know yet.” She tugged on Cathy’s arm and turned her far enough away from Rafe to whisper, “Remember who said we wouldn’t know what to do with a cowboy? Well, here.” She reached into her shoulder bag and withdrew two condoms which she tucked into Cathy’s hand. “This is in case the cowboy teaches you what to do.”

“Are you nuts? I’m not going to get wild and crazy with a complete stranger.”

“You never know. Make sure you call me if you’re not coming back to the room tonight, and don’t forget our flight is at eleven.”

“Moira—”

But Moira fled. Back to Smokey Eyes, no doubt.

Giddy and breathless, Cathy faced Rafe Walker. Without another word, he led her toward the concession stand. When they had Cokes in hand, he guided her to an area at the end of the stables, behind the loudspeakers, where they could hear each other talk.

“Is this your first rodeo?” he asked.

“How did you know?”

He pointed to her legs. “Those aren’t Levis. And those expensive boots don’t look like they’ve been near a cow patty.”

“Busted,” she said with a nervous laugh.

He lifted her hat, releasing waves of hair to tumble over her shoulders and down her back. Rafe caught his breath and stared at it.

“To make your hat look lived in,” he said in a hushed voice, “you need to beat it against your leg a few times. But holy God, why you’d want to cover up that hair with any hat is beyond me.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m going to kiss you, Miss Catherine Fitzgerald. Is that all right?”

He stepped closer before she had a chance to say yes. She set her cup on a stack of boxes. He tossed his into a nearby trash can, never having taken a sip. Her hands walked up the front of his shirt and over his shoulders to meet at his nape. His hands fit neatly at the small of her back. He pulled her to him.

He was tall, but on tiptoe her body meshed with his in all the right places. Firm, warm lips met hers. When his tongue demanded she open to him, she did. His flavor burst in her mouth, spearmint and heat, as he boldly explored.

Raising his head, he looked around with heavy-lidded eyes. He walked across the yard, dragging her beside him. After a quick glance, he threw open a stall door and slipped inside. Moments after closing the gate, he lifted her, fitting her over his erection, scraping her breasts against his chest. She dug tunnels through his hair with her fingers, knocking his hat on the straw where he’d dropped her Stetson. Hungrily, she pulled his lips back to hers.

She whimpered. He moaned, licking the inside of her mouth as though she were the sweetest treat he’d ever had. The grind of his hips suggested what he wanted and she wrapped her legs around his waist.

He took two steps to back her up to the inside wall. She twisted, rubbing her crotch into the bulge that seemed ready to burst through zipper and button and double stitching the jeans ads bragged about.

Rafe tore his mouth away even while they dry humped against the stables. She buried her face in his neck, oblivious to anything around them, ignoring all but the rising tide of incredible sensations spiraling outward from low in her belly. Her hips had a life of their own, slamming into his, grinding, rubbing, stroking, denim to denim, heat to heat.

His breath bellowed against her ear, sending tendrils of hair flying. “God, I want you.”

He smelled of dirt and animal and raw masculinity. His neck was gritty with dust. She didn’t care. Her tongue streaked a path up the cords of straining muscle to his earlobe. She nipped it.

“Yes.” One word escaped, all she could manage as he shifted slightly and hit the right spot to send her over the edge. She gasped and held her breath, her head thrown back. Pinpricks of light flew across the blackness inside her lids.

Her nipples, sensitive and erect, pushed against the confines of her chambray shirt. The softness she’d admired when she bought the shirt that morning now seemed rough as sandpaper on her breasts. She should have worn a bra, but her small breasts rarely needed the support. Now the additional sensitivity helped prolong what had been an intense orgasm all on its own.

Finally, she came back to herself. Rafe’s labored breathing matched hers, though the bulge in his jeans hadn’t diminished. He let her slide down his body and then rested his forehead on her head. The sounds of people walking by penetrated her hearing and bright flames of mortification heated her cheeks.

“You’re hot, Catherine Fitzgerald. I think I was in high school the last time I did what we just did. And unlike you, Becky Thomson didn’t get off on it back then, though I shot off like a firecracker.” He grinned down at her. “Guess turn about is fair play, though I sure would like to feel a little relief too.”

She’d never done anything like that before, *never*. Not with her high school boyfriend to whom she’d lost her virginity, and not with the society lawyer to whom she was practically engaged back home. She’d had orgasms before, sure, but not with the primal passion she’d just experienced with this man she’d known about fifteen minutes. A piercing blaze had ripped through their clothing, without any touching or foreplay.

“I hardly know what to say, Mr. Walker. This should be so embarrassing.”

He stroked her hair, twirling a strand between calloused fingers and staring at it in awe. “Call me Rafe. I think it’s accepted etiquette for two people who humped like rabbits to use each other’s first names.”

“Humped...?”

“Umm-hmmm.” He held her hair to his nose and breathed in. “Like rabbits. Though I think usually Mr. Rabbit isn’t still hard and aching when they finish. Jesus, you smell good. Really good.”

“You smell like bull, Rafe.”

He burst out laughing and stared down at her, his dimples like shining beacons, calling to her. “You are all dusty and mussed. And so pretty I can hardly stand it. Come back to the hotel with me?”

“I don’t even know you.”

“I think we knew each other the minute you smiled at me across the ring just before the gate opened.”

“I did not smile at you.” She fingered his collar, thinking how much she’d like to be touching him instead of his shirt.

“Oh yes you did. I never flirt with strange women.” She cast him a doubtful look so he added, “Not when I’m about to bull ride. But you...you were different. I knew right away we’d get together.” He leaned down to her ear. “And I’ve never done this before. My partner’s pleasure has never been so important. Come back to the room with me. Let’s do it again only right this time. Let me make you feel good, Catherine Fitzgerald.” In her ear, the words came out on a growl.

“Make up your mind, lady. I need this stall,” came a voice from outside.

“Oh, Lord.” She felt her cheeks blush crimson but Rafe just laughed.

Gallantly, he opened the stall door and ushered her out. Tipping his hat to the older man holding the rope on a very large bull, he said, “Thanks for the use of the stall, Ace.”

“Don’t make a habit of it,” the older man grouched.

“I promise,” Rafe replied, smiling down at Cathy.

She wanted him again, right then and there. But naked this time. She wanted to be under him, feeling his weight, watching his muscles play in the light. She wanted to see his eyes when he filled her, as he rocked in and out and when he came, while deep inside her body.

“Is it possible we could do a little something in your car? Before getting to the hotel?”

He laughed. “Darlin’, I’m happy to oblige. It’s a truck and there is a *lot* we can do.”

Fire pooled in her groin. Burning passion proved to be a familiar feeling that lasted through the weekend, barricaded in his hotel room. She called Moira after hastily rescheduling her flight. They didn’t come

up for air until Sunday night when she had to return to her room and pack.

Then reality intruded. Cathy returned to Boston and the conservative, ordered career path she'd laid out. She never forgot Rafe, though. Not his smile or his laugh or the way his light touch made her feel. Oh, yes, his touch.

All autumn she remembered the sensation of his calloused fingers brushing her skin. And the sweet sensation of his thick cock, wet with her own moisture, slipping into her, stretching, abrading, filling her. Each time they came together she wondered how it was that a man she barely knew made her feel complete, so unlike the other men she'd been with. She'd half decided by the time the weekend ended that she was in love.

Despite promises, he didn't contact her. All efforts to reach him ended in unanswered messages. She put a stop to the speculation that she would marry her high-powered boyfriend, but gave up all hope of ever hearing from Rafe.

In December and January, three phone calls from him punctured the cold, bringing the memory of a blazing Texas summer while snow fell outside her Boston window. A month before graduation she arrived from a late class to find him sitting on her porch steps, turning the wide brim of his Stetson in his big hands as he watched traffic pass. Their eyes met and he stood. When he spread his arms, she'd flowed into them like water filling an empty canyon after spring rains.

"I can't stop thinking about you," he murmured into her hair.

"Nor I, you," she responded, thinking how perfect life was at that moment.

He piled her books on the porch and then kissed her so she felt it in every inch of her body, unmindful of horns and shouts of encouragement from passing vehicles or giggles from pedestrians.

“Do you have your own room in this place?” Rafe had his arm firmly planted around her shoulders, but he looked up at the Victorian house behind her.

“I have the whole house.” She smiled at the look of astonishment on his face. “It belongs to my grandmother, but she’s out of the country right now.”

He showed his dimples. “Well, God bless Grandma.” Scooping her books off the porch, he followed her inside. Setting the books down again, this time on a table in the entry hall, he wasted no time taking Cathy in his arms.

She folded her arms against her chest and then pushed him away. “Wait a minute. You went months without contacting me or returning my calls. I know I just fell into your arms out there on the sidewalk, but why should I now?” Her heart lodged in her throat watching him tuck his hands in his back pockets, hang his head and stare at his boots.

“I was scared, Cathy.” When he looked up she couldn’t mistake the sincerity in his eyes. “That weekend in Dallas hit me like a two-by-four. I’ve never been so into a woman. No pun intended.” He grinned for a brief moment. “We’re so different; I didn’t think there was a chance in hell we could make it together. But damn if I could get you out of my mind.”

He reached for her hand and she let him take it. “Then when I called and we talked, and I still couldn’t get past the lump in my throat with every thought of you, I gave in. I knew I had to see you, knew I had to find out if you feel anything like I do.”

“And that is...?”

“You’re on my mind all the time. I go out on the ranch and think of you, of that weekend. I go to bed dog tired, and can’t sleep for thinking about you, wondering where you are, who you’re with.” He slapped his hat against his thigh. “Weren’t you engaged or about to be engaged?”

“I broke up with him.”

His eyes lit up. “You did?”

“As soon as I got back from Dallas. Somehow I thought a cowboy I met out there was interested in me.”

“You were right, although he was too much of a jackass to follow you back here and beg you to come home with him. But I’m here now. Come to Texas when you graduate. Marry me.”

“What?” She blinked, uncertain she’d heard right. “I can’t marry you. I’m a city girl.”

“The ranch isn’t that far from Houston. When you feel the need for city, we’ll go in.”

“I don’t know anything about ranching.”

“That’s my job.”

“Are you close enough to a town that needs lawyers?”

“Fifteen miles away is the county seat. Where there’s a courthouse there’re lawyers.” His smile broke out, dimples and all. “None as pretty as you, darlin’.”

“I can’t cook.”

That stopped him. He studied her eyes. And her heart?

