



FIGHTING FIRE

ALYSSA BROOKS

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"That doesn't look safe." A deep, smooth voice issued from behind her. "Get down. I'll get whatever you want."

Shivers chased her spine at the sound of the order. Though Carmen couldn't quite place it, a sexy note in the deep tone rang a strangely familiar bell. Masculine, with a hint of a country accent, she recognized the man.

Holding on tight to the rickety shelf, she tried her best to ignore the voice at her feet as she reached for the blasted file on the top ledge. The boards under her feet shook and creaked, hardly able to stand the hundred and twenty pound punishment. Just when she'd almost grabbed the old yellowing folder, two strong hands grabbed her around the waist. They burned through her clothes, their touch soft yet demanding. Intimate. A ripple of anticipation coursed through, wanting his touch, much as she didn't. She wriggled, trying to shake off his grip.

"Let me go."

"I told you." Though she tried to hang on, he pulled her from the shelf as if she weighed nothing and set her on her feet.

"Brent Sommers!" Carmen cried as she stared at a ghost from her past, a once fellow Rocky Falls High student. Not just any old classmate, but *him*.

Despite herself, she couldn't stop staring. No doubt, he was as handsome as the last day she'd seen him. Even then, no matter how much she didn't like him, she couldn't help having a secret little crush on him.

But now, good gracious, now he'd grown into a man. The boyishness to his golden stature had vanished, any softness filling out with the hard cut of earned muscles. His shoulders were broader, his tanned skin slightly weathered. Blond whiskers shadowed his jaw.

Her eyes scanned over his uniform. A crisp white shirt, with a small silver badge pinned on the left breast. A name badge, and some sort of small, gold medal decorated it. A navy tie and slacks finished the ensemble, making him appear neat, clean, in charge.

H-o-t.

She'd always been a sucker for a man in uniform. Always.

Her eyes swept his length again, enjoying every inch of him as she tried to figure branch of service he was from. What he wanted from her. In the deep recesses of her mind, she wished he'd come for her.

"I told you to get down." He stared at her with his deep emerald eyes. Eyes she could never forget, not even after she'd left Rocky Falls all those years ago. They were so green, not bright green but a darker hue, like the color of pine and trimmed with a gold that made them sparkle with life.

Damn it, why was she melting into a pile of mush? So the guy was attractive. So what? He'd always been. He was also the one who used to call her Pinky and give her wedgies. Besides, she didn't come home to find romance. She'd come home to find freedom from it. "I don't know who you think you are, coming in here as if you can boss me around. But you can't. If I want to fall to my death, I damned well will, thank you."

"Okay." His tone mocked her.

"You can leave now," she almost shouted. One thing she didn't take kindly to was someone- anyone- telling her what to do. No one had since Doug, and no one ever would again.

"Afraid not. We have business."

"Business?"

"I'm here for your inspection."

"What inspection is that?"

He nodded. "Carmen, I'm the fire chief. Now let's get this finished with so I can shut you down and get on with my day."

"Excuse me?" A streak of anger ripped through her. "You're not shutting me down. In fact, you're not even inspecting The Lucky Hart today. I scheduled nothing with you. You can't just drop in here on a dime."

"As a matter of fact, this building was due for inspection well over a month ago. You never called, nor did you answer the letter I sent. I can inspect it right now, or I can shut it down right now. But you aren't opening tonight without my okay."

"I've been in town for weeks now, getting this place in order. You can't just come in here the day I'm opening and threaten me. If an inspection was due, I should have been notified. I wasn't."

"You were. Check your mail."

Carmen threw her the folder on the front desk, and her hands flew to her hips. For a moment she almost yanked them away, remembering how Doug used to make fun when she did it. Years of being mocked by him hadn't erased what he'd seen as annoying tendencies, it only trained her to constantly be on guard. She held her hands in place, determined. Doug had Lisa now. And she had her hands on hips, where they would stay all she liked.

"No."

"Have it your way. Let me know when you are ready for inspection. Until then, you have been officially shut down." Brent turned and headed toward the door. "I'll post the notice now."

"Wait." Carmen gritted her teeth as a wash of insecurity boiled in her stomach, and made her sick. What if he could really do that? Maybe she should just let him look at the place. What could it hurt?

