

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?



SUSIE CHARLES

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**DEDICATION**

*To Debbie, for her unstinting belief in me; Karen, for making me want to write better than I ever thought I could (plus the regular doses of 'inspiration') and to Dennis, who has always believed I can do anything.*

## CHAPTER 1

How not to plan a naughty weekend getaway.

Rule Number One: *Do Not* book plane tickets for 5:30 on a Friday night just before a public holiday when half the population of Sydney is trying to get out of the city.

Rule Number Two: *Do Not* go home after work to pack a bag. Plan. Be organized. Pack at least a week before. Or a month.

Rule Number Three: *Do Not*, under any circumstances, call for a cab. Murphy's law guarantees you will get the slowest cabbie in creation, for the simple reason that he is the only one going slow enough to answer his radio and drive at the same time.

Having been stupid enough to ignore all three rules, Nick now drummed his fingers on the armrest with growing impatience. He noticed pedestrians making faster progress than he was, and wondered, not for the first time in the last twenty minutes, whether it wouldn't be faster if he just got out of the cab and ran the remaining three miles to the airport.

If he missed that plane, it would be this damn cabbie's fault. Weren't they all supposed to be speed freaks? Wasn't that an unspoken rule somewhere in the taxi-driver universe? *Thou shalt break all speed limits ... Thou shalt drive, at great speed and with complete disregard for road rules, stray pedestrians and personal safety, on any flat surface, including sidewalks, to get your passenger to his plane on time.*

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Obviously not. A quick glance at his watch confirmed that, if he were lucky—really, really lucky—he would get there just in time to board the plane. If...

However luck, lady or otherwise, did not appear to be riding in the taxi with Nick this evening. They had managed to catch every traffic snarl and red light on the fifteen-minute drive from his photography studio to the airport, turning it into a forty-five minute trip ... so far.

"Look, buddy," he pleaded to the driver, leaning over the front seat. "I have a weekend in Melbourne planned with a stunning lady whose pants I have been trying to get into for the last six months, so take pity on me, would ya, and step on it?"

It surprised the hell out of him when the cabbie glanced back and spoke to him.

"Thees woman ... she is beautiful?"

They had sped up a little, and if talking had that effect on his driver, Nick could talk about Kate until the cows came home. No problem there. "Oh, yeah, more than beautiful. She's like a ten-course meal to a starving man."

"And she getsa your mind all a twisted up ina de knots also?"

"*Everything* gets twisted up in knots, mate. Mind, body ... I'd be a real hit at a macramé convention."

"You should seea your face, my friend. I hatea to tell you dis, but dat is de same look dat I used to get when I first met my Maria."

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"What look?" Nick had no idea what the cabbie was talking about. Nick figured he looked just fine. A little tense, maybe, but that was to be expected.

"As dey say, you are history, señor. Dis woman, she has—how you say—your number." And then he laughed.

Nick was still mulling over that when he all but suffered whiplash at the sudden burst of speed the cabbie put on, and closed his eyes as they swerved around a turning car, waiting for the crunch as they hit. But they didn't, as amazing as that was. Less than four minutes later, they were pulling up at the departure lounge of Mascot Airport.

He was so relieved, he shoved a fifty-dollar note in the cabbie's hand with a, "Thanks," and jumped out of the taxi without waiting for his change. He'd much rather miss the change than miss the bloody plane. He didn't miss the cabbie's chuckle, though. Or his final words. "You are a goner, my friend."

Right.

For once, the check-in queue was short. His relief was short-lived when he realized the only reason for that was most likely because everybody else had checked in. They were doubtless already sitting on the plane.

He heard the final boarding call over the P.A. and looked at his watch. Almost time for takeoff. With a nod at the attendant, he grabbed his boarding pass and small bag, and ran to the departure lounge. He plopped his bag on the conveyor belt and stepped through the metal detector gate.

*Beeeeep!*

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*What now?* He looked up at the noise and frowned. The only dangerous thing he was packing was a temper that was getting hotter by the minute. That couldn't qualify as suspicious enough to set off alarms. Could it?

"Shirt, please," requested the young female security guard, pointing at him.

*You've got to be joking, right?* He looked at her, the unspoken question plain on his face.

No. Obviously not joking.

"Shirt, sir," she repeated.

This couldn't be happening. No, on second thought, it fit perfectly. He was not meant to get airborne, just as he was, without a doubt, not meant to get into Kate's pants any time this weekend.

With a roll of his eyes, he reached down and, with an impatient tug, ripped the studs open on his denim shirt in one quick movement. Fine. He'd walk naked through a blizzard if he had to. Whatever it took to get on the plane. He tossed his shirt onto the conveyor and once more stepped through the gate.

*Beeeeep!*

"Um, pants, please," she indicated, a hint of a smile on her face.

*Jeez!* Right about now, he was glad he had arranged to meet Katie in the departure lounge instead of traveling to the airport together. She'd have a field day with this little incident. Apart from a body that was made for sex—he *suspected* as he hadn't been lucky enough to get his dick out of his pants with her so far—she also had a bad habit of



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teasing the hell out of him, a trait he intended to beat out of her—with his cock.

Without looking around to see what kind of audience he had, he flicked the buckle on his belt, undid the studs on his jeans and slipped them down, pulling them off and dumping them on the conveyor to follow the shirt, leaving him standing there in nothing but his black Jockeys. Thank God he'd heeded his mother's drumming-in when he was a kid about clean underwear. Heaven forbid the plane should crash and somebody noticed he had on yesterday's underwear!

He quirked his eyebrow at the security guard, noticing what looked like a somewhat less than professional appraisal on her face, and walked through the gate. Chances were his cheeks were blushing; although with any luck his Jockeys hid the telltale sign.

No beep—at last.

"Thank you, sir," said the security guard. "Have a nice flight."

With a glare at the saucy guard, he picked up his bag and clothes and pulled up behind the nearest column, hoping to make his dressing a little more private than his undressing just moments ago.

It was no doubt part of the cosmic plan that he was bent over, stepping into his jeans when a husky voice whispered in his ear.

"Nice ... luggage, big guy." Kate chuckled, pinching him on the butt. "I wouldn't have missed that entrance for the world."

"Ha ha. Very funny."

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"No, I'm serious. You had half the women in here drooling."

There was a very naughty glint in her eyes he noticed, as his fingers moved up the row of studs, fastening them once again.

"Were you one of them?"

She laughed harder now as he closed the final one. "Maybe..." she teased. "Come on, Nick. Let's go stow that luggage of yours. Nice boxers by the way," she shot back as she walked ahead of him towards the boarding gate, earning a cheeky grin from him.

\* \* \* \*

After shoving his bag into the overhead compartment, he sat down next to Kate, grabbed her hand in his, and leaned over, nuzzling her neck with a soft kiss.

The soft scent of his aftershave hit her. No man alive smelled as good as Nick Matheson—leastways none she'd found. *Hot, spicy, edible. Very.* His warm breath tickled her neck as he nibbled and kissed his way up to her earlobe, the electric zap from that shooting straight to her nipples, making them pucker under the fabric of her silky blouse.