“You can read a cookbook, though?” At her nod he let out a breath. “Then we can manage. Hell, I’ve been managing alone for years. You’ll have time to learn.”

She heaved a sigh. “God, Rafe. I can’t believe I’m even considering this.” She looked away, nibbling her bottom lip.

Months ago, they'd lit up the world with their fiery passion. But they hadn't spent the whole weekend screwing around in bed. They'd talked for hours, sharing their views of life, both ridiculous and sublime. She'd thought maybe she found The One, until she returned to Boston and hadn't heard a word from him.

Her heart screamed to jump at the chance for happiness with a man who made her forget the world with his touch. Her mind pounded home the message that she didn't know this man at all. *One weekend of passion does not a happy marriage make.*

But it didn't guarantee a failure, either. Plenty of good marriages had been built on less. None that she could think of at the moment, but...

"Yes," she whispered.

He swooped her into his arms and twirled her. "Oh God, Cathy. I'll make you happy, I swear I will."

"I love you, Rafe."

He set her on her feet and held her close. "Cathy, Cathy," he murmured into her hair. "I love you too." Then he chuckled. "Just think. I'll be makin' love to the sexiest, most beautiful attorney in the whole state of Texas. And, darlin', you know how big Texas is."

He followed her up the stairs to her room. Sunlight spattered across the bed, filtered through the leaves of the beech tree outside the window. A hint of vanilla lingered in the air, a reminder of the candle she'd burned that morning while dressing.

Rafe's hands landed on her shoulders, halting them in front of her floor mirror. From behind, he reached around and unfastened the first button of her blouse. Gently, he spread the fabric. Almost religiously, his fingers skimmed the bare skin revealed.

He stepped closer. She leaned back, loving the sense of being enfolded, loving his scent—a primal, sexy, musk—loving the hard length

of him pressed into her back. His chest rose and fell with each breath, the muscles tense, strong, warm.

With each button unfastened, he allowed his fingers to touch her skin, to explore, to revere. Finally he swept the material off her shoulders and to the floor. From the back, he unhooked her bra, but instead of stripping it off, he slid his hands around to cup her breasts.

“They’re small,” she said.

“They’re perfect.” As if to prove his words, he kneaded them tenderly and then played the nipples with his palms until they stood in super-sensitized points.

She rolled her head back and moaned. He bent his head and nipped her neck, never moving his gaze from their joint reflection.

It took only a few minutes for him to bare her. His hands roamed at will over her skin. Imposing his booted foot between her feet, he nudged her legs apart. With one hand, he reached for the golden triangle between her thighs, with the other, he caressed her breast.

“Rafe!” She wanted more, much more.

“Shh. Just watch.”

And she did.

With infinite care he furrowed her pubic hair, teasing the length, twirling his fingers through it before continuing on his quest. His middle finger parted her labia, releasing a powerful waft of scent. He inhaled deeply.

Her arousal seemed to initiate a change. He rocked his hips; she pushed back, rubbing her bottom against his cock.

“No, it’s too soon. I want to make you come first. Then I want to see you come again while I’m deep inside.”

Her breath caught. His finger slipped in the moisture between her legs. He stroked up to her clit, bringing her fragrant wetness with him.

Need built in her belly. She spread her legs farther apart and rolled her labia over his fingers, which were now moving back and dipping inside her slick passage.

“So wet. So hot. Mine.”

“All yours,” she said. The sparkle in his eyes when his gaze captured hers in the mirror stoked her fire higher. “Faster, Rafe. I want you inside me.”

He pulled her nipple, then flicked it. She bit back a scream with the pain/pleasure. His fingers thrust in and out of her pussy, then pulled her moisture, dragged her pleasure, up to her clit, teasing mercilessly. Her hips jerked forward and back, riding his hand in front, rubbing his cock in back.

Like an itch she couldn't scratch, she worked her hips and arched her back to find relief. Every nerve ending sparked. Her breath came in pants. Her fingers stretched out as tension spiraled through her.

And then... And then, the dam burst. Relentlessly, his strokes hurled her into a flood of sensation. Her pussy convulsed around and over his fingers. Tremors rippled through her and she keened her release into the silence of the room.

“Look,” he commanded.

She opened her eyes to see a woman in the throes of orgasm. A rosy hue covered her chest and neck. Her eyes glazed below heavy lids. Her nipples stood at stiff peaks, dark red and alert. And Rafe's fingers, wet and calloused, moved triumphantly, pushing, pressing, rubbing.

“God, you're beautiful.”

She stretched her arms over her head and around his neck, pulling his mouth to hers. “*You're* beautiful,” she whispered before meeting his lips and thrusting her tongue into his mouth.

Hungrily she ate at him. He turned her and at last let her unbutton his shirt and unzip his jeans, allowing his cock the freedom it craved.

She dropped to her knees and pulled his pants and briefs to mid-thigh. She crawled forward. Grasping him, she looked up while teasing the purple head with her tongue. Suddenly as greedy for his cock as she had been for his mouth, she took all of him in one movement.

He gasped and then groaned. His fingers tangled in her hair, stopping her from sliding forward. Holding his crown in her mouth, she looked up.

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

She took him in hand, sliding her fist to the base of his shaft, twisting lightly and then stroking back up.

“Absolutely. Let me suck your dick, Rafe.”

He strangled out a laugh. “God, I love it when you talk dirty. You look so sweet and conservative and then you come out with something like ‘dick’.”

She smiled, feeling powerful. “Let me suck your dick and then you can drill my cunt. We can fuck all afternoon.” He groaned and she chuckled. “Later we can do a sixty-nine and you can eat me. I’ll swallow, Rafe, I’ll take all of you down my throat and swallow what you give me. I’ll let you—”

“Enough!” He grabbed her arms and lifted her up and over to the bed.

At once she scooted back and spread her legs. “Fuck me with your boots on, Cowboy.”

“Yes, ma’am.” On hands and knees he crawled between her legs. “Cathy, have you been with anyone since...?”

“No, have you?” She watched his eyes but they gazed at her clear and honest.

He shook his head. “It would have been a letdown, darlin’. Birth control?”

“Taken care of. Come and get me or do I need to think of more dirty things to say?”

“I hope you won’t be thinking at all.” He settled over her. Guiding his shaft, he ran it up and down between her lower lips, coating them both with her moisture. Then he did what she’d been dreaming about for months, he slid inside, filling her completely, stretching the lining of her pussy until she thought she couldn’t take any more.

And he moved, slipping out, leaving only the head of his shaft inside and then slowly pushing, expanding her body and awareness. His mouth found hers and his tongue struck a rhythm to match his cock.

She spread her knees wider than she thought they could go. Her legs wrapped around his narrow waist. Arching her back scraped her nipples through the curly hair on his chest. She smoothed her hands up the backs of his arms to the firm muscles of his shoulders, which were tense and strained with the pressure of holding him over her body. Then she stroked down, along his spine.

A sheen of sweat coated his back. She felt a light moisture between them, too, and heard the slap of their bodies as they came together. Faster now, and harder, he glided into her. He had control of her body, of her senses. They breathed in synch. Their hearts beat together, dancing the ballet their bodies composed.

Her hands reached his buttocks. Grabbing his cheeks, she dug in her nails, kneading and pulling him even closer. She wanted to be one with him, she wanted him to know and feel what he did to her, with every nerve he had.

She got her wish when sensation cascaded over her at the same moment Rafe threw back his head and cried out her name. For the first time in her life, a man’s seed spurted against the lining of her vagina. In seconds, sperm swam farther into her body, becoming part of her. Sexy,

so sexy, to think they were joined in this way. The thought set off another orgasmic wave.

Long minutes later, Rafe lay beside her. She thought again about what they'd done. The man she loved had given her a portion of himself. This was a commitment, a way of showing how much they meant to each other. Someday they'd make a baby and then truly they would be one, in a new and unique way.

He propped up on his elbow and took her hand. Linking their fingers, he kissed her knuckles. "I can't wait 'til we're married. I want to be everything to you."

"You already are."

She looked into the eyes of the man who loved her, and saw the promise of their future. He was her destiny. If he lived in Texas, then Texas was her home too. If he lived on a farm, she'd learn to garden. And she'd learn to cook—such was her determination to be the best wife to Rafe.



She couldn't have known then that no marriage maintained the level of wild desire they'd experienced in those heady, early days. It never occurred to her that she and Rafe would become little more than roommates who shared a bed. That they would brush by each other but never really touch, or that for weeks they'd be too tired for simple sex, much less romps of passion.

She longed for life the way it used to be, before her job took so much time and Rafe shut her out. She longed for what she hadn't had in a long time, and for something she feared she'd never receive from Rafe again.

Chapter Two

“Rafe?” To the uninitiated, his sister’s voice sounded casual but her steely undertone tipped him off to trouble.

“Hey, Sis. How’re you doing?” He put down the glass holding three fingers of deep, amber whiskey, his second in the fifteen minutes since the mailman brought the certified letter.

“I’m fine. The question is, how’re *you* doin’? And Cathy. How’s she?”

So this was the call, finally. Cathy had been gone almost two weeks. He was surprised they’d let him off the hook this long. He hadn’t told anyone she was gone, figuring first it was no one else’s business, and hoping second that she’d come home before her leaving became common knowledge. The former didn’t seem to matter to his sister, obviously, and the latter simply hadn’t happened.

Every day marked another high point in how miserable he was, but he hadn’t contacted Cathy. He’d meant it when he said he wanted her to be happy, and if that brought him misery, then so be it. Of course, before, he hadn’t known the meaning of the word *misery*. He’d lived alone for years before they married, but the past two weeks had been different. Before, being alone had been his choice, a quiet house had meant peace after a long day’s work. When Cathy agreed to become his wife, he thought he’d never be alone again, not in his heart, not in spirit.

Not like this.

The aching loneliness of the empty house, the burgeoning hope when the phone rang, the quick futile glances to the dirt drive to see if her

Thunderbird was barreling home—all these things had sent pain lancing through him, but he'd borne it. The letter he'd received a little while ago stating Cathy was seeking a divorce was almost too much for him, though. He didn't know how he'd go on when everything good in his life had turned to shit.

There was no use hiding the facts any longer. A page and a half of typed truth stared at him from the table, right next to the open bottle and half-full glass. "Barb, Cathy's left me."

"I know, Rafe." Her voice was low, her words sympathetic, but the tone was still pure iron.

He huffed a breath. "I reckon the whole county knows by now." More than the whole county if his sister had heard. She lived in Houston, miles away. "She served me with papers today. She intends to divorce me."