After all, why wouldn't the inspection pass?

Her uncle had run The Lucky Hart for years, and though the building was over a century old, he'd kept it in good working order until he got sick. Maybe the lapse in time had allowed the inspection to expire, maybe she'd been so busy she'd missed Brent's notice, but really, she saw no reason for her to be shut down.

"This way," she offered tightly. Through swinging doors that once had been the original entrance, she led him into the main hall. It really wasn't large, but about twenty-five feet square with a large stage in the front composed from the original oak. Now aged, it was rustic yet still sturdy and adorned by a velvet curtain that had been hung there sometime in the twenties. The entertainment performed there to the tinkle of an antique piano, mostly girls in old-fashioned costumes showing off their legs. Though occasionally they'd bring in a band or a funny act, the men's interest laid in the ladies. Funny to think how though their clothes never came off, some high kicks and demure smiles could still make a crowd of men go wild.

A bar made of plank wood sat on the right, complete with spittoons and tobacco rags hanging from its front. Jars of pickled onions and pigs feet sat along it, and many antique liquor bottles and dishware decorated its surroundings. Under the bar the actual drinks could be found, but they were kept stashed for the purpose of appearance. Several tables surrounded it, all new but crafted to appear older. A deck of cards and box of poker chips sat atop each as not only entertainment but also a souvenir for the tourist that came in. The rest of the dirt floor was left open, and the men could buy a dance with a lady for a dollar just like in the olden days. Though the punch in the card was good only for dancing now--no upstairs hanky panky as everyone knew went on in the past.

Brent took the stairs to the stage, looking around. "Let's see the back."

He bent to examine some wires at the base of the stage, and through his trim blue pants his tight, chiseled rear strained. The kind of ass you would see on an action hero, or in a Playgirl magazine. She imagined herself reaching to take a squeeze and...

A vision of him in yellow pants, red suspenders, and a fire helmet flooded her mind. Instantly her pussy clenched. Damn. How she wanted him over her, stripping away her clothes as she hung onto those red bands and begged him to extinguish her fire.

A heat rose to her cheeks, embarrassed by the rush of desire traveling south in her. Her pussy heated with desire, dampening. She fought to push the lust away.

Where had that come from? Good grief. Sure, she'd always had a thing for fireman. She even had a calendar in her office. But you'd think she could control herself.

"How long will this take? I'm very busy."

He ignored her, continuing to analyze every detail with his hard gaze. Carmen fumed as he brushed through the red velvet curtain into the stage area.

The Lucky Hart had belonged to her family for over a hundred years. It was old. She wanted to carry on the family tradition. She needed to. If he didn't pass her...

Maybe she should be nicer to him.

She watched him browse through the dressing area, where racks of costumes hung near vanities. Black lace and red satin surrounded them, along with silk and fishnets, gaudy feathers and fur.

She decided to make an attempt at friendly conversation. Maybe then she could distract herself from that firm rear.

"I thought you had some big football scholarship?"

Brent whirled around violently, his big black boot catching on an electrical cord. The next thing she knew, they were both plummeting to the ground.

He lay atop her, his face only an inch from hers. The fullness of his lips hovered right above hers, as his deep green eyes gazed into hers with a look of both shock and anger.

"I thought you'd gotten married."

His words brought a sharp pain to her chest. Yeah, she'd gotten married--the worst mistake of her life. It certainly wasn't an issue she wanted to discuss with him. Besides, all she wanted was him off of her, right now. His hard body felt a little too good pressed against hers, the build of his pecs hard against the softness of her own breasts. "Like you said, things change. Are you going to get off me now?"

"No."

Her insides fluttered. "No?"

"Bad knee."

No? Good heavens, the simple smell of him became too much. Spicy, woodsy, mingled with a little sweat. The scent of a man. Already her nipples hardened. My God, what if he could feel them? Her shirt was so thin...

"Oh for heaven sakes. I'll roll you off of me."

She gave him a shove, a little too hard for her own good. Rather than pushing him away, she ended up rolling atop of him. His strong arms wrapped around her. Her blouse hung open, revealing the curve of her breasts to him.