"Hello, sweet Kate," he whispered, the smooth, velvety tones melting her insides to mush. Did he have any idea the effect he had on women? Nick may have missed it, but Kate had seen the looks on the female security guards and a few of the female passengers as he did his impromptu strip in the terminal. Even one guy had pursed his lips and let out a silent whistle when Nick bent over to retrieve his gear.

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Dark hair, dark eyes, dark, tanned skin. Dangerous with a capital D. Body solid, without an ounce of fat. Nick had the look that bespoke a man who worked his body the hard way, not through weights, but through a tough, physical life. Strong thighs, a broad chest she couldn't wait to run her hands over, and tall, too. He was tall enough to make her five-eleven look average, which was a relief. She was sick and tired of having to bend down to kiss the top of her guy's head.

It had to be more than the unusual prospect of a neck kink from kissing Nick that made her chimes start clanging away like a demented doorbell as soon as he was within sniffing distance. If you took away the devilishly handsome face and sexy smile, the rock-hard body that rippled with strength, and the compelling male smell of him, he was just another guy.

*Yeah, and I'm Mary Poppins!*

She closed her eyes and sat back in the seat, not quite ready to look at him again until she had her irrational craving for him a little more under control. One weekend of mad, hot sex with Nick and she was sure she could get that craving out of her system. Binge and purge. Lots of dieters used that process and there was no argument her sex life had resembled a starvation diet the last couple of years after her bust up with Phil and his philandering penis.

Besides, she had spent way too much time fantasizing about Nick. Now she was operating under her tried and true premise that the reality never, ever, quite matches up to the fantasy.

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A whole weekend with Katie. Just the two of them—alone. After that, he'd be back to normal. He could pick up his love life from where it had been before he'd met Kate Sinclair. He knew she was just like him. Neither of them was looking for an attachment. Just sex. And the hotter the better. He suspected that sex with her would be a veritable smorgasbord of taste sensations, and he was eager to try them all.

But in the back of his mind, he had the nagging feeling if he weren't careful, he'd get burned. Kate wasn't like the other women he'd slept with. For all the bluster and teasing, there were times when she looked scared. Not that anyone else would notice; it was more because he'd been paying close attention over the last few weeks. He just hadn't been able to figure out why or what.

Did it really matter to him? *Stupid question!* When he saw that look, he was beginning to suspect that, yes, it did matter very much.

He noticed she'd closed her eyes so he shut his, too, and squeezed her hand as he lay back in the seat. The flight was a short hop, but they could both do with the rest. The night, with any luck, was going to be a late one. He had a lot of ground to cover with his sweet, sexy Kate.

## CHAPTER 2

"Where on earth are we going, Nick?"

Night had fallen while they were on the plane, and they had disembarked to a dark, very chilly Melbourne night. As they hummed along in the car Nick had rented at the airport, Kate tried to find a sign to give her some clue about where they were headed.

"Not long now. Five minutes," he said, glancing over and grinning at her impatience. Of course, he wouldn't be male if he didn't delude himself into thinking it was because she couldn't wait to get her hands on his naked body.

He laughed to himself at the thought. For the last six months, she had managed to thwart every attempt, every tried and tested maneuver to get her into the cot. Her ability to resist what amounted to a full-on, full-frontal attack was just one of the things that fascinated him about her. He'd never had to work so hard at scoring in his life. But if nothing else, he loved a challenge, and he suspected Kate would be more than worth the fight.

It was in the way she moved ... the way she sassed him to no end ... It was in the way one sultry teasing look from her was enough to have his cock jumping out of his pants...

"Look, five minutes is fine, just so long as *one* of us knows where we're going."

"You that eager to get your hands on my hot body, babe?" he teased, resting his hand on her thigh.

\* \* \* \*

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Kate had realized early on that the arrogance and typical male bravado were more for show with Nick than for real. He was a kidder, and if for one second she had suspected they were for real, there was be no way she'd be in a car now, driving to some God-knows-where hidey-hole in the Victorian countryside for a weekend of what she hoped would be mind-blowing sex.

His fingers stroked her thigh, inching up, higher and higher. She had to fight to swallow the moan. "Looks like the reverse to me, *babe*." *Whoa. Ms. Husky slipped out of nowhere.* "Is driving one-handed a talent of yours? Just what I like, Nick. A guy who can multi-task."

*Sure, go on and joke, Kate. Who do you think you're kidding?*

A moonlit panorama of the countryside sped past, ending minutes later at the driveway of a huge house, which in reality wasn't so much a house as a manor. She felt as though she'd been propelled back into the early 1900s. The beautiful, restored, old house was lit up with the sparkle of many gaslights and sat on the edge of what looked like a lake. After pulling to a stop on the gravel driveway, Nick got out. Just as she reached for her bags from the back seat, he came around and opened her door.

"Don't worry about those. I'll come back and get them once we've checked in," he offered.

"If you're sure." She swung her legs out and stood up, bringing them face-to-face.

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"Very sure," he said. His eyes twinkled with amusement as he nuzzled her neck again.

*Damn the man!* she thought, as she felt sucked in towards the warmth of his body. *And what is this obsession with my neck?* The night air was cool, but the goosebumps that pimples her skin had nothing to do with wind chill. She wasn't cold. There was a nice furnace blazing away inside her body that was keeping her plenty warm.

She suspected he knew pretty well the effect he was having on her, but there was no reason for her to be the only one on the receiving end. The corners of her mouth kicked up into a naughty grin.

"You're such a good boy, Nicky. You deserve a reward."

\* \* \* \*

Nick was grinning until Kate reached up and kissed him—the sort of kiss that more often than not preceded an explosion of fireworks in his brain and a chain reaction through his body to his cock. He inhaled sharply against her mouth when he felt her warm hand sneak under his shirt and work its way up his chest. All it took was a small twist on his nipple as her moist tongue slid over his lips and inside his mouth and he was ready to strip her in the parking lot and take her there and then.

"Inside," he said with a throaty growl, the word coming out more like an order than a request. It was either that, or fuck her up against the car. His cock was screaming for the car. His brain wasn't too far behind.

\* \* \* \*

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"This place is beautiful, Nick! How on earth did you find it?"

They stood in one of the private chalets away from the main house that sat on the edge of the lake.

"You like it?" He felt a disturbing flush of pleasure at her reaction to the place. "I booked it on the internet."

That was amazing in itself. The fact he had sat there one night for four hours, searching for just the right place to bring her, still had him confused. For some reason he was wary of attaching too much importance to, he wanted this weekend to be different. Special.

"It's amazing," she said, bouncing on the four-poster bed before she moved over to the fireplace to warm her hands. "And so romantic. You surprise me."

*That made two of us*, he thought. Coming up behind, he put his arms around her and inhaled the scent of peaches in her hair, then pulled away before she could distract him again, which could be achieved pretty damn easily by her just standing there and breathing. God, he was starting to sound so pathetic.

"I'm going to go grab our bags. Why don't you have a nice, hot shower while I'm gone and warm up, then we can go have dinner."

"What? You mean you're going to feed me, too?" she teased. "Wow!"

She was sassing him again. And he loved it. "Trust me. You're gonna need the sustenance to keep up your strength for what I have planned."



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He gave her a playful slap on the bottom as he walked out, her laughter following him out into the cold night air.