A sharp intake of breath indicated his sister's shock. "Divorce? But-but that's crazy. I thought she'd just moved into town, to think things through. That woman loves you. Anyone can see it."

"Not Cathy, and she's the only one who counts."

"What do you plan to do about it?"

He pictured his mom standing right behind his sister, listening to every word and trying to get Barbara to give him advice. Their mother lived in a suite of rooms his brother-in-law built for her off their Houston home. Barbara would be standing in her kitchen, her back rigid and her blue eyes flaming, looking just like their mom.

"What do you mean what do I plan to do? The thing I want most in the world is for Cathy to be happy. Evidently, I don't make her happy. What do you think, I should drag her back here and have her hate me for it? I can't do that. This time, she made it clear she—"

"What do you mean 'this time'? She's left before?"

Hell! Why hadn't he just told the whole Houston contingent that he'd take care of his own business?

"We've had a few problems over the last couple of years, but we've always been able to deal with things. With no outside help," he emphasized. His hint fell on deaf ears.

"Is it work? Sex?"

"Barbara, if you think I'm discussing my sex life with you, it's time we checked into nursing care because you're senile." He added a light tone but his sister didn't laugh. Hoping it didn't reflect the despair infecting his spirit, he lowered his voice. "Really, there's nothing you can do. I appreciate the concern, but I think this time we're finished. Cathy misses the city. You know, she's educated and sophisticated, and I'm...well, I'm not." He didn't explain his worst fear, that Cathy might want another man.

In almost a whisper, Barbara repeated his latest statement. His mother's voice rose in the background and Barb added her own comments. "Nonsense. You're educated. Maybe you didn't go to Harvard, but the University of Texas is a fine school. I know Cathy comes from a different background, but I never thought she minded the simpler lifestyle. She loves her job, and I know she loves you. Let us think for a minute."

"There's no reason for either of you to think. I can—"

"Is there someone else?"

His heart sank. "Not for me." Rafe stared with longing at the whiskey waiting on the table. He rarely pulled the bottle of Jim Beam out from the back of the cabinet, but he was looking forward to getting good and drunk tonight. He wished he could start right away, but one slurred or false word and Barbara would blab to their mom that he was drinking.

God knows, those two might jump in the car and drive up here, and that was all he needed.

Silence. “Do you know for sure there is for her?”

“Not for sure, no. But she’s been working long hours with one particular guy, there’re private phone calls when she’s home. She says I need to figure out what I want, and she says it like she already knows what she wants. The fact that she left shows it’s not me.”

“So, what is it, did she say?” His mother said something too low for him to hear. “Just a minute, Mama, I’m waiting for him to say,” Barb whispered in an aside.

Subtle, Barb. “No. Maybe I needed to say I love her more, or maybe she wants me to sweep her off her feet. Hell, after four years I can’t be expected to kiss her hand every morning or get down on one knee to ask what’s for dinner. Half the time lately she’s not even home for dinner until eight o’clock, but I don’t complain. I understand she’s building her career.” Anger replaced despair as he remembered that he thought Cathy was having an affair which would account for her late nights.

How could she do that to him? To them?

He remembered clear as day when she’d hired on as the first female DA in Hartman County. Skidding that Thunderbird to a stop at the edge of the pasture, she’d blown the horn and waved. Then she’d run out to where he was mowing. Having exchanged heels for tennis shoes, she’d still worn one of her expensive Boston suits that she’d put on for the interview. He’d found out she left stockings and panties at home when she climbed on the tractor and straddled him.

Lord knows where they found room between the gear shift and mower controls, but somehow she unzipped his jeans and climbed on. She didn’t care about the suit skirt pushed up around her waist or that he’d tossed her jacket onto the cut grass so he could suck her tits. She didn’t

even care about the traffic passing on the highway a few hundred feet away. She'd only cared about celebrating with him, in their own special way.

Even now he could feel what it was like having her slide down his dick. The sun beat on the roof of the tractor and there was no breeze, making the day feel well over the one hundred and two degrees the weatherman had predicted. Sweat ran like a river and slicked their bodies. Cathy tasted salty and hot. She'd said she liked him dirty and sweaty when they made love, and she'd nipped his earlobe. He drove deep into her liquid heat, coming like a volcano. She screamed his name out in that open field with the smell of sex and cut grass enveloping them. And he'd loved every minute of it. Why hadn't they ever done that again?

"Rafe? Rafe Walker!"

Oh shit. He'd fantasized about having sex while his sister was on the phone.

"Sorry. I got distracted."

"I asked if anything else had happened. We just don't see Cathy having an affair."

Damn. "I didn't want to worry you but we almost went bankrupt last year."

"Oh no!"

He heard "bankrupt" and "wait a minute" as Barb relayed the information.

"Between this damn drought and the drop in cattle prices, we came close to not making it. I had to ask Cathy for money from her trust fund to pull us through. It almost destroyed me," he admitted, ashamed. "A man shouldn't have to go to his wife for help like that. And then, I've

been putting in lots of hours, trying to keep our heads above water. Truthfully, we don't see each other much anymore. Maybe this is best."

"Rafe, Cathy's money is your money. I'm sure she feels that way. Just like the ranch is hers as well as yours."

Of course, the ranch wasn't Cathy's. He'd never put her name on the deed. Somewhere in the back of his mind he'd never really believed she'd stay. He'd never thought what he offered would be enough, and he was right.

"She's not like you and Mom."

"Of course she isn't. You don't want her to be. You want her to be like Cathy, like herself. Why don't you two take some time away? Beau and I sure need a break from the house and kids, and so did Daddy and Mama. Why do you think we spent weekends at Gran's every few months?"

Definitely more information than he wanted.

"I have to face it, Barb. I'm a failure as a husband."

Her silence cut him like a knife. She must agree.

"Is Cathy right, Rafe? Do you *really* not know what you want?"

In her quiet question he found the answer.



Two weeks gone—well, twelve days and fourteen hours—and Cathy had heard nothing from Rafe. Each morning she rose from her bed hoping he'd call that day to talk about getting back together. Each night she turned out the light with a heart aching from loneliness.

During the day she performed at her peak on her first murder case. In the evenings, she concentrated on the next day in court to avoid thinking about Rafe and what a failure she was as a wife. And she must

be an awful wife because she couldn't find a way to make Rafe love her again.

But nights were the hardest. Then she tossed and turned, remembering what life had been like when they shared impromptu passion. The stress of too many long hours preparing for court over the last few months had come to an end with the guilty verdict that morning. Now she'd have too much time to stem the tide of the good memories.

Like when he'd surprised her one Saturday afternoon. He'd come into the office freshly washed from the barn. He'd stripped off her slacks and sat cross-legged on the floor, her legs over his shoulders. He'd teased the insides of her thighs with the bristles of a five o'clock shadow and then used his tongue to lap her cream and tantalize her clit until she exploded against his mouth.

Just as good were the summer evenings when they sat on the porch drinking iced tea and watching the sunset. Words weren't necessary to her peace, just Rafe's closeness, in spirit as well as body.

All of that had changed when the ranch came close to failing last year and he'd come—practically hat in hand—to ask if she could help. They were married, so of course she wanted to share her money. But some small part of her had resented his asking because he'd never made her feel they were partners when it came to the Walker property. She had lawyer's work and he had rancher's work, which, as he'd phrased it, was their livelihood. As though her job was a hobby. Maybe she should have taken the hint then, and left.

And now she had. The divorce papers had been served yesterday. Even that hadn't prompted Rafe to call. With the case over, she'd start applying for positions back in Boston.

To celebrate their win, her co-counsel, Mark Connors, had offered to buy lunch at The Hartman Inn. Cathy knew he was attracted to her. He'd

made several veiled comments about how he'd like to know her better. Mark, with his knowing good looks and rampant ambition, was the kind of man she'd almost married, the sort who'd lost all attraction for her once she'd visited the dusty, dry plains of Texas. Everything changed with Rafe, and now no smile or quip from Mark sent even a small tingle down her back.

At the end of the meal, Cathy excused herself. Mark was headed back to the office and she had calls to make from her room.

"I enjoyed working with you, Mark."

"I liked working with you too. I think we make a great team."

Oh, Lord, he didn't really wink, did he? "Well, maybe we'll be on a case together again sometime." She held out her hand, not expecting him to grasp the chance to pull her into an embrace. She pushed away, but not before she felt him stiffen. She followed his gaze and saw Rafe.

Her heart raced and her breath caught in her throat. Ignoring Mark, she turned and focused on the incredible man a few dozen feet away. She wanted him with a fierceness even stronger than when she'd seen him waiting on her front step in Boston years ago. And she didn't think any wanting could be greater than that.

He stood transfixed in the entryway, watching them. With his rigid posture, Cathy knew every muscle hidden beneath his best suit had tensed. The gleam off his boots shone in the artificial illumination of the chandelier but there was no welcoming sparkle in his eyes.

Except for the restaurant lighting, the room was dim, and a glance out the window showed the previously sunny sky filled with dark clouds. Rain, she thought. Then she took another look at Rafe's face. *No, a storm.*

He stood so still he didn't even seem to breathe. Cellophane-wrapped roses hung from his hand, at least a dozen and blood red. Dressed as he was, she imagined he'd gone full-bore for romance, sophisticated Boston

style. Cathy thought daisies, brown-eyed Susans and even Texas bluebonnets were as romantic as roses, but she wouldn't argue the point, if he ever got through the doorway and to the table.

Cathy sensed Mark step away from her, a move that Rafe could easily interpret as guilt. She started forward since he didn't seem inclined to take the first step.

A clap of thunder broke the tension. With a jerk, Rafe looked out the window then back at her. Pain, and then rage, filled his eyes. His stance and expression rivaled the tormented sky, and she knew right then he wouldn't ask her to come back to him. Seeing her with Mark would have verified his worst fears about her and their marriage. He confirmed her thought when he thrust the roses at the hostess, spun on his polished heel and strode out.

At least rain would make his life easier. She wouldn't have to worry about him or the ranch when she left.

"Rafe!" She ran after him, desperate to explain. He might leave, but she didn't want him to think she'd been unfaithful.

Cathy reached the door in time to watch her life speed away in a black pickup truck.

Chapter Three

Rafe slapped the steering wheel with the heel of his hand as he sped through a yellow light at the edge of town. He was right, Cathy was seeing another man. And she didn't even have the decency to take it out of town, to hide the affair from prying, gossiping biddies in the place where he lived and had to do business. Damn her! Damn her to Hell, along with that wussy-looking bastard she was fooling around with.