"Now, I like this," he murmured with a chuckle, his hands moving to her hair. His fingers grazed across her tender scalp, sending tingles along her spine.

She should really get off him. But she couldn't. Damn it, she wanted him and bad. The next thing she knew, his mouth had possession of hers.

She'd always had a secret little crush on him.

He'd always had a secret little crush on her.

Slowly he fingered the mass of silky brown hair cascading around him in waves. Every inch of her body pressed close to his. Too close. The sweet scent of her attacked his every sense, the soft tones of vanilla making him ravenous with need. Damn it, he should push her away. Get the hell out of here.

But he couldn't. Something stopped him short and made him kiss her deeper, something that he'd secretly wanted to do for a very long time. He traced his finger along her spine as he

explored her mouth, enjoying the taste of her sweet lips. If only he'd been a little more of a man in high school. God, he could still remember her like it was yesterday. Pinky, he'd called her. They way she'd kept with the styles had been close to laughable. Teased hair. Neon clothing. Leggings. Skin tight, ripped up jeans.

Damn, she'd been hot.

But guys like him didn't go with girls like her. They went with girls like Suzy, cheerleaders who dumped you the second you lost your football scholarship.

But hey, what girl wouldn't have done that? They all wanted the same thing. A free ride.

This needed to stop. Brent pulled his mouth away, but as if it were magnetized, Carmen's stuck to his. Their lips fought each other, fury in the hard kiss. Devouring her, Brent crushed her mouth with his need. Flicks and swirls of her tongue dared him to do more. To do the unthinkable. To take her.

The sweet, unimaginable flavor of her enveloped him. Nothing had ever tasted more delicious or smelled more intoxicating. He let his hands wander her body, feeling all of her. Despite the fact that she was lean, she curved in all the right places.

The smoothness of her deeply tanned skin reminded him of caramel, the softness of her long brown hair fine silk in his fingers. But her eyes, huge and brown, framed by long dark lashes, and so... so... there were no words to describe them.

God help him, she was beautiful. Irresistible.

Ripping the buttons on her blouse apart, he found her pert little nipples and took one in his mouth. He rubbed the hardened bud with his tongue then massaged it in between his fingers. Her breasts fit perfectly in his hands. He cupped them, enjoying their weight. Then he moved onto her other nipple, giving it the same treatment. Carmen moaned and arched.

How he wanted more of her. All of her.

All of her?

Damn it, what was he thinking? This was a mistake. A huge one. And he needed to stop now, before it went to far.

He needed to do his job. Not her. Determined to end it, he grasped her waist, and rolled her off him. "That's enough."

Carmen reached for the buttons on her blouse. "You're right."

"I'm sorry that happened." Brent stood slowly, favoring his knee. Though it sometimes went out on him, not many people were aware of it. In fact, besides his father and his best friend, Carmen was the first person he'd ever admitted the problem to. The town had no idea he'd never quite recovered from his football injury, and they didn't need to. The pain was always short-lived, and quite manageable. He could still do his job just fine. No, better than fine.

"So...did I pass the inspection?" Slight laughter traced her voice, as if she found something humorous about the situation.

So that was it. He couldn't believe it. He pushed her away and stood. "A make out session with you changes nothing. I have more pride than that. Apparently you don't."

"You jerk! I never meant that way and how dare you insinuate I'd allow you to touch me just to pass your petty inspection! You fell on me! You came on to me!" Fire enraged her voice. "Besides, I'd have no reason to. There's nothing wrong with this building and you know it."

"I beg to differ. Codes have changed recently." Really, he was surprised Carmen had fared as well as she had with this inspection. The place was a firetrap, but at least some updates had been done. But not near enough.

Colorado laws had been revised after two club tragedies had hit the national news. In both cases, sufficient exits would have saved many lives.

Shaking her head, Carmen rolled her eyes and swung her hand toward the door. "Just finish the inspection and get lost."

She said it as if he could help it. Carmen hadn't passed inspection, and that he couldn't change. How could he?

From his pocket he yanked free the notebook of inspection slips, filling it out. "I'll post the

notice on the door. The Lucky Hart has not met fire codes. You're not to open. You're not to entertain customers of any sort."

With that he walked away.

Insufficient exits. Expired fire extinguishers. No fire escape plan within customer's eyesight.