All the way to the car and back, the thought of Kate naked in the shower had him so worked up that his long gait threatened to break into a sprint. On returning, he could hear the water still running in the bathroom, and the sounds of Kate singing filtered out through the closed door. Resisting the strong urge to go join her, he dropped into the comfortable sofa in front of the fireplace, closed his eyes and listened to her.

Feeling relaxed in the warmth, he let his mind wander...

He was in the shower, standing behind her. Warm water cascaded down over both of them as he let the slippery slide of his hands drift over the swell of her full breasts, her waist, her hips. The soft moan as his hands slid lower over the silky skin to cup the sensuous curves of her buttocks, lifting them a little and tilting her forward, had the head of his erection reaching...

"Nice dream?" The soft voice purred in his ear as a sharp nail scraped over the tenting bulge in his jeans.

He jerked upright, his eyes snapping open, only to see Kate leaning over him wrapped in nothing but a fluffy towel.

"Drop the towel and I'll tell you all about it." His voice was husky.

"You're not hungry?"

"Depends," he said, pulling her down beside him on the sofa. "You on the menu?"

"I think I classify as dessert."

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With a teasing glint in her eye, she pushed off him. He grabbed for her and missed, instead catching the corner of the towel, which slipped away from her body as she moved.

She stood stock still, gloriously naked, as his eyes blazed a heated path, enjoying the live image of what had been in his head just moments before. Then she turned and her look was so hot, it left the fireplace for dead.

"And if you want *dessert* anytime tonight, big boy," she said with a throaty chuckle, "you better go get showered and changed so we can eat, before I take matters into my own hands and start without you."

"Only if I can watch," he warned as he stood up.

Laughing, she moved over to the suitcases, and still naked, lifted out clothes to put away. He was glad she was so comfortable with her own body because he planned on keeping her naked.

"You better get moving," she said, breaking into his thoughts. "Or I might have to call on BOB. You remember him, don't you, Nick? My Battery Operated Boyfriend?"

His mouth went dry. He remembered the day they had covered the grand opening of "Whipped Cream and Other Delights." *Woman's Monthly*, the rather risqué but oddly named magazine she worked for, had a two-page spread lined up on the newest "toy" store for adults, and she'd been responsible for the interviews while he had been brought in to take photographs.

They had spent quite some time researching and checking out the merchandise. It had been disconcerting in the extreme discussing the merits of different vibrators with a

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woman he had the hots for. Watching her handle the toys had given him a raging hard-on that had taken hours to go down.

And be damned if she hadn't bought one of those rabbit ones. Of course, half the embarrassment for him was having her explain just what the "bunny ears" were for. Hell, if she needed a clit tickler, she only need ask.

"You mean you brought the vibe with you? This weekend?" *She brought the fucking vibrator with her?* His male pride took a hit. Didn't she think he had the stamina? Like hell!

"Uh-huh. Maybe I'll introduce you two later ... *after* dinner," she said with a wink.

That wink. He knew that wink. And introduce you later? *Oh yeah, baby.* He had plans for Kate and that vibrator. *Fantasy number two coming right up!*

Fantasy number one wasn't anywhere near as creative. Basic sex. His cock in her pussy. The no-frills version. Long, hard and all night.

"Okay. I'm going. I'm going." He headed for the bathroom. *Oh, my wonderful, naughty Kate.*

He smiled to himself as he ripped his shirt off over his head. As he undid his jeans and shucked them off for the second time that night, he couldn't resist rubbing the bulge that sprang out, freed at last from its prison.

He flicked the water on—hard, cold, stepped in and froze. Okay, a cold shower to cool his ardor was out. Frostbite on his most precious appendage would call a fast halt to the weekend activities he had planned. With a shivering hand, he flicked the control to warm up the water. He had to do something, though. His erection could pass for a towel rail at

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the moment. Grabbing the shower gel, he poured some into his hand and began to stroke his full length. It didn't take long. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the sensation.

Visions of Katie swirled in his mind and he pumped faster, trying to recall the last time he had needed to take himself in hand. She had him so wound up he was like a volcano waiting to erupt, which he did in hot, arcing jets against the tiles.

### CHAPTER 3

After dinner, they warmed up in front of the fire and sipped on rich, black coffee while they gazed into the flickering flames. Someone had banked the fire while they were at dinner and a scent of pine cones—an earthy, woodsy scent—filled the air. Nick sat on the thick, soft rug, leaning up against the sofa, his arm around Kate who was curled up beside him, snuggling into his side. *Nice fire, full tummy, warm woman.* He was feeling contented, satiated and satisfied, and they hadn't even got to the bit about the hot sex! What the hell was wrong with him?

He pushed the disconcerting thought away and shifted, tilting her mouth up to his. Chocolate, after dinner mint, coffee—a rich combustion of flavors met his tongue when he slipped inside her warm mouth and stroked it, letting the essence of her wrap around his senses in an intoxicating blend.

Lost in a sensual haze, his hands roamed over her, one hand seeking out the bare flesh of her back as his other one moved underneath the soft cashmere top she wore. With a slight shift, she moved closer, the hard points of her nipples pressing into his chest. With a flick of the clasp, her bra fell open and his hands moved higher, stroking her back.

Pulling back a little, he looked at her, a question in his eyes.

"What is it?" asked Kate, her voice soft and husky.

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"Just tell me if I'm going too fast," he said, his eyes crinkling as he smiled.

"You're joking, right? You want to speed things up a little?"

He raised an eyebrow at her and chuckled.

"I'm feeling a little chilled," she explained, taking his hand.

"Right about here." She placed it on her breast under the soft fabric.

The feel of the swollen breast under his hand was a mixture of heat and silk, the hardness of her nipple against the softness of her skin firing every nerve in his body. If he didn't get her naked soon, he would go nuts.

Leaning down to kiss her, he laid her down on the rug in front of the fireplace. Taking his time, he removed each piece of her clothing, unwrapping her like a present at Christmas, kissing and tasting each delectable inch of flesh as he exposed it. She was no teenager. Kate's body was ripe and full like a woman in the prime of her life. Gorgeous. Delicious.

A long time ago, when the epitome of a magnificent woman was not determined by a skeletal, waif-like appearance, but by a bounty of curves and flesh, an ode would have been written about Kate. Soft and round, a body a man could sink into again and again.

And he wanted to. Every cell in his body screamed at him to take her. Sucking in a deep breath, he forced the urgent craving aside. He intended to have his dessert and he had no intention of rushing a single bite, or nibble, or lick ... With tongue and teeth, he feasted on every luscious inch.

His hunger flared again when nipping the small dimples above the beautiful globes of her ass set off tremors through

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her. He gritted his teeth as her response translated into an urgent throbbing along the full length of his erect cock, but it was the way she shivered and moaned when he licked and nibbled the sensitive skin on the outer side of her breasts that was nearly the end of him. He wondered at the tensile strength of his zipper up against the battering his hard length was putting it through.

Of course, the feel of her hand reaching down and rubbing along his erection at that precise moment wasn't helping, either. With a groan, he pushed against her palm, the heat of her hand searing through the fabric of his jeans, before he grabbed her arms and pinioned them above her head.

"Nuh-uh." He grinned at her pout. "Hands off."

"But that's not fair, Nick. You get to have all the fun."

"You're not having fun?" He raised his eyebrow.

"Silly boy. Of course I am. But we could have lots more." Her lascivious wink made him laugh, but he shook his head.