After talking to his sister, he'd called his lawyer and requested he add Cathy's name to all his property. Early today he'd signed the papers, now burning a hole in his inside jacket pocket. Then he'd gone in search of the biggest bunch of roses he could find. At last, he'd walked to the courthouse in search of Cathy. He'd arrived to find her case ended, so he'd gone to her office. That's when he heard she was having lunch at the Inn.

And the Inn was where he'd discovered her in another man's arms. He was right after all. She was having an affair.

At seventy-five miles an hour, his truck ate up the distance to the ranch. He almost dared a trooper to stop him today. He'd end up in jail for assault because he was going to hit the first person who got close to him. Glancing up at the darkening sky, he mused that the only good thing happening today was the rain.

Finally. Rain for the fields, to fill the streams and cisterns. From the appearance of the sky, maybe this storm would provide enough water for weeks. He desperately hoped so. He not only needed the water for the

ranch to recover, but he was determined to pay Cathy back every cent she'd taken from her trust fund. No way would he be beholden to her, now that she wouldn't be his wife any longer.

Although Rafe's mind overflowed with images of that blond jerk's arms around Cathy, other thoughts pushed their way to the forefront. There was much to do before the full force of the storm struck. He had to make certain the horses had entry to the barn and that they had clean hay, that the equipment was under cover and the house was battened down. The rain was welcome, but a bad storm could bring a lot of damage too. Strong wind already pushed his truck around the road.

He tuned the radio to the local agricultural station. "...is a warning. Tornados have been spotted in Harrell and Hartman counties. One is confirmed to have stayed on the ground for at least twenty-five miles. These funnels are large and dangerous. If you are in Hartman, Williams, Sayors and the surrounding areas, take cover immediately. This is a warn—"

Punching the button to silence the announcement, Rafe slammed his foot on the brake, bringing the truck to a fishtailing stop. His heart pounded. White-knuckled, his hands grasped the top of the steering wheel where he dropped his head. Seven miles ahead of him lay his life, land and buildings that had been in his family for generations.

No. Not true. The truth had hit him like a punch to the gut yesterday. Ahead of him lay his business. His life was eight miles behind him in the form of a blond, green-eyed woman whom he loved with everything in him. And who might have no idea of the upcoming danger.

Without another thought, Rafe U-turned and raced toward Hartman. He didn't slow when rain pelted the windshield, but he had no choice with the onslaught of hail.

At last he pulled up in front of the hotel, flung open the truck door and dashed into the lobby. Hotel guests stood at the windows watching the storm. Rafe strode to the front desk. “There’re tornado warnings out for the area. Everyone should head for shelter.”

“Tornado!” The girl behind the counter stared at him with wide, frightened eyes. An older man appeared from a back room and Rafe explained again in terse sentences. He asked the girl, “Do you know where Mrs. Walker is?”

“N-no. Maybe the restaurant?” Her voice cracked with ready tears.

He’d been gone less than half an hour. Could she still be in the restaurant? He ran in that direction.

The room was almost empty and Cathy was nowhere in sight. He hurried back to the desk, now crowded with staff listening to instructions from the manager. “What’s Mrs. Walker’s room?” The girl stared for a moment. Rafe slapped the counter. “Mrs. Walker’s room!”

“Oh!” She clicked some keys on the computer. “Two-twenty.”

Rafe dashed for the stairs. At the second floor he first turned the wrong direction, then reversed to find the correct door.

“Cathy!” He pounded but didn’t hear a sound coming from inside. Where would she have gone? Back to the office? To the guy’s place?

No. He pushed the image of her in another man’s arms to the back of his mind. Right now what she had or hadn’t done didn’t matter in relation to her life.

He rushed back to the lobby where—thank God—he saw her standing with a group of people at one of the windows.

He hadn’t noticed earlier, but she wore his favorite emerald green suit. The shade brought out the spectacular color of her eyes and turned her hair the color of wheat. Today she had the golden strands pulled back into a low bun. On Cathy the style looked sexy rather than

matronly. She'd never needed heels for height—she was a mere four inches shorter than his six-foot-two frame—but she wore them because he'd told her once that he couldn't take his eyes off her legs when she had them on. Rafe didn't want to contemplate who'd been staring at her legs today.

“Cathy!” He launched himself toward her.

“Rafe! What are you—?”

“There's no time to explain.” He grabbed her hand and started for the door. “Come on, we have to get out of here.”

“Where are we going? It's raining—”

He stopped her words with his lips. Not a kiss like he wanted to give her, but one to send a message, a promise. That's what he hoped, anyway. “God willing, we're going home. Okay?”

She gave a nod in reply. It was enough.

Despite the high heels, she kept up with him as he darted out the front door. In seconds, he headed the truck out of town and went speeding toward home again.



Cathy had never been so terrified. Hail covered the road, turning the asphalt into a slippery, treacherous mess. Rafe guided the truck with skill she'd never before appreciated. Rain started again, falling in torrents that the windshield wipers couldn't begin to handle. Belted in, she still felt sick with fear. She couldn't see where they were driving, and didn't think Rafe could either.

She chanced a glance at him. They hadn't said a word since he'd told her at the hotel he was taking her home. She wished she knew what changed his mind, though it hardly mattered at the moment. The feeling

of relief that flooded her with his statement surprised her, although she'd been dying to hear him say something like it for the last two weeks. She wanted to explain that she knew what she wanted. Not telling him before had been not only wrong, but holding in her feelings had cost them a year of possible happiness.

He couldn't spare a second for her right now, though. Totally focused on the road and the truck, he leaned forward as though being closer to the windshield would allow him better visibility. His hands gripped the wheel and his mouth formed a tight, thin line.

Suddenly, the rain lessened, and with that, so did the tightness in her chest. "Better," she said.

It felt like hours since they'd left the hotel. She turned to look out the back and was surprised to see the lights of Hartman not far behind them. They hadn't driven nearly as far as she'd thought. The high roofline of The Hartman Inn was visible, but a low cloud covered it as she watched.

"Shit!" The expletive from Rafe startled her.

"What is it? You can see better now, can't you?" She fought to keep anxiety from her tone, but Rafe's expression made it difficult.

He turned his head for a brief look at her. Her fear must have shown clearly on her face, because he reached over to squeeze her hand and flash her a quick smile. "It seems we're among tornados, darlin'. When I came into town today I'd hoped to stir up a storm of emotion in you, but I didn't have this in mind."

"Tornados?" Frowning, she looked off to the right, where the ranch was located. She sucked in a breath. Far off in the distance, a narrow, dark gray funnel stretched from the cloud cover to the ground, skimming the earth. As Cathy watched, the tip of the funnel rose then touched down again in a different spot. "My God, Rafe, it could hit the ranch."

“That’s not what I’m worried about right now.” He leveled his gaze at the rearview mirror.

Cathy swiveled to look out the back window. The thick cloud she thought contained only rain was actually... “Oh my God!”

“I’ve got to get you to safety,” he muttered.

That couldn’t be a tornado. Everyone knew tornadoes were funnels, large at the top, tapering to a point at the bottom, like the one she’d seen heading toward the ranch. But the swirling air mass behind them suddenly tossed debris into the air. Sparks arced, like fireworks in the dark sky.

“Transformers,” Rafe said, pressing the accelerator to the floor even while watching in the mirrors as the town behind them destructed.

“This can’t be,” Cathy breathed. “There won’t be anything left.”

“Worried about your boyfriend?”

She snapped her head around in time to see him wince. So he did believe there was something between her and Mark. “There is no boyfriend, only a colleague.”

He looked chagrined. “It doesn’t matter. I shouldn’t have said anything. No time to worry about that now.” He clamped his lips together, the same lips that had sent desire coursing through her fifteen or twenty minutes ago.

Unable to stop herself, she turned back toward Hartman, but the town had disappeared. A swirling mass of charcoal-colored air followed them with remarkable speed.

Rafe twisted the wheel to the right, slipping and skidding in the mud of a dirt driveway. They’d caught up to more rain and he seemed to throw the truck into 4-wheel drive and flip the windshield wipers on high simultaneously. The vehicle groaned, then found traction. They flew up the drive, running perpendicular to the onrushing tornado.

“Where are we going?” Cathy shouted. A small tree branch blew across the hood. She clenched her hands and tried to keep from panicking.

He kept glancing past her to measure their distance from the storm. Cathy peered through the rain and saw a house ahead.

Rafe whipped the truck around the building. “Come on!” He turned off the engine and opened the door. Jumping to the ground, he looked to see if she followed. She did, though her heels sunk into the muddy surface, slowing her progress. The wind disposed of her chignon, and fierce rain battered her before she reached the back steps.

Rafe pounded on the door then turned the knob, but the house was locked. He breathed heavily and scrubbed his hand across his cheek. “Wait here,” he yelled over the screaming wind.

She tucked herself as close to the door as possible and watched as he tested the windows along the back. A gust tore the lid off an aluminum trashcan at the corner and hurled it, catching Rafe’s shoulder and head. Cathy’s hand flew to her mouth but too late to stop her scream. Rafe stumbled then straightened, looking dazed. He shook his head and sent her a weak smile, which did little to stop the terror sending her heart into a dizzying rhythm.

Please, God, please don’t let anything happen to Rafe. I love him.

She opened her eyes to see him rip off his jacket and wrap it around his forearm and hand. He swung his arm in a wide arc and broke a window, then swept the frame clear of glass. Hiking himself up, he took a breath and lifted his leg over the sill.

Within seconds he was at the back door, dragging Cathy into the house. Debris sailed by, driven by the wind. Papers, leaves and twigs detoured into the house through the broken window and open doorway.

Rafe grasped Cathy's elbow with one hand and opened every door he found with the other, quickly discovering there was no basement.

Suddenly, a roar captured her attention. There had been no tracks outside, but a train was blasting its way toward them. Several somethings—she had no idea what—banged into the side of the house. Glass shattered, wind whipped around them. She couldn't hear herself think. She certainly couldn't make herself heard by Rafe, couldn't tell him how much she loved him, how she regretted they'd ended this way.

Rafe dragged her in the direction they'd come, back into the bedroom. Grabbing the bedspread, he swung open the closet door and thrust Cathy onto the floor. He wrapped the spread around him, pulled the door shut, and then dropped over her, covering them both with the heavy material.