"Damn it." Carmen jerked her eyes from the posted notice to her reflection in the recently cleaned glass door. Sometimes she wondered who the woman staring back at her was. Oh, on the outside she still looked the same, though perhaps a little mussed, hair astray, without a drop of makeup. But not the Carmen Hart who'd left Rocky Falls all those years ago.

That Carmen always looked her best. And that Carmen would have put Brent in his place. Not almost slept with him.

God! How could she have just fallen into his arms? To think *he'd* had to stop things. Not only did she feel like the world's biggest fool because of what had happened, but much to her own embarrassment, she couldn't stop thinking about it.

About him.

The touch of his rough, calloused hands caressing her soft skin, making her crawl with fiery want. His expert lips on hers, jolting tingles along her spine as his tongue roamed her mouth, making her wish he'd been exploring other areas.

After he'd left, she'd needed to change her panties. And if she didn't stop thinking of him, of those rippling, thick muscles and evergreen eyes, she'd have to again.

Blast the man.

Once again she read his majesty's royal decree. In a nutshell, she couldn't open tonight. It wasn't fair. How could her life be so screwed, yet only continue to get worse? This couldn't be happening.

Hands on hips, she shook her head. *No*. No, it wasn't going happen. She wouldn't let it. She was woman. Hear her roar!

A tiny giggle escaped her. But as silly as the thought was, she was dead serious. She refused to be the pathetic fool the door's glass reflected. Slowly, she peeled off Brent's notice and headed inside.

"Hey, Sam," she greeted her bartender-slash-assistant in a singsong voice.

With a look of shock, Sam lifted her face from her hands and wrinkled her blond eyebrows. They made for a sharp contrast against the girl's brilliant blue eyes outlined in black, and over dyed red hair. Carmen wanted to shake her head. If only she were more natural, she'd be breathtaking. Women would die for that figure and porcelain doll face.

"You're surprisingly cheery." Disbelief coated Sam's words. "Did a miracle happen while you were staring at that sign?"

Carmen chuckled. "You'd be surprised what half an hour of staring can accomplish. I have a plan."

"I hope it involves opening tonight. My rent's due tomorrow." There was no mistaking the worry in her voice. "I already was late a couple of times after your uncle died. The landlord is on his last string with me."

Determination crawled through Carmen's veins as she headed towards the bar. "Why don't you go grab the phone book from my office? We have some calls to make."

"Sure." Sam bounced from the barstool with flourish.

"Oh, and don't forget about that door." Carmen called after her. She was lucky. Brent hadn't noticed that. No one would ever expect the seemingly normal door to be so treacherous, but it had been locking people in and out for ten years now. Why her uncle hadn't ever gotten it fixed

was beyond her, but it ranked tops on her list. "And grab some pen and paper."

Plopping in a chair, Carmen ran a hand through her hair. No way she was just closing at his order. She would fight that man tooth and nail before she let him shut her down.

Tonight she *would* open and legally at that. She'd just have to fix what he'd said was wrong before she opened the doors. He could come and post some more notices after that, but tonight she would be the winner.

If Carmen thought she'd get away with this, she had another thing coming. Flabbergasted didn't begin to describe his reaction when he'd drove past The Lucky Hart, and discovered it open. What was going on in her head? Now he'd have to fine her.

Brent worked his way through the thick crowd, trying to locate her. He didn't see her anywhere. Sudden applause roared through the room, drawing his attention to the stage. The velvet curtains drew open slowly, the pianos jingle carrying through the air.

Carmen Dressed in an old-fashioned ruby colored satin teddy, trimmed with black lace, fishnets to her thighs. A long feathery boa wrapped around her sleek neck, her hair swept into elegant twist of brunette silk.

The applause quieted as she came forward, and the piano picked up the pace. Her body moved with its beat, shaking and twirling. The boa flowed around her body. Two girls backed her, though somehow they appeared fuzzy blurs to Brent. All he saw was Carmen, her legs kicking high, so long and slim and tan. The tight cut to her old fashioned outfit, accentuating the smallness of her waist compared to her hips. And her tits. Dear God. Black lace pushed them into a voluptuous swell, and they teetered on the brink of falling right out.