"Oh, we will, sweetheart. Don't you worry."

He wanted, this first time, for the pleasure to be all hers. The vision of her—the soft, creamy swell of her breasts arched up towards him—was beauty in itself. The professional photographer in him recognized it; the man in him hungered for a touch and more.

Capturing a nipple between his teeth, he flicked the tip, watching the immediate response in her body, the hardening of the velvety tip and the quiver that passed over her. But it wasn't enough. Her skin smelled of peaches and vanilla and he wanted to experience more.

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With devilish delight, his tongue painted a damp path over the dips and swells of her body. Tracing a fingertip up her inner thigh, he felt the tremble, the slight parting of her legs as he moved higher.

He noticed her watching him, lying back with a look of complete surrender on her face for whatever he was about to do. *Trust and submission*. It knocked him in the guts and fired his blood. The triumphant, primitive growl of a male marking his territory, taking his mate, threatened to break free. It was as well he was still dressed, or that look would have been his undoing. It took every bit of his control not to plunge into her, take her hard and fast, spread his scent all over her and fill her with his seed.

No, not fast. Not hard. Later maybe...

He released her hands then, and easing her legs further apart, he inhaled the smell of her, letting the sweet perfume of her arousal invade his senses. Positioning himself between those beautiful, long legs, he looked in fascination and hunger at the dew forming on the soft, satiny folds between her thighs. And it was all for him.

When his tongue met her heated flesh, her body arched in response, a ragged moan breaking from her. The scent of her—the indefinable essence that was Kate—filled his nostrils, and leaning down again, he feasted on her, licking, nibbling, until she was crying out his name.

*Aaah, sweet Kate, I knew you would be like this*, he thought with satisfaction as he leaned back to look at her. She was wet, dripping, the evidence of her arousal running down to the cleft between her buttocks. It was a sight to



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drive a man insane. His cock was throbbing in time with her pulse. He gritted his teeth in an effort to stay focused on Kate and not on the relentless need to free his erection and slide inside her tempting warmth.

Instead, he slid a finger inside her moist sheath, stroking in and out as she pleaded with him for a quick release. A lick of her sensitive nub followed by a breath of cool air had her hips lifting up to him, reaching for his mouth. Her body was taut as a spring, her breath panting as she pushed against his hand.

"What do you want, Katie?"

"Don't tease, Nick. You know damn well what I want."

"But I want to hear you say it, baby."

"Fuck you! Just do it. Please."

"Oh, I will, Katie, but first I want to hear you tell me."

He eased his finger out ... softly scraping the sensitive tissues inside as he went, and was satisfied to see a small moue on her face.

"Nick!"

"What? Tell me what you want. Say the words."

"Make me come," she sobbed, teetering on the brink of orgasm.

"Much better." With a swift plunge, he drove two fingers back inside her, his teeth nipping lightly on her sensitive clit, the combination sending her spiraling into a climax, an uninhibited cry of satisfaction torn from her as she clenched around his fingers and he lapped at the juices that flowed from her.

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He watched her come back to him, her eyes fluttering open, and he knew he had never seen a more beautiful sight than Kate, relaxing in his arms as her breathing returned to normal, a light sheen of sweat covering her body.

Pulling her close, he gave her time to recover, soothing her with light strokes over her body until the tremors passed.

"There is something very, very wrong about this, Nick." She pulled at his shirt, tugging it out of his jeans.

"How so?"

"I mean, look at us. I'm naked, and you're still fully dressed. You don't find something a little strange about that?"

"Always in a hurry, Katie. We have all weekend. But in case you're wondering—I *always* sleep naked." He winked.

"Thank God for that."

He stood then, picking her up easily in his arms, and carried her through to the bedroom. She decided to undress him, taking great delight in teasing him in much the same way he had teased her earlier. By the time she was sliding his boxers down, he was about two seconds away from throwing her back on the bed and slaking his desire for her.

She wasn't quite done with him. Shaking her head, she took the condom out of his hand, ripped open the little foil package with her teeth and proceeded to put it on ... with her mouth. He gasped at the heat of her mouth around him, watching in amazement as she slid on all but the last two inches, which was still a record in his book. No woman had ever been able to take him so deeply—not since he was a teenager anyway.

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As her lips closed over him and her tongue laved his length, he gritted his teeth, the sheet bunching in his fists as he fought the need to hold her head and plunge further into the delicious softness encasing him.

She sat up and straddled his hips, running her hands over the hardness of his chest before leaning down to take a nipple between her teeth. The light nip that followed had him groaning.

"I hope you're ready, big boy, because I really can't wait any longer." Her eyes glinted at him in the soft candlelight.

Yes! With a grunt, he flipped them over so he was on top. "That makes two of us, sweet."

Back in the driver's seat, he positioned himself at her opening, and with teasing slowness, slid in a scant inch before he stopped, teasing her as he licked at the tight bud of a nipple.

"More," she cried at him, her heels digging into his buttocks as she tried to pull him closer.

*Patience, Katie, patience.* "No rush, baby," he murmured, and slid in another inch, feeling her tightness grip him. It was like pushing into a warm, tight, velvety glove.

"You're a fucking tease, Nick!"

"My, my. Such language. He pushed further until he was half buried inside her and groaned. "You're so tight. So damn hot."

"You know you're gonna pay for this, don't you?" She panted. Her nails dug into the bunching muscles of his shoulders.

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He felt her clench around him and chuckled. *Oh yeah, play time is now officially over.* "I can take it, sweetheart. Whatever you want," he replied, and hooking an arm under her leg, plunged in the rest of the way.

\* \* \* \*

Nick was never one to snap awake, ready and raring to go. The process was slow, gradual, with at least four hits on his snooze button before he could hold his eyes open long enough to get out of bed. Which was why this morning was so different. His other senses were awake before his eyes opened and they jolted him out of sleep faster than any alarm clock had ever done.

It was the unmistakable warmth and feel of Kate's body nestled into his, the intimate thread of limbs around each other—more than the tangled covers—that hinted at the heated passion they had shared the night before. The unmistakable scent of sex hung in the room—the blending of their sweat and juices combining into a heady aphrodisiac. His erection throbbed against the soft skin of her belly.

Nick did not wake up with women. Slept with them—yes. Woke up with them—never. Not if he wanted to avoid entanglements, which he did. *So what, he wondered, is so different about Kate that I asked her to come away with me? No, don't go there, Nick. This is not the time,* pleaded his sleep-befuddled head. Instead, he enjoyed the moment and snuggled closer to her warmth, pushing that thought aside for another time.

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He cupped her face, looking at the slight puffiness around her eyes, the cute way her nose wrinkled and twitched as he brushed the wayward strands of hair off her face. He could only wonder now, why he had denied himself this ... this intimacy all these years. But then he hadn't known Kate Sinclair. The thought slipped into his mind again. *What is it about her that made me break my own anti-intimacy rule?*

"Stop it, Nick," she mumbled, her voice sleepy, her eyes still shut.

"Stop what, baby?" There was a gentle smile on his face as he smoothed away the frown on her brow.

"Thinking so much. It's keeping me awake."

He laughed, the gentle vibration rippling between their joined bodies. "Sorry. Go back to sleep," he murmured. "It's still too early to get up." He stroked her temples with a gentle touch.