She thought her ears would burst before it all ended. The closet door popped open; the very walls shook. Rafe cried out in pain, frightening her more than all the noise and wind. Her only comfort was his weight pressing her to the floor, and the knowledge he was with her. Even if they died there on that closet floor, she owed him her life in more ways than one. If only she could tell him.

Everything went still. Immediately. One moment she imagined she lay between the tracks of the California Zephyr, pummeled with noise and anything the wind threw at them. The next moment...nothing. No wind, no sound. In its way, the silence deafened more than the noise.

In the stillness, she sensed Rafe—his scent, his breath on her hair, his arms wrapped so tightly around her she could hardly breathe. *Thank you, God, thank you!*

He stirred, pushing back on his haunches. He turned her over and looked down. "Are you all right?"

"I think so. Are you?"

“Yeah.” His gaze raked her, full of concern. Lightly, his hands roamed down her arms, bringing her palms up to his lips.

“Rafe, look.” They lay in the closet space, but she saw him clearly. When he pulled her to her feet she registered the emptiness around them. The entire back wall of the house had disappeared along with most of the side and front. The destruction was too much to comprehend, and she sank to the floor again. Rafe crouched beside her.

“You’re bleeding!” He ran his fingers back down her arm exploring for the damage.

She frowned, examining him first with her eyes and then, gently, with her hands. “No, it’s your blood. We’ve got to get you to a hospital.”

The arms of his shirt hung, shredded and stained red. His head bled freely where the trashcan lid had hit him. Gashes criss-crossed his back from where objects had cut through the bedspread, driven by the ferocity of the wind.

“I’m okay, as long as you’re okay.” He held her hand to his lips. When he looked up, his eyes had filled with tears.

“You saved my life.” She could only whisper.

“I saved my life. Without you, what would I have? What would I be? That’s what I came to tell you.”

“Your ranch! Oh, Rafe, you could have made it home if you hadn’t come back for me. What if—?”

He kissed her. “Hush, darlin’. If *our* ranch is still there, we’ll consider ourselves blessed. If it’s not...” The pain in his eyes tore at her heart. “Then we’ll still be blessed, for this second chance.”

She cradled his cheek and nodded. “I love you. Only you, always you.”

He closed his eyes and leaned his head against hers. “That’s how I feel, how I felt the moment I looked up from that bull and saw you. If I

ever go a day again without telling you, it's not because I don't feel it." He stood, pulling her up with him. "I'm sure the truck is gone. Do you want to wait here while I try to find help?"

"No, where you go, I go. I don't want to let you out of my sight again, ever."

He looked down. "You might change your mind after a few feet in those shoes."

"That's true. Maybe—" She tilted her head at a sound coming up the drive.

Rafe made his way toward what would have been the front of the structure, stepping around broken boards and overturned furniture. A beat-up pickup made its way toward them, swerving around debris.

"It's Sam Matthews, coming to see if anyone's here, I guess." He heaved a sigh and raked his hair, then winced.

"Do you think he'll take us to the hospital?" Rafe was right. Trying to go anywhere in her heels invited disaster, but she didn't want him to leave her alone.

"I don't want to go to the hospital."

"No?"

He shook his head and gave her a quick, heated kiss. "I do know what I want, Cathy. I want to be everything to you. I want to prove you're everything to me. I just hope we have a house left to start over in."

He jumped the few feet to the ground and went to meet Sam, never seeing the glint of joyful tears in her eyes.

Chapter Four

Rafe climbed from the rickety truck. “Thanks, Sam.”

Cathy leaned forward in the center of the bench seat, trying to see through Sam’s mud-spattered windshield.

“Ain’t no problem.” Sam Matthews peered through the windshield too. “Don’t look too bad, Rafe. Mebbe you got lucky.”

Lucky? He looked at his beautiful wife, knowing she worried about their house and how he would take it if they found the worst had happened. “I’m the luckiest man alive, Sam.” Cathy swung her head around to stare at him. She smiled when she saw he was watching her, not inspecting the property.

“Yeah, you gist might be,” Sam said, still looking around for any damage. “Well—” he jammed the old truck into gear, “—I reckon I’d better see if I kin find if anyone else needs help. Tornaders missed our place all together, so if you need anything, give a holler.”

Rafe leaned in and scooped Cathy up in his arms. “We’ll do that.”

Cathy twisted around to look back in the truck. “Sam, if it looks like we made it through, I’ll call you. We have room if someone needs a place to stay.”

“That’d be great, Cathy.”

She slammed the door shut and Sam pulled away while Rafe carried her to the porch. He set her on her feet and together they looked out. Tree limbs littered the yard. The azaleas bordering the house were in shambles and none of Cathy’s carefully planted flowerbeds remained

unscathed. A lawn chair blown in from somewhere lay battered against the porch.

“This is nothing,” Rafe said. “Maybe we were missed by the bad stuff.” He could hardly believe the brunt of the storm passed them by.

“I hope so.”

“If you’ll check the inside, I’ll walk around the outside and then see about the barn.” He squeezed her hand and stepped off the porch.

An inspection of the house exterior showed no damage and his spirits rose with each minute. The barn fared well too. A tarp blown away by the wind left a hundred bales of hay exposed and scattered, but the structure suffered no damage. Neither had the animals inside. Before he could examine much more, Cathy joined him. She’d changed into jeans and a tee-shirt.

“The house is fine,” she said. “I can’t believe we weren’t hit. After what happened to that other house, I... Rafe, we’d have had nothing.”

He held her. “Everything that’s important is standing right here. We could rebuild the house, the barn, anything else. Can we rebuild our marriage?”

“We made it through a tornado. Anything else should be a snap.” She rose on her toes and kissed him. Her tongue traced the seam of his lips and he opened to her.

With her hands around his waist, she tugged him until she’d backed against the horse stall. She broke off and smiled. “The first time we made love was in a horse stall, remember?”

He smiled too. “What I remember is that it wasn’t what I call making love. There were too many clothes between us.”

“You fixed that soon enough.”

“I did? You were the one who asked if we couldn’t do something in the truck.” He stroked her hair. Even after the rain and dirt and mud,

her hair still smelled like flowers. When she'd left him, he buried his face in her pillow night after night just to capture that fragrance.

"I couldn't get enough of you. Then or now." She smoothed her hands over his arms, frowning again. "I'd suggest we do something right here except we should clean and bandage those cuts."

"What cuts? I don't feel any cuts." He leaned in for another kiss. Cathy had brushed her teeth or used mouthwash or something. Her mouth tasted minty and fresh. And hot. His tongue played with hers, his lips moving ever so lightly. Just enough to show her his hunger.

He cupped her butt, scraping his hands on the rough boards of the stall. She wrapped her arms around him timidly, and he wanted more. "Don't hold back, darlin', please. I almost lost you. I need you now."

As though his permission was all she needed, Cathy unbuttoned his shirt in record time and pushed it off. Little wounds on his back and bigger ones on his arms tore where blood had dried, but he didn't feel a thing except fire building inside.

"The heat seems worse than ever now that the rain's past," she said.

"I'm feeling a little hot, too," he murmured, dropping kisses on her hair as she tried to unbuckle his belt and unzip his slacks.

"You *are* hot, Cowboy."

He stepped back to push his pants below his thighs. Cathy had pulled off her tee-shirt and was working on her jeans. She wore no bra. Her nipples had already hardened. A tendril of hair stuck to her neck where she'd started to perspire. Rafe pushed her hair back and licked her neck. Salty, sweet, all Cathy. A taste he'd never tire of.

If Rafe kept kissing her she'd never get out of those damn jeans. She laughed with the thrill of it.

“Hey, you’re all cocked and primed, and I can’t get undressed like this.”

Grinning like a fox in the henhouse, he bent down and stripped her jeans and panties to her ankles. She toed off her tennis shoes and pulled her feet through the pants legs. In seconds, Rafe lifted her against the slats of the stall. She wrapped her legs around his waist.

His cock nudged her labia, seeking her sheath. The scent of her arousal hung heavy in the air and she knew she was wet. Then unerringly, he slid home.

Rafe groaned in her ear. “I love you.”

“God, I love you too.”

He squeezed her butt cheeks, kneading her skin, moving in and out. Her nipples grazed his chest with each thrust until she wanted to scream from pure pleasure. Without finesse, he pounded her into the boards, scratching her back on the wood. She wanted it, wanted a little pain to match the pure pleasure. The tension that presaged an orgasm had started the minute Rafe said he needed her. She was close to coming already and he hadn’t been in her for more than a few seconds.

Rafe’s lips roamed her neck, shoulder, collarbone and back to her neck. His tongue licked and stroked, leaving fire wherever it touched. She panted. Her hands roved through his hair, glided across his shoulders, wet from sweat. His strength had saved her that afternoon. He’d covered her with his body and held her with a grip that was strong and sure and full of his love.

He thrust hard and she came, wildly, completely, letting go of the fear she’d felt earlier, relinquishing the pain and loneliness of the past two weeks. She convulsed around him, pulling him into her, milking his cock, welcoming his release and taking it as her own.

This was her man and her life and she wouldn’t let him go again.

Later, when they'd dressed but still smelled of sex because there was no breeze to carry the scent away, he led her back to the house. His arm stretched across her shoulders and hers wrapped around his waist. They strolled, in no hurry, though the rest of the ranch waited to be inspected for wind and hail damage.

"The papers for the ranch were in my jacket. They're probably plastered against some house in Timbuktu by now."

She stopped to smell one yellow rose left unbowed on her favorite bush. "Why did you have ranch papers?"

"For you to sign. I had your name put on everything. I should have done it sooner, right after we got married. I'm sorry I didn't." He looked away from her, as though embarrassed.

Talking was impossible with her heart lodged in her throat. "Rafe, I..."

He smiled at her. "We can talk about it later."

She nodded, fighting tears.

"I guess I'd better change clothes and go out to check the herd and pastures."

"Without the truck, what will you drive out there?"

Dimples in full force, he grinned. "The tractor made it through the storm."

Thank God, so had they. Both storms.

"I have fond memories of that tractor. Maybe I can come with you?"

He laughed. "Why, darlin', I'd love that." They walked up the steps and into the house. *Their* house.

We're so much luckier than most, she thought. Not because they could afford to repair whatever damage they might find, though they were fortunate in that regard.

No, they were lucky *because* of the storm. They'd found a new burst of energy for their marriage and life. Runners call it second wind.

Without the tornado, Rafe might not have come back for her. If he hadn't, Cathy wasn't sure they would have made it.