With each of her sultry movements, Brent hardened against his jeans and strained for release. He couldn't move, couldn't think. Ragged breaths escaped him, and if the heat had him perspiring before, he sweated like a stuck pig now.

Once again applause roared through the room as the jingle ended. Carmen took a bow, her smile brilliant. "Welcome, gentleman. Thank you." A saucy little laugh purred from her throat. "You boys are too kind. Well, I just wanted to give all of you a proper welcome. As you know, I am Henry's niece and I will be taking over the Lucky Hart. The prices will remain the same, and the rules as well. Bad behavior isn't tolerated here, gentleman. Remember your limits because drunkenness, fighting, and obscenities will get you thrown out. And above all, respect the ladies. We all want to have fun, right? So no one ruin the good times and I won't end yours." The crowd remained quiet, and respectful.

Carmen glowed. She looked so damn beautiful Brent wanted to race on the stage and throw her over his shoulder. Thirty men were standing here, watching her, all wanting her as he did. For some reason, he didn't like it. Not one bit. He gripped his fists tightly and willed his feet into place as he waited for her to finish. "Many thanks for your attention tonight. I just have one other thing to say and then we'll turn the music on again. I would like to extend my appreciation to those who helped me get this place open tonight. You know who you are. We couldn't have done it without you. Many thanks."

She waved as she took the stairs on the left of the stage. The piano jingled through the room once again and the talking picked up. But Brent stood paralyzed, staring at her as she mingled through the crowd. Finally she caught his eye, and her gaze hit him like throwing stars.

The woman had some nerve standing there, in the midst of men in only a teddy, directing a nasty glare towards him. How he wanted to shake the smirk right off her, then wrap a robe around her and tie it tight.

The hardness tightening his lower regions melted away as red-hot anger pulsed through him, reminding him of why he was here in the first place. He couldn't believe she'd opened despite him. Her stubbornness could cost people lives if something bad happened.

Suddenly his feet could move again, and move they did. With long heavy strides he charged across the room to her.

"Brent. What a surprise." Her smile turned fake as she held her wine glass as if to toast her

success, and raised her eyebrows in mockery. "Well, do enjoy."

She started away but he gripped her by the arm, leaning to murmur in her ear. "We need to talk. Let's go."

"Really, this isn't the time."

"Now. Or we can do it in front of everyone if you'd rather."

Her huge chocolate eyes frosted, and narrowed into two dark slits. For several seconds she stared at him, anger radiating from her. Then her expression melted into false friendliness. "Why don't we talk in my office?"

"Fine."

"Fine." Her phony smile grew wider, until it pushed her cheeks to a point where he wondered if her face didn't hurt. "Follow me."

Every second he spent behind her was excruciating. Try as he might, he could focus on nothing but her perfect little rear end swaying back and forth, and those damned long legs. The black high heels she wore did her calves justice, accentuating their curves as they lifted her perky ass.

Cheese and crackers!

Despite the fact that he tried to look anywhere and everywhere else, his cock twitched and started to harden. Gnashing his teeth, he followed her into her office and slammed the door behind him.

"Don't you have any shame at all? I can't believe you Carmen." His voice boomed off the walls. "How can you walk around in that outfit? And that dancing, good grief."

"Not that it's any of your damned business, Brent," she hissed.

Several moments passed by silently as he fumed, too angry for words. Carmen stood, arms crossed, her back to him.

"And by the way, there is nothing indecent about this outfit. Most bathing suits show more than this. And that's bathing suits, not bikinis. My God, look at these tap pants, Brent. There cut nearly half way down my thighs for heaven sakes. Some woman wear skirts more revealing than this." She plopped in her chair. "Grow up."

True, her outfit was old fashioned. But still. "You didn't have to dance like that."

"Like what? So I kicked my legs a little. You know, I am a single woman attempting to run a man's establishment. I needed them to know I was on the same level as them. I needed their attention. For them to like me...listen to me. And it worked. They heard every word I said, didn't they? And you know what? I don't owe you any explanation. If this is what you wanted to speak with me about, you should just get lost." With a wave of her hand, she directed him to the door. Then her face fell, her jaw nearly dropping to the ground. "My God, you shut the door."

"So?"

She stamped