"Good." She sighed. "You wore me out. I need more sleep..." The words faded as she drifted off once more.

She was right. He was worn out, too, and satisfied in a way he had never felt before. *Satisfied? Huh! That didn't explain half of it.*

He lay there, his arms wrapped around her, remembering the rest of the night. Kate was one incredible woman, all right. With difficulty, he ignored the erection trapped between them, and closed his eyes, feeling her move closer to him as overwhelming tiredness claimed him. Later ... there was always later...

\* \* \* \*

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She felt the shift in him, the relaxation of his grip on her, the sign he was asleep once more. She had a feeling he had been thinking thoughts similar to hers, going over the details of the previous night in his mind.

It had been sometime in the wee hours of the morning as she slipped into the post-coital bliss that had eluded her with every other man when she realized she had been wrong. Big time. With Nick, no way could it ever be "only sex." Her body was one big tingle and pleasant ache from her scalp to her toenails.

He had derived particular pleasure in taking control of her BOB, but that had been for her pleasure—not his. He had teased her with it with unrelenting delight, watching her come—hard—before he tossed the vibrator onto the floor and drove his cock back inside her still-convulsing pussy, shooting her into another jarring, pulsing climax.

Even now, hours later as they lay entwined, her body trembled as he moved against hers in his sleep. She tried to think of words to describe Nick as a lover, but soon decided she could fill a lexicon with her choices. Amazing, caring, enthusiastic, relentless, sensitive, tender—the man had made love to every part of her, including her mind and her heart.

She had a feeling she was fucked—in every sense of the word. But this was only sex ... She bit her lip. She had better get her head screwed back on before daylight, or she was going to be in some serious trouble.

With a sigh, she tossed off the troubling thought and slid back into a light doze. Nick was mumbling something in his sleep and he pulled her closer, but she was too tired to listen

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or hear the words.

## CHAPTER 4

After an unhurried morning in bed, followed by breakfast and a very enjoyable soak in the spa bath, they took off for the nearest golf course for a round. The temptation was there to stay in bed all day, but in an unspoken agreement, they both recognized they needed a break from the intensity of the night before.

Even though Nick played well enough to hit off on a four handicap, and in spite of the fact that they were playing with borrowed clubs, he still only managed to beat her by five strokes. *Too much sex must make you shoot way over par, big boy*, she laughed to herself. Or maybe it was the hip hugger jeans she was wearing. He couldn't seem to stop looking at her butt and she had caught him more than once with a distracted expression on his face.

On their return, they had showered—together—coming out cleaner than she'd ever been in her life. She grinned and made a mental note to keep shower gel away from Nick for the rest of the weekend.

By dinner that night, she was hungry enough to eat a whole cow on her own. She couldn't remember a time when she had been so starving, but then she'd been burning a whole lot more calories than usual. They laughed and talked over their meal, not surprised to find they shared the same dry sense of humor. But it was more than the enjoyment of each other's company. The intimacy of the candlelit room weaved its magic over them, and she thought how sweet it



was that Nick often reached to touch her hand throughout the meal.

Most of the guys she knew weren't as touchy-feely as Nick. She liked it. At one point, she had felt the soft touch of his shoeless foot under the table running up the inside of her lower calf. She had looked up at him, her surprised glance catching the heat in his eyes had her melting in her seat. She couldn't wait to get back to their chalet and find out what he had planned for dessert.

Once their plates were cleared, she excused herself and went to find the ladies room. More than anything, she needed a break from the intensity and a chance to get her mind back to where it needed to be to get through the rest of the night. She was starting to feel things for Nick she had no right to, and it worried her.

*It's only sex. It's only sex,* she repeated in her head like a mantra, but disquieting thoughts of a future with him kept creeping into her mind. Leaning over the vanity, head hanging and lost in thought, she didn't realize the door had opened and somebody had come in, until a lady spoke behind her.

"I hope you don't mind me saying so, my dear..."

Kate glanced up to see a smiling, older woman looking in the reflection of the mirror, talking to her.

"...but you and your husband remind me so much of Harry and me years ago when we were first married. It's so wonderful to see a young couple like you, so in love."

*In love?* "I'm sorry. You ... um, we're not ... um ... married."

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"Oh. Well, maybe not yet, my dear," she said, patting Kate's hand. "But it won't be too long."

"No, no, you misunderstand. We aren't ... we don't..."  
*Okay, Kate. How do you tell a nice stranger you're only here for a shag-fest without sounding like a total slut?*

"Love each other?" the lady finished for her. "I may be old, but I'm not blind," she said with a wink. "You just wait and see. I'm right. I'd recognize that look anywhere."

"Um ... sure. If you say so." Kate's heart was thumping nineteen beats to the dozen. *Great! So coming in here to straighten out her head was NOT a good idea.* Now what? If what this old lady thought she could see was true, she was in trouble ... deep trouble. Taking a breath, she squared her shoulders and opened the door.

## CHAPTER 5

She lay back on the bed, propped up on her elbows, and watched Nick undress. It was a sight she could get used to on a very regular basis. The broad, hard, hairless chest tapered down to the tight, flat stomach, lean hips and long, muscular thighs. She enjoyed the play of muscles that rippled beneath the surface, the tight buttocks, the sense of strength that just poured out of him, not to mention the impressive sight of his blatant erection. She could feel herself growing damp just watching him.

His eyes, when he turned to her, were dark and filled with lust. He could feel it, too.

"Do you trust me, Katie?"

That was entirely the *wrong* question to ask a woman lying naked on a bed, watching a very aroused man.

"That depends," she somehow managed to croak.

"Yes or no? One answer." He moved towards her with the grace of a large cat until he stood beside her, his hand running up her leg, and on up her body, cupping a breast in his hand.

*Oh, shit!* "Yes?"

"Right answer, Katie." He leaned down to brush his lips over hers in a soft kiss. "Now, shut your eyes for me, sweet."

"Um, Nick..."

"Trust, remember?"

"Fine. But if you do anything weird, you know I'm gonna bust your balls."

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"That's my Kate." He chuckled. "All fire and no ice. Now, just relax. Nothing but pleasure. I promise."

With a final glare, she closed her eyes. She heard the sounds of a drawer opening and closing, the rustle of something she couldn't quite identify, and the dip of the bed as Nick kneeled beside her.

The slip of silk over her eyes took her by surprise at first, but she was distracted from her initial alarm when a warm, wet tongue rasped down her neck, laving the sensitive flesh. Her arm was lifted and there was the feel of Nick's teeth as he nibbled along the soft flesh of her upper arm, ending at her open palm. She felt the soft slide of something silky around her wrist. She jerked in response, but his mouth was right next to her ear, soothing her.

"Remember. Trust," he said, his voice thick and husky.

*Trust seems to be a bit of a one-way street around here at the moment*, she thought with a frown. She'd never been tied up before. As if she'd surrender that sort of control to any man! But for some reason she couldn't quite fathom, she *did* trust Nick. On that disquieting thought, she turned her eyes towards him, following the heat of his breath as she felt the second arm follow the first.

The same delicious attention of tongue and teeth was given to each leg and ankle. Quite apart from the fact she was laid out like an offering on some sacrificial altar, she felt excited, and damn it, more turned on than she cared to admit.