As it happened, they'd reforged a vow. One spoken at their wedding, but which now held meaning they couldn't have understood then. To love each other. Forever and ever, whatever wind might blow.

About the Author

Prior to writing her first fiction only a few years ago, Dee S. Knight lived a varied lifestyle. Her high school sweetheart promised excitement when they married. When they tied the knot after college, he delivered. She's been a house parent for wards of the court, an assistant librarian, gift wrapper, long distance trucker, high school teacher, adult ed teacher, technical writer, clerk, computer consultant and...romance writer, which she's enjoyed the most. For the past many years, Dee and her honey, a software consultant, have lived all over the United States, enjoying each new place while looking forward to future locales and discoveries. Currently, they reside in the Great Midwest.

To learn more about Dee, please visit www.deesknight.com.

Falling in lust with a sexy Elvis impersonator gets complicated when Vanessa discovers the real Elvis Presley may have hoaxed his death.

Hunk of Burnin' Love

© 2007 Veronica Wilde

Available now at Samhain Publishing

Summer should mean hot men and toe-curling sex—at least that's what Vanessa believes, but a bad break-up has left her spending her summer nights alone. Then her sex life erupts into flames when she meets two very different Elvis impersonators on the same night. One is a sexy young musician who gets her all shook up in a steamy midnight swim. The other is a graying older man who looks just a little too much like Elvis Presley for comfort.

Vanessa can't help falling in love with her new summer hottie. But their burning love gets complicated when the mysterious older impersonator begins dropping disturbing hints about his true identity—hints that suggest Elvis Presley never died at all.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex and graphic language.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Hunk of Burnin' Love*:

Every summer the carnival came to town, perching on the edge of the beach like a loud, multicolored monster of whirling rides and cheap prizes. Vanessa hadn't been there in years, namely because Landon had always made fun of it. *Childish* and *stupid*, he called it. Yet now it seemed like fun—cheap, bawdy fun. As she walked through the straw-covered grounds, the electronic song of the merry-go-round and the screams of joy from the rollercoaster overwhelmed her. She could smell fried dough

and cotton candy and everywhere she looked someone was trying to shoot moving bottles or stumbling off the Tilt-A-Whirl.

Yes, it all sparkled before her like a vulgar, roaring gem. Suddenly she realized how much she had missed out on this summer by staying home and moping over Landon. Well, that was going to change—starting tonight. She was wearing a short red cotton dress that showed off her tan legs and her long black hair was loose; the appreciative glances of passing men told her she looked good. So what if she was alone? Feeling adventurous, she headed down to the auditorium where glossy posters advertised the Celebrity Star Revue.

She paid for her ticket and slipped down a dark hall leading backstage. “Hi, I’m Vanessa Reeves,” she told the security guard. “Mr....” Her confidence died as she realized she had never learned the impersonator’s real name. “Elvis invited me to come see him tonight. He told me to come backstage.”

“Did he now.” The man looked her up and down with a sly smile. “Go down that hall there. Second door on the right.”

“Thank you so much.” Even without directions, she would have known which dressing room was his. A booming rendition of “Burning Love” was blaring through the door. She knocked.

Was that a “come in” she heard? She tried the knob and stepped in—and found herself staring at a naked man.

Her first impression was of smooth, tanned muscle. He was in his mid-to-late twenties, just over six feet tall with the broad shoulders and narrow hips of a model. That flawless sun-browned skin just seemed to go on and on, rippling from perfectly carved pectoral muscles down to a sculpted abdomen and continuing into long, hard-muscled legs. But as if magnetized, Vanessa’s eyes were drawn to the center of his body, where an impressively thick, long cock was growing hard under her gaze. A

wave of shock and heat swept over her and she quickly dragged her attention up to the man's face.

Silky black hair framed one of the most handsome faces she'd ever seen. Ice-blue eyes blazed at her in outrage.

"Oh God, I'm sorry," she gasped. Heart pounding, she began to back out.

"Sorry?" the guy yelled, grabbing a towel to cover himself. "Haven't you ever heard of knocking?"

"I *did* knock," she said hotly. "I thought you said to come in. Look, I'm sorry. The guard said this was the Elvis impersonator's room."

It was obvious now that the portly, silver-haired impersonator she had met at the cemetery was nowhere around. Her face was burning pink with embarrassment—and her body was flushed with reactive lust at seeing such gorgeous, naked masculinity.

He snapped off the boom box, cutting off the Elvis song mid-tune. As he wrapped the towel around his narrow hips, his gaze traveled up and down her body. "Looking for Elvis, are you?"

"Yes." Despite her flustered state, she couldn't help noticing just how fine he looked in the towel. With his wide shoulders and sculpted torso, he could have stepped out of an underwear commercial. "Look, I'm really sorry. I was at the cemetery today and met him—"

"You met Elvis at the cemetery?" A mocking white smile crept across his tanned face. "Was he eating a peanut butter and banana sandwich? Did he say, *Thank you, thank you very much?*"

She scowled. "Look, I happen to be a big Elvis fan. So while I'm sorry I walked in on you—well, naked—I'm not going to let you mock his memory."

Somehow her indignation unlocked his true smile. He grinned more genuinely and came toward her. "That makes two of us. T.J. Woodard here—a huge fan of the King."

She mustered a friendly smile, as if he wasn't standing before her with just a white towel tenting over that impressive manhood. As if the image of his enticingly stiff cock wasn't flashing repeatedly in her mind no matter how hard she tried to think of something innocent. "Vanessa Reeves. Thanks for being so nice about the mix-up."

T.J. adjusted his towel as he walked closer. For a moment she stiffened with anticipation. But he only pushed the door shut behind her.

Her heart began to race with a nervousness that wasn't entirely unpleasant.

"So," she said lamely. "Do you work here as part of the crew?"

Those blue eyes were mesmerizing her with their erotic speculation. With every moment that passed, it was becoming harder to remember the Elvis impersonator she had come here to see.

"Yeah, I work the lights." His gaze was growing more interested, yet calculating too as he took in her short red dress, then returned to her face. "So how about I get you the best seat in the house?"

"Okay..." A devious hint rode his smile but she wasn't sure how to decipher it.

He leaned closer. "Just on one condition."

Something fluttered inside her stomach. She nodded in a daze.

"You have to give me the best kiss I've ever had in my life." His lips were full and sexy and she couldn't help but notice how pink they were against his tan. "Deal?"

She swallowed nervously. "Deal," she promised, her voice barely a whisper, and extended her hand.

T.J. took her hand in one meaningful squeeze. Then he let go of his towel.

Unable to stop herself, her gaze fell down his broad golden-brown chest to the eight-inch rod stiffening between his legs. It rose up like a velvet colossus, straining toward her with undisguised lust.

A helpless, animal heat swept through her like wildfire. All the frustration and yearning of this sexless summer collected between her legs in one trembling, demanding ache.

“I...” Her voice was shaking as she tried to assert control over the situation. She hadn’t even had a date in months and now here she was under the spell of a naked stranger. Normally she would never do something like this, no matter how sexy the man. Yet she only leaned back against the door as T.J. took her skirt and pushed it up her thighs. Taking his cock in his hand, he rubbed its swollen head back and forth over her panties. Vanessa closed her eyes and succumbed to the moment, feeling the heat of his skin press through the satin.

“You still haven’t kissed me yet,” he whispered.

Sometimes the truth is the greatest aphrodisiac.

Liaisons in Jubilee

© 2007 Jamie Craig

Available now at Samhain Publishing

Katie Mayes is the Executive Manager for a large, east coast beach resort. Unfortunately, her boss has discovered her one secret—her seasonal flings with Caleb Beckett, the Entertainment Director for the resort. Company policy dictates no internal fraternization, especially between managers and their subordinates, so her boss gives Katie a choice. Caleb or her job.

She avoids personal encounters with Caleb, until one fateful night a week before the resort's big summer launch. Then, she runs into him at a local nightclub. When Caleb approaches her, she tries to give him the cold shoulder, but he follows her onto the dance floor where the music, her desire, and his persistence break her will. She claims it's only one more night before they break it off completely, but Caleb insists on more. Far from an ending, he views the summer as their true beginning.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language, spanking, light bondage.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Liaisons in Jubilee*:

It didn't matter if Caleb was speaking or singing. There was a velvet lilt to his voice that always sent a rush of warm electricity down the back of her neck. It might have been weeks since she'd felt him so close, months since she'd had him even closer, but the absence did nothing to lessen her body's reaction to his presence. If anything, it seemed to have made it stronger. Her pussy clenched, and her skin heated, and she had

to fight not to lean back against the hard wall of his body right then and there.

Caleb still hadn't moved by the time she set down her empty bottle. "Brilliant deduction," she said, twisting around on her stool. He only moved enough not to get knocked over by her long legs, but it was still too close for Katie's comfort. Resting her elbows against the bar, she looked anywhere but at his hungry eyes. "The crowd looks lively tonight. Lucky for me."

Caleb never looked away from her. She could almost feel the weight of his eyes. "Do you think anybody here could keep up with you?"

"Does it matter?" She risked a glance back at him, only to get caught by the sight of his full mouth. How many times had she lost herself while kissing him? Too many to count. The sudden thought of what his newly acquired facial hair would feel like against her inner thigh made her cheeks flame, and Katie jerked her attention back to the thrashing crowd. "It's just dancing. It's not like I'm taking the guy home to fuck his brains out."

"Oh, it's never just dancing with you, Katie." He leaned forward. "But if that's what you want, I'll give you a few turns around the floor." Caleb smiled, managing to look charming and not at all lecherous. "Maybe you'll change your mind about the second part."

She faltered for a fraction of a second. It was tempting—so tempting. She'd never known a man to move like Caleb, in and out of bed, and after all, it was just a dance, no matter what he might profess. Except there was her job to consider, and she was his boss, and any concession now had the possibility of being disastrous later.

Katie slid off the stool and met his gaze without wavering. "I'm not going to change my mind," she said. He stood so close that their bodies brushed against each other as she headed for the dance floor. She didn't

need to find a partner before she got there. Experience told her she wouldn't be alone for long once she started moving.

She watched Caleb from the corner of her eye as he slipped onto the dance floor. She tried to avoid him, but he adjusted his body, weaving with the rhythm and sliding between the writhing bodies that surrounded her. He positioned himself behind her, gripping her hips lightly.

It felt like the air had been sucked out of her lungs. Though her first instinct was to push him away, Katie knew that would start a scene she wasn't prepared to follow through with. Coming to the Wooden Nickel might give her a measure of anonymity, but if she got involved in a commotion, it would spread along the boardwalk faster than wildfire. And she knew Caleb. He wouldn't let something like attracting attention stop him. Hell, he was a performer at heart. He'd take that attention and use it to his advantage.

So she went with it. She didn't have a choice. Within seconds, though, the heat of the room and the throb of the music and the buzz from the beer made her initial concerns dissolve away. Her arm coiled up and around to caress Caleb's neck, her eyes fluttering shut so that she could focus on the pure physical pleasure suffusing her body. Caleb knew exactly how to fit against her, and somehow, knowing they were his hands holding her against him just spurred Katie to grind her ass back into his burgeoning erection.

Caleb followed her lead on the floor, and to her surprise, kept his hands firmly on her hips, instead of allowing them to wander over her curves. His body was so hot against hers and it was impossible not to let her mind drift to the very thing she said she wasn't going to do. But for the moment, she was happy to dance with him, to feel the rhythm of his hips, to feel the life pulsing from him with each step.

The music shifted from the upbeat tempo to something slow and sensual. Caleb tightened his grip and began directing her, leading her into the new tempo.

Gradually, Katie became aware of the other guys drifting away, and she opened her eyes to the swirling lights, wondering what in hell she was doing. So what if Caleb moved like liquid fire against her? So what if she felt like she was going to explode just from the firm caress of his hands? She was asking to get burned by letting him do this.

Twisting in his arms, Katie meant to walk away, but his searing gaze kept her pinned against his chest, just as effectively as his hard hands. She leaned forward, her breasts crushing to him with a familiar ache, and settled her mouth at his ear. It took a moment to say the words. His scent made her mouth go dry and she had to swallow more than once in order to find her voice again.

“Quentin knows,” she breathed.

“So? Is he the jealous sort?” Caleb joked. When she didn’t smile, the light in his eyes dimmed, and he managed to look like he might be taking this seriously. “What did he say to you?”

“He gave me an ultimatum. You or my job.” She couldn’t resist. It only took turning her head the scantest of inches to trail her mouth along his jaw. “You think anything else could’ve kept me away?”

This summer, it's going to be Steamy...

Samhain Publishing Presents
Midsummer Night's Steam
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Duty wars with affection when Racor's greatest spy must decide who to trust, the evidence against her sexy suspects, or her heart?

A Scorching Seduction

© 2007 Marie Harte

Lt. Col. Trace N'Tre and Assassin Vaan C'Vail are hiding out in the only place the military can't touch them—on a pleasure planet in an island resort owned by Vaan's cousin. Gathering evidence on the outside, they know it's only a matter of time before they'll have to face their accuser, a high official in the Racor government.

Unbeknownst to them, Myst, Racor's greatest spy, has had her eyes on them for some time. The puzzle of these two alleged traitors doesn't fit, and Myst has made it her mission to find out why. But when the tables are turned and she's caught spying under the planet's hot summer suns, pleasure and affection confuse the issue, making her wonder who to trust—her heart, or the evidence against her lovers.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, frank language, ménage, m/m action, and hot sweaty adventure.

A young minister's celibacy is challenged by an earthy, Appalachian woman.

Blackberry Pie

© 2007 Bonnie Dee

On a blistering summer afternoon, Reverend Nathan Andrews climbs a mountain to meet backwoods members of his congregation. Fresh from

seminary, the young man isn't prepared for the onslaught of lust that hits him when he encounters a sensuous girl picking blackberries.

Determined to implement his outreach plan, he helps her harvest the fruit. But their potent sexual chemistry is too intense to deny and they engage in passionate sex surrounded by the beauty of nature.

Grace is earthy and primal, the opposite of the proper young lady he expects to take as a wife some day. Can there possibly be a future for a college-educated minister and a primitive mountain girl?

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language.

Can a straight-laced business student and an indie boy with a thing for extremely personal electronics turn one night's wild ride into a trip to last forever?

Catching a Buzz

© 2007 Ally Blue

Adam Holderman isn't your typical twenty-something college boy. He prefers jazz to Goth, shuns body piercings and street-waif clothing, and despises the lack of vocabulary among his peers. Some call him uptight, but Adam doesn't see it that way. Just because he prefers his men articulate and well-groomed doesn't make him a stick-in-the-mud. He simply has standards, unlike most guys his age.

The new employee at Wild Waters Park, where Adam works, single-handedly throws a monkey wrench into Adam's orderly world view. Buzz Stiles wears eyeliner and black clothes, listens to emo bands, and talks like a teenage skate punk. He's the polar opposite of Adam's avowed "type". So why can't Adam get him out of his head?

When Adam finally agrees to go out with Buzz, he finds there's much more to Buzz than a hot body, a sharp wit, and a Goth fashion sense. Buzz is someone Adam can see himself being with for the long haul. But you need more than mind-melting sex to make a relationship last. Can they keep their hands off each other long enough to find out if they have what it takes?

Warning, this title contains the following: graphic language, explicit male/male sex, inappropriate use of personal electronic devices, and gratuitous disco dancing.

Her boyfriend is back...and that's a major problem. Antonia isn't ready to face the one man who shakes up her world...

Full Disclosure

© 2007 Mary Wine

Antonia doesn't need to look at forbidden fruit. The taste still clings to her lips, haunting her with just how good she and Danton had been together...

...Right up until he informed her that he had to get married because he was going to be a father. That just made it worse. Inside him was a man worth dreaming about, even if she knew it was in vain.

Danton always double-checked his facts. It was a habit that kept him alive during missions that should have killed him. His impromptu wedding was no exception. There wasn't going to be any consummation of the vows until he had a paternity test. But doing the right thing had cost him the one woman he loved.

Until the test came back negative. Now there is nothing that will stop him from coming back with the prize he'd been forced to abandon three

months ago. Toni was going to be his, right after she got the full disclosure on his hasty wedding and the blunt fact that he loved her.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language and bondage bedroom games with toys.

Does a full moon really cause naughty behavior?

Bad Moon Rising

© 2007 Leeanne Kenedy

Hailey Burke has heard that full moons cause people to behave in strange ways, but she never thought it would apply to her until the night she winds up in bed with a man she doesn't even like. So she'd had a temporary loss of sanity when she slept with Zack Creighton, the womanizing photographer. Big deal. Doesn't mean she's going to do it again, right?

Wrong.

Unfortunately, Zack has something else in store for Hailey. He's liked the sassy redhead from the moment he met her, but he can't get the stubborn woman to let go of the misconceptions she's formed about him. Sure, he's played the field, but Zack is no womanizer, and he has no intention of leaving things at one night. Once he's had a taste of Hailey, he wants another. And he's determined to convince her that he's not the bad boy she's always thought.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language.

How can masturbating in a hotel Jacuzzi lead to love? Cassidy Yates is about to find out.

Beyond the Tears

© 2007 Michelle Cary

A year after her husband died while serving in Iraq, Cassidy Yates still nurses a broken heart. Thinking a vacation will help, she agrees to a week in Key West with her best friend, April. Upon arrival, April suggests a way for Cassidy to ease her pain—sleep with the sexiest stud she can find.

Not the type to bed hop, Cassidy refuses April's idea and ends up alone. Abandoned by her friend, Cassidy decides to take a nighttime swim. In the Jacuzzi, she masturbates to the memories of making love to her husband. Mortified by her own behavior, Cassidy retreats to her hotel room, hoping no one witnessed her exhibition.

Chase Dempsey is a man with rugged good looks and a killer smile. He isn't looking to fall in love and only wants few days of relaxation before returning to his Texas ranch. Still, he's curious after watching Cassidy's erotic display and wonders what makes the gorgeous redhead tick. When he finds her dropped sarong, he realizes she's just given him the opportunity to find out...

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex and graphic language.

Is their passion real, or only a mirage?

La Mirage

© 2007 Jennifer Colgan

On a lonely stretch of I-95 in the middle of the Nevada desert, journalist Savanna Blaine and photographer Ben Lantano find themselves stranded by engine trouble on their way back from an assignment. Their quest for a gas station leads them to La Mirage, a beautiful resort nestled in a secluded canyon where they are the only guests.

Invited to spend the night in lush accommodations, passion flares between Savanna and Ben who have suppressed their hidden desires long enough. A single touch ignites an unforgettable night in each other's arms, but the next day, when La Mirage mysteriously disappears, they're left to wonder, is their newfound intimacy real or nothing more than a trick of the summer heat?

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, oral sex.

One tempting heiress. Two sexy cowboys. Three means fun beyond her wildest dreams—until her Cord starts to unravel.

Take Me

© 2007 Mackenzie McKade

Thoroughbred rancher's daughter Caitlyn Culver has always wanted playboy Cord Daily, even after her daddy threatened to bankrupt him. But winning a racehorse in a poker game means Cord is no longer just a cattle rancher. He's come back wealthier and more wicked than ever.

Snaring this cowboy won't be easy for Cait, and keeping him will be even harder. Still, his sexual antics and taste for ménages won't scare her off. She knows the best way to snag a man like Cord is to pretend

indifference. So when he comes onto her in the barn, she plays along—only to leave him tied to a ladder, aroused and unfulfilled.

It's payback time.

Cord seeks out Cait and brings along his playboy cousin, Dolan Crane. The two cowboys are enough to set her body afire. She's bound and determined to resist their sexual allure, but ends up experiencing a night beyond her wildest fantasies. Now Dolan wants Cait for himself. Cait's father wants Cord's racehorse. And Cord wants Caitlyn to choose—her father's money or her cowboy's love.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language, ménage a trois, and BDSM.

Can a jaded lawyer and a reformed criminal really find true love in the tropics?

Fijian Fling

© 2007 Sami Lee

Dumped by her boyfriend and on thin ice in her law career, Sophie Edison badly needs to re-evaluate her life. She escapes to her favorite hideaway on the tropical island of Fiji, where the attentions of the resort owner – the enigmatic and lethally sexy Dominick 'Nick' Dufour – prove a temptation too great to resist. Nick's obvious desire to take her to bed is just the salve her battered confidence needs, and she embarks on an affair that leads her to uncharted waters. Before long she starts to wonder if she can ever go back to her old life.

Nick has lusted after Sophie for years. When she turns up at his secluded resort alone for the first time he wastes no time in making her his lover. Sophie is his perfect match in bed, and in the ocean and the

shower...but although he might long for something more, Nick knows theirs is just a holiday fling. For he is keeping the secret of his checkered past from Sophie and it could prove the ultimate deal breaker...

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language.