She found with her sense of sight removed, all the others kicked in even stronger. The pine scent of the fire, the fizz of

champagne pouring into a glass, the sensuous touch of Nick's tongue as he licked her lips, never knowing what was coming next. She felt like she was heading into sensory overload.

"You're so beautiful, baby. I promise you won't be disappointed."

She tugged weakly at the scarves holding her, testing their bind. They were firm, but she could move—just not very much. "There's an awful lot of promises flying around here tonight, big boy. You better know what you're doing, or I'll—"

He chuckled, cutting her off. "My beautiful, feisty, Kate. Relax. Just let go."

*Right. Easy for him to say.* Her ears strained to hear. All her senses were attuned to his movements: the soft footfalls on carpet, a light tinkle of glass, even his breathing sounded louder. She heard him take a deep breath, one intended to calm from the sound of it.

*Now why would that be?* she wondered. She was the one trussed up. Every nerve was stretched taut. The anticipation of not knowing what was coming or what he was doing was starting to get to her.

Her head turned at a noise nearby. Something popped and crackled in the fireplace. She sniffed. A pine cone from the distinctive fragrance. Then another scent teased her.

*Nick. His aftershave.* Coming closer.

She felt a hand under her head, lifting it. The touch was warm and gentle in direct contrast to her jumping nerves. First came a light brush of lips on hers, the touch at first soothing, but as his tongue slipped inside her mouth, caressing and stroking, a moan bubbled up, to be swallowed

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by Nick's mouth. He eased back and the heat of his breath in her ear sent a shiver of eagerness through her that traveled like wildfire down her body.

"Drink, sweet?"

"Uh-huh." She tried to lick her lips and became aware of how dry her mouth was. It had to be nerves.

Then Nick was there.

A cold glass lifted to her lips as he held her head. It was an unusual feeling being completely helpless, but as incredible as it was to realize, there was no fear. Just trust. She *trusted* Nick to look after her. The realization settled her and she took a sip. The cold trickle of champagne slid down her throat ... soothing, cooling, quenching. A relieved sigh escaped her.

"More?"

Nick's voice sounded raspy, like he needed a drink himself. But he was focused on her. She could feel it. Like the hand supporting her. She didn't need her sight to know. It was there in his touch, his breath; his body was communicating with hers on another level, one she wasn't familiar with, but couldn't deny. It was almost tangible, touching her mind, and she could feel her body respond.

*Relax.* The tension that had been holding her muscles tight eased and her body let go.

"You're doing fine, Katie. Don't be afraid. Just enjoy."

There was that tone in his voice again. Whether it was her heightened sense of hearing, but it seemed she wasn't the only one affected by this little scene. No way on earth would she have ever considered letting any other man do this to her, so why him? She'd have to puzzle that one out later,

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because right now she had too much else to think about. Like the way her body rolled towards him as he knelt on the bed, feeling him reach for something before he leaned down to kiss her.

His lips felt wet, tasted sweet, and she parted her mouth to try and determine what it was when she felt something wet and soft slip from his mouth into hers. His mouth nuzzled over hers before he pulled away and she could finally identify it.

"Strawberry!" The ripe fruit slid down her throat. "Hmmm."

Another followed the first in the same manner. Food, sex and Nick—her three favorite things, and all at the same time. If this was heaven, she was ready to sprout wings and sing hallelujah.

"And this?" he asked.

She felt his finger at her mouth this time and opened for him, biting softly on the morsel he offered, sucking on his finger for a second or two before letting go.

"Chocolate covered strawberry. I love chocolate strawberries."

"I thought you might. This is your last one before I have my dessert. Open up."

The rich flavor of chocolate and strawberry dipped in whipped cream filled her mouth. "Oh, God, Nick, that's divine!"

"Good. Now ... how about this?"

Not knowing what to expect, her head turned from side to side, trying to work out what was coming.

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She jumped when she felt a cold line being painted from the valley between her breasts all the way down past her belly button. His hand lifted and two more, shorter lines joined the main one.

"What *is* that?"

"Just cream."

The innocent tone of his voice didn't fool her for a second.  
"But what did you draw?"

"An arrow, pointing towards *my* dessert," he chuckled.

"You wouldn't!" she gasped.

"Wanna bet?" He licked the trail of cream over her stomach and lower.

Her skin felt like it was on fire, the trail of heat following where his sinful tongue led.

"And my dessert is ... here," he said.

She felt something cold spread over her labia.

"You didn't?" She could feel herself blush.

"Uh-huh. Now quiet. It's time for *my* treat."

If it weren't for the bonds holding her fast, she would have lifted right off the bed the moment his hot breath and teasing tongue started to lap at her cream-painted folds. It felt so damn good! His tongue jabbed into her, his rumble of pleasure vibrating against her clit.

"Are you trying to kill me?" she panted.

"No, just drive you a little crazy."

"Well, you've succeeded, okay? Now put that damn tongue away and..."

"And what, sweet pea?"



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"I'm not a bloody flower!" The pressure, the pleasure, the whole delicious torment of what he was doing was starting to get to her.

"Looks like it to me. A beautiful flower blooming right in front of my eyes," he said as he slipped first one finger, then two, inside her.

She sucked in a breath at the penetration and held it, reluctant to move in case the sensual scrape and pressure of his fingers ceased.

"Do you have any idea how much I love to lick you, Katie? I've never tasted anything more beautiful." His lips crashed down on hers.

A mixture of scents washed over her as his mouth settled over hers—strawberries, cream, and something else that could only have been her juices—mingled as he kissed her, taking her mouth in a hungry feast, his fingers maintaining a steady rhythm, in and out, the light flicker over her swollen nub a torturous pleasure that made her body arch for more.

It was too much. Kate's body was crying for release, her skin a mass of jumping nerve endings, and her senses—the four she was left with—were screaming at her. If he didn't fuck her very soon and end this pleasurable torment, she really was going to have to kill him later.

The bed rocked as he moved and then came the sound of foil ripping.

*Thank God for small mercies! Well, maybe in this instance, not quite so small.* "It's about time. A girl could pass out waiting."

"You sure you're ready? I could always..."

"No! Don't go anywhere. Please." *Please...*

"The only place I'm going, the only place I want to be, is right here..."

A harsh moan of unbelievable pleasure was torn from her as every incredible inch of his hot erection slid inside her, searing a sizzling path along the raw nerve endings until he nudged the head of her womb. It felt good. Hell, it felt bloody fantastic!

His lips closed over a breast, sucking and licking, his teeth nipping at the nipple while his tongue flicked the tip. He pulled out until just the head of his cock was lodged inside and waited. She arched her hips, clenching around him, holding him there. And then he groaned, the sound savage and ragged, and plunged deep back inside her, filling her. One thrust ... two ... deep, shallow, slow, fast...

Reality was slipping away. He was everywhere ... lips, tongue, teeth, the plunging hardness as he took her, driving her higher and higher. She could feel it coming. The sensations in her body were spiraling out of control. Sparks of white shattered the blackness of her sight. The light touch of his finger on her clit pushed her, sent her crashing over the edge, pulling in a frenzy against the restraints as her body bucked and thrashed beneath him in a fiery explosion of sensations.

After a moment, he eased out of her, triggering mini-shocks through her body all the way. She whimpered at the feeling of loss as cold air replaced the heat of his body.