Newlywed Catalina Robinson thinks it's not possible to be more satisfied...but then she learns what it's like to love two men.

Honeymoon Castaways

© 2007 Dawn Halliday

Cat has just married Dave Robinson, the man of her dreams. Their Best Man, Andreas Bailey, is flying them to their honeymoon resort in Barbados. But over the middle of the ocean, something goes horribly wrong...

Cat, Dave and Andreas find themselves stranded on an uninhabited Caribbean island. Though she's never thought of him as more than a friend, Cat finds herself connecting to Andreas in a way she never expected and is shocked and aroused to learn that her husband feels the same way. Together, the three of them discover a heat and passion uninhibited by the conventions of society. But will they ever be rescued? And what will happen to their unusual relationship once they return home?

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language, ménage a trois, voyeurism and skinny dipping.

Two men and a bottle of nut cream...

Nut Cream

© 2007 Jade Buchanan

Nut [nuht] noun, verb.

1. A dry fruit consisting of an edible kernel or meat enclosed in a woody or leathery shell.

2. Slang, Vulgar – a testis.

Cream [kreem] noun.

1. A soft solid or thick liquid containing medicaments or other specific ingredients, applied externally for a therapeutic, or cosmetic purpose.

2. Slang, Vulgar – to have an orgasm.

Toby Madison is coming into his mating phase, and is leaking pheromones all over the place. He is about to find out what happens to bad little wolves, in the best possible way. Cliff Bullen is more than ready to place his mark on the man he has always wanted as his mate – with a little help from a bottle of nut cream.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit male/male sex and graphic language.

Welcome to Fantasm Island! Leave your inhibitions at the door and let your fantasies soar.

Fantasmagorical

© 2007 Annmarie McKenna

That's what the brochure said anyway. A week long fling with a stranger. Where's the harm in that? Take a compatibility quiz and a slew of other health tests, sign a strict privacy agreement and give license to any sexual fantasy you've ever had. Evan Knight couldn't wait.

Gabe and Lance have been searching for their perfect third for what seems like forever. One look at the woman he and his best friend and lover Lance have chosen to claim during her time on the island, and Gabe thinks they may have finally found her.

But what if Evan isn't interested in more than the fling she signed up for? Or worse, what if she can't handle two men who are into each other too? Gabe and Lance have one week to convince Evan that the three of them belong together...and they'll use every bit of seduction in their arsenal to make sure when the fantasy ends, their reality together will only just be beginning.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit fantasmagorical sex, graphic language, ménage a trois, and hot nekkid man-love.

Falling in lust with a sexy Elvis impersonator gets complicated when Vanessa discovers the real Elvis Presley may have hoaxed his death.

Hunk of Burnin' Love

© 2007 Veronica Wilde

Summer should mean hot men and toe-curling sex—at least that's what Vanessa believes, but a bad break-up has left her spending her summer nights alone. Then her sex life erupts into flames when she meets two very different Elvis impersonators on the same night. One is a sexy young musician who gets her all shook up in a steamy midnight

swim. The other is a graying older man who looks just a little too much like Elvis Presley for comfort.

Vanessa can't help falling in love with her new summer hottie. But their burning love gets complicated when the mysterious older impersonator begins dropping disturbing hints about his true identity—hints that suggest Elvis Presley never died at all.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex and graphic language.

Chastity Cuthbert is determined to bring love and romance to the Last Frontier.

Ladies! Meet Red Hot Alaskan Men

© 2007 Nancy Lindquist

Chastity Cuthbert is in love with love. Its too bad that she's so busy working on everyone else's happily ever after that there's no time left to work on hers. Her company, The Alaskan Connection, matches single women with sexy Alaskan hunks. Business is booming. Until Dave Wellington drags his personal vendetta against outsiders right to her doorstep.

Dave Wellington, Mayor of Smithfield, Alaska won't allow Chastity's cadre of red-lipped floozies to take over his town. A she-bitch from the lower forty-eight broke his brother's heart and no one else is gonna go through that. Not if he can help it. Besides, Smithfield is welcoming tourists for the first time. The male residents need to keep their minds on business. Not sex.

Determined to change Chastity's mind, he travels to Chicago to talk her out of her plan. Chas is so pissed off at the sexy mayor that she forgets her "no one-night stands" motto. Right into Dave's bed.

Now she has to travel to Smithfield and face him. She's strong. She can face Dave again. Just because she snuck out of his hotel room in the middle of the night doesn't mean she's a big ole chicken. Right?

Warning: This book contains hot naked Alaskan guys, all looking for love. Read it at your own risk. I am not responsible for any sudden urges to go to the Last Frontier, nor travel costs incurred. Oh, and there's explicit sex too.

One hot summer night and a scorching balcony interlude light the fuse of hidden attraction between neighbors Jill Reed and Cole Adams.

One Night on a Balcony

© 2007 Samantha Lucas

Jill Reed has spent her entire life denying her sexuality, but living next door to Cole Adams the past few months has made it near impossible.

Cole is fresh off his third divorce and considers himself a one-man relationship train wreck. He purposefully keeps his lust for Jill in check because, after all, she's the kind of woman a man keeps.

Jill and Cole have been denying their bone-deep attraction for months, but one night on a balcony, passions ignite, an adventure starts and everything is about to change—forever.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, sex in a public place, graphic language.

Sometimes the truth is the greatest aphrodisiac.

Liaisons in Jubilee

© 2007 Jamie Craig

Katie Mayes is the Executive Manager for a large, east coast beach resort. Unfortunately, her boss has discovered her one secret – her seasonal flings with Caleb Beckett, the Entertainment Director for the resort. Company policy dictates no internal fraternization, especially between managers and their subordinates, so her boss gives Katie a choice. Caleb or her job.

She avoids personal encounters with Caleb, until one fateful night a week before the resort's big summer launch. Then, she runs into him at a local nightclub. When Caleb approaches her, she tries to give him the cold shoulder, but he follows her onto the dance floor where the music, her desire, and his persistence break her will. She claims it's only one more night before they break it off completely, but Caleb insists on more. Far from an ending, he views the summer as their true beginning.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language, spanking, light bondage.

Life's not always about the journey, but who takes you on the ride.

Custom Ride

© 2007 K.A. Mitchell

A stint in the Air Force left Ryan MacRae with a bitter memory of life in the closet. Jeff Allstein is a mechanic who has too much to lose if his private life becomes public. The heat of their attraction boils over on a stormy summer night, but satisfying that need only makes them both crave more.

Their searing connection makes it hard for Ryan to understand the road blocks Jeff continually puts down. Ryan will have to buckle up if he's going to find love at the end of his custom ride.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit male/male sex, graphic language.

What Leilani wants, Leilani gets...and she always gets her man.

Skin to Skin

© 2007 *Dionne Galace*

What Leilani wants, Leilani gets. That is, until she meets the enigmatic Oliver Clayton, her new neighbor. For some reason, Oliver seems to be intent on avoiding her even though he's obviously interested. Leilani has tried to everything to get his attention, from wearing skimpy little outfits to walking a neighbor's dog six times in front of his yard. Leilani wants Oliver...and she always gets her man.

In the heat of the summer, the temperature's not only thing rising. Luckily, Oliver has that pool in his backyard and Leilani knows just how to cool off...

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language, light bondage.

Hot summer nights make people do crazy things.

Spontaneous

© 2007 Karen Erickson

Sophie Kincaid doesn't want to be attracted to her boss but she is. Sick and tired of being used by men, she's sworn them off. But her hot and now slightly drunk boss just became too hard to resist.

His girlfriend dumped him and now Ian Grey is drowning his sorrows in alcohol, something he never does. Flirting with Sophie the sexy bartender inspires him to do even more things he'd never consider. Like have hot sex with her in the storage room.

They can't deny their attraction for each other but Sophie's afraid she doesn't measure up. And what does Ian want from her anyway? She'll have a naked good time figuring it out...

Warning this title contains the following: Hot, steamy, explicit sex and graphic language.

Roping the naughty girl is all fun and games until someone falls in love.

Knotty Girl

© 2007 Maggie Casper

Shelby Langley was not sub, slave or Mistress, she was merely kinky. Point her to a BDSM club where she could watch and experience pretty much anything the mind could conjure, without the tangled web of an actual relationship, and she was in orgasmic bliss.

Long into the lifestyle, Craig Jensen was able to spot a submissive in denial from a mile away. Usually he left them be to find their own way, only keeping an eye out for their safety while on his turf, but there was something about the sweet, young blonde who had a love for rope bondage that called for him to claim her as his own.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language, anal play and an overall spanking good time.

When a school teacher with a backbone of steel meets a hard-nosed lawman, more than the desert will heat up.

Marielle's Marshal

© 2007 Beth Williamson

Marielle Bloom never expected to be the victim of a stagecoach robbery stranded in the desert in the middle of summer with a sexy marshal who sets her body on fire with one look from his steely eyes.

Marshal Ramsey Whitfield doesn't know what to make of the outspoken teacher, but he does know she feels perfect in his arms. As they trek together across the barren landscape, searching for civilization, they discover that their desire for each other is hotter than the desert sand.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language, violence.

When a man who isn't human is accidentally enslaved by a woman who has no idea what he is, the result is magical.

Sealed With a Kiss

© 2007 Lila Dubois

Signing up for a one-week adventure vacation, Helena expects to be kayaking in the Pacific, not having every sexual fantasy fulfilled in her guide's bed.

Ocean is more than he seems, his kayaking business a cover for his deepest secret.

When Helena accidentally enacts old magic, enslaving Ocean, he doesn't know if she is the luckiest girl on earth, or an enemy of his kind, bent on imprisoning him forever. Ocean's strange behavior worries Helena but she's distracted by the mind-blowing sex.

After the truth is revealed, will their budding love be Sealed with a Kiss?

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language, voyeurism, and fantasy fulfillment.

When his girlfriend demands he settle down and start a family, Cole Winchester has some hard decisions to make. Marry his girlfriend, or finally own up to his taboo attraction to other men.

Taboo Desires

© 2007 Amanda Young

Cole Winchester feels like a rat, boxed into a corner. Faced with the prospect of being trapped in a passionless marriage, he makes the hard choice to end his relationship.

A run in with an old friend on the beach, propels Cole's fantasies out into the open and forces him to confront his taboo desires. Before him, lies the choice of a lifetime—embrace his desire for another man and all the pitfalls that come along with it, or return to his girlfriend and live out the safe half-life he carved for himself.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language, and hot nekkid man-love.

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