She felt the scarves around her ankles loosened and released, followed by the ones on her wrists, then he was

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back inside her, a slow glissade until his full length was once again sheathed within her.

A warm tongue licked at the trails of wetness on her cheeks, soothing her.

\* \* \* \*

Nick really wanted to say something ... anything to describe what had just happened. She needed soft words now to soothe her, ease her down, prepare her for what was to come. Instead, all he could think of was driving into her so hard it made her teeth chatter. *Okay, Nicky old boy, it's never been like this. You'd have remembered—oh yeah!* Every muscle in his body was clenched tight, holding back the beast fighting to break free.

She couldn't see, so she'd had no idea, he realized, what the sight of her, lightly bound and waiting for him, had done to his control. It had been all he could do not to plunge into her over and over, slaking his need on her body until they both screamed in ecstasy and release. She was so responsive, like every fantasy he'd ever had, come to life. He'd had Kate in mind when he purchased the soft, silky scarves from Whipped Cream when she was busy interviewing the owners. They were worth every single cent.

His eyes raked over the creamy skin, a light sheen of sweat making it glisten in the flickering glow of the firelight. Her lips were parted, her tongue flicking out to wet her lips. She was driving him mad.

Even though her hands were free, she still hadn't removed the blindfold, but her legs were now locked around him,

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matching each short, sharp stroke with an impatient arching of her hips and he stopped wondering why.

There was the familiar prickle along his spine and he knew it wouldn't take long. He'd been ready the moment she had clenched around him earlier. But he gritted his teeth and held on a little longer, listening for the change in her breathing, the tightening of her walls around his cock, and when he was sure she was with him, at that second when she reached for his face and kissed him hard, he let go—the longest, hottest release of his life.

Every drop of moisture was sucked out of him from the tips of his toes to surge out through the head of his cock, the pulsing triggered by the little ripples of her tight pussy around him as she came with him.

Each time with her was better than the last, and in that teeny part of his brain that still functioned, he wondered at what point he would ever have enough of her. The word never flashed into his mind, and he tried without success to push it away.

Spent, sated, and totally, utterly satisfied, he rolled beside her on the bed. Reaching down to pull the covers over them, he folded her into his body, holding her tight, heartbeat to heartbeat, cradling her against him as they both dropped into an exhausted slumber.

## CHAPTER 6

Standing in the bathroom brushing her hair, Kate looked at herself in the mirror, hardly recognizing the woman who stood before her. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkled, and her body—still recovering from the last session of lovemaking when they woke over an hour ago—was glowing with an inner warmth that only came from being well and truly loved.

She was in deep shit! As quietly as she could, she pushed the door shut and felt the prickle of tears behind her eyes.

*You will not cry, Kate Sinclair. You'll go home, put this behind you, and you will be fine. This is only sex.*

*Of course, it doesn't help you haven't had any for so long. That explains the emotion you're feeling. And why wouldn't you? Nick doesn't just have sex. Hell, no! That would've been too simple, too easy to walk away from.*

Now her traitorous heart was involved, and that scared the hell out of her.

She hugged her arms around herself, trying to still the unfamiliar emotions churning through her. But at the root of it all, she recognized the problem. Her problem. She didn't want to be just another notch in his belt, one of the many she was sure who had succumbed to the great Matheson charm.

She had known what this weekend was all about before she came. She'd wanted it, too. She wasn't some stupid, vacuous bimbo who didn't know the score. So why did she feel so bloody devastated?

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*Shit, shit, shit!*

The door opened a crack.

"May I come in?" he asked, his expression taut.

"Sure. Am I in your way?" She certainly hoped not because her feet appeared to be stuck to the floor. The vanity was the only thing holding her up at this point.

"No. You're right where I want you. Sweet, sweet Kate," he whispered from behind her. He lifted the hair off her neck as he leant to nuzzle and lick the pulse beating there. His hands skimmed down to cup her breasts and he looked at her in the mirror. "What happened?" His warm, rough hands slid down over her ribcage to span her hips and settle there.

"What do you mean?" she asked, afraid of the answer.

He pulled her flush against him, his arms going possessively around her waist and holding her tight. "This? Us? When did it change?"

"Change?"

"Stopped being just about the sex. You know what I'm talking about, don't you?" His voice was a soft rumble that vibrated through her.

*Oh, Christ!* She tried to get away, but he held her firm.

"Answer me, Kate. You know what I'm saying. You feel it, too."

Staring at his intense reflection as he held her there, she felt upset, scared, and couldn't stop the torment of her emotions from creeping into her voice. "Feel what, Nick? Like I'm in over my head? Well, you got that right. Now let me go." Half-heartedly, she tried to twist in his arms, to escape

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the all-too-tempting urge to give in to what she knew deep down she really wanted.

"No. Not going to happen, sweet."

He pulled her hips towards him and with a gentle pressure of his hand on her back, bent her over the vanity. His erection nudged against her pussy, hot and hard.

"Let me show you."

The sight of his eyes, so full of lust and ... She was scared to put a name to the other emotion she saw there.

Locking his gaze with hers in the mirror, he pushed inside, his rhythm slow and gentle, the slickness from their earlier lovemaking easing the full length of him inside her, filling her enough to take her breath away.

"No." Her head screamed the word, but as it passed her lips it became a feeble whimper. Even now, especially now, her resistance to him was weak and she tore her eyes away from his, scared he could read what her mind, her heart, was really saying. *Yes, yes, love me. Fill me.*

"Look at me, Katie." The words at her ear were firm, but tinged with gentleness. "Watch me love you, baby."

Unsettled by his choice of words, her heart wrenched, but her glance flicked up and she looked.

In his eyes, his beautiful, soulful brown eyes, there was a tenderness, a great well of emotion so deep she wanted to drown in it, if only she could let herself. But she couldn't. Her heart couldn't stand it.

"I can't, Nick. Don't you understand? I can't." Tears ran down her cheeks, dropping off her chin to pool on the vanity.

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His arms only wrapped more securely around her. She could feel the thump of his heart against her back.

"And I can't let you go. Understand that, sweet Kate. Not now, not after this. You're mine now, sweetheart. Only mine."

His gentle penetration picked up, though still slow and easy, there was no mistaking the message that he was sending. And all the time he watched her, loved her and held her with a look that said so much, revealed so much, that she felt her heart shatter and her legs go weak.

*Mine. Mine. Mine.* His words played over in her head again and again to the beat of his thrusts.

And then it began.

The convulsive triggers surged through her, the incredible, mind-blowing pleasure of feeling him thicken deep inside, the rhythmic clenching of her muscles around him, and the final, shattering explosion as he erupted inside her, the hot gush of his seed as he filled her depths, triggering wave after wave of orgasm through her body.

He held her as she collapsed, a gentle hand forcing her to look up at him. His breathing was ragged, like hers, but the love and lust still clouded his eyes.

"Now, you understand," he said.



## CHAPTER 7

She was cradled against him, the circle of his arms complete around her waist and they just stood there, staring at each other. Then his lips came down on hers, his touch gentle, almost chaste. She needed that. The emotions roiling in her were too intense.

As she struggled to regain control, Nick was there, holding her, supporting her, making her feel loved. She nestled closer into him, fitting her head under his chin. It felt so good.

"Don't be scared, Katie. I won't let you go, sweetheart."

That was all well and good, but what happened when the weekend was over and they flew back home? Would he still be there for her? In one of those moments of gut-wrenching insight, she had the feeling her life was about to change.

If she would just let it.

No. She couldn't do it. That road led to pain and heartache. She'd already been down that path once before and she had no intention of making the same mistake twice.

With a sob, she tried to wrench herself out of Nick's arms, but they tightened around her, holding her close.

"Don't even think about it, Katie. I am not letting you walk away."

She bit her lip and lifted her head to look at him, shaken by the depth of concern she saw the concern in his eyes. It was so powerful it took her breath away.

"Why not, Nick? Why won't you let me go?" She had to know what he felt, hear what he was thinking, because she

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knew exactly what had happened to her, and if he weren't feeling the same way, it would break her heart.

"Don't you know?" His lips were kissing her softly, tracing a trail over her forehead, down her cheek. "Tell me you don't feel this, too?"

"No. What—"

Her words were cut off as he kissed her. What started as a sensitive touch between them, soon flared to a hunger that had nothing to do with lust and everything to do with need. His tongue invaded her mouth, a relentless possession as if he wanted to imprint his essence, his heart and soul on her. She had no defense against it. Didn't want to anyway. Her body responded to him, and with a moan of surrender, she leaned into him, her arms going around his neck, locking them together as he pulled her body tight up against him.

When they finally broke apart, they were breathless, gasping, and she felt like her whole world had turned upside down.

"Come on, baby, work with me here. Tell me I'm not alone in this." He grasped her face in his hands, his hold gentle once more, cherishing. "Katie, I love you. Can't you feel it? Can't you tell?" His forehead came down to rest on hers. "Tell me I'm not alone."

\* \* \* \*

The memory of that moment hammered around her in head like it had been doing relentlessly for the last three weeks since they'd returned from the Victorian inn. She had said the words he'd wanted to hear. *Like a fool. A lovesick*

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*fool at that.* Words she had only said to one other man.  
Words that had opened her heart and laid it bare.

I love you, Nick.

The fallout from that was in the little bit of plastic she was holding in her hand that had just changed from white to blue.

Great. Just fucking great!

Kate stood there looking at the indicator trying to come to grips with the implications of that little color change. Just to be sure, she double-checked the box. *Yep, that was right ... blue meant pregnant. Blue meant a baby.* The only time in her life she'd had unprotected sex, and this was the result.

Which wouldn't be nearly so bad if she knew if Nick was even living on the same planet, let alone in the same city. She hadn't heard from him. Three fucking weeks! Not even a lousy message on her answering machine.

*What's love got to do with it,* Tina Turner wailed through her mind. Sure, Katie could cry, but that would achieve nothing except more puffy eyes and another headache, and now she couldn't even take a painkiller. An angry sob escaped.

No, it would be simpler and much more satisfying to just find Nick and kill him.

And therein lay the problem. Nick was gone.

Phoning home, phoning his studio, emailing ... if she didn't have proof to the contrary in her hand, she'd be starting to wonder if she'd had a really long, wet dream instead of the shattering reality of that weekend away with him.

No, the weekend was real all right. And she was the world's biggest kind of idiot. For the umpteenth time, she

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wondered if she had misunderstood, or misheard, or something that would excuse her for falling into the trap he had laid for her. No. Her memory of it was clear. No mistake there, as if the little piece of plastic she held in her hand weren't incontrovertible proof.

And the truly pathetic part? She really did love him. Just like she told him after he dragged the words out of her. *What's love got to do with it ...* Nothing. Obviously, nothing at all.

\* \* \* \*

Nick checked his watch. 8:30.

He watched his duffel come closer and grabbed it off the luggage carousel. There was no time to go home and clean up before he saw Katie. Even if he was carrying half the dirt of Nepal on his body, he didn't care. He just had to see her. The last three weeks had been hell.

Thank God he'd had time to send her that email before he left the country. He hadn't foreseen Greg, his partner in the thriving freelance photography business they shared, coming down with dysentery while on location. He'd started making arrangements as soon as he got home from Melbourne and found the message from Greg, and even leaving for Katmandu the next afternoon had been cutting it fine to get the necessary shots in time for the *National Geographic* deadline.

Now, he just wanted to see Katie, hold her, tell her how much he'd missed her. God, how he'd missed her. And loved

her. He was planning on telling her that again, but no tears this time ... except maybe happy tears.

Fifteen minutes later, he was at her place, ringing the buzzer. He felt relieved when he heard a soft footfall approaching the door. The happy expression he expected to see was missing, though, and one look at Kate's face had him worried out of his mind.

"Katie, what's wrong, baby?" He barged in, anxious to hold her and find out what was wrong. Fix it.

"Get out, Nick. You've had your fun. Done your damage. Now you can just leave."

Nick was confused. More than confused. "What the hell are you talking about? I came straight from the airport. I couldn't wait to see you. I thought you'd be happy to see me, too." *Was that my heart that just fell through the floor?*

"The airport? What are *you* talking about?"

"My email. I sent it on Monday morning. Nepal? Ring any bells?"

"What email?"

If looks could kill, he figured he'd be six feet under and pushing up daisies from the look on Katie's face. He felt like he was watching a movie and had ducked out to go the john and missed some crucial scenes because none of this was making any sense. "The one I sent it you before I flew out. Greg was sick in Katmandu, and I had to go and get the shots."

"I didn't get any email. Where did you send it?"

"The address you gave me—snazzy@wildfire.com.au. Why?"

A thump knocked him sideways and he rubbed his arm where the punch had landed. "What the hell was that for?"

"There's no.au on it, you techno-moron. For three weeks, three long weeks, I've been thinking..."

"What have you been thinking?" His eyes narrowed as he took in the anger and hurt on her face.

"That you didn't want to see me. I thought..."

Now it made sense—even to a thick-headed guy like him. "Baby, I wanted to see you so bad it almost killed me. Hey," he said, wiping away the fresh stream of tears. "I love you, sweetheart. I told you that." He looked into her eyes. That scared look he'd seen a few times before was there. "You're a silly goose, you know that?" Holding her face in his hands, he kissed her, trying to communicate all he felt with one simple touch. "You thought I didn't mean what I said."

She nodded against his shoulder.

"Let's settle this right now. Look at me, baby. I want to see your eyes when I tell you this."

She raised her head, looking up at him under lashes glistening with tears.

God, she was so precious to him. He had to do this right. Words weren't his strength like they were hers, but he'd give it his best shot.

"I love you, Katie. The last three weeks have been torture. I don't ever want to be away from you like that again." He dug deep into the pocket of his jeans and pulled out a small box. "I had a stopover in Singapore on my way back and I picked up a little something for you to tell you what my words can't."

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He opened the box and pulled out an exquisite ruby and diamond ring. "Marry me, sweetheart?"

The chuckle that escaped her surprised him and he looked at her curious as to what had brought it on after the intensity of moments before.

"Here, I'll swap you."

She handed him a slip of plastic with a blue dot on it. As an answer, it felt a bit short of what he'd had been anticipating ... hoping for. *Hey, hang on...*

"Oh, and the answer's yes ... Daddy," murmured Katie as her arms wrapped around his neck.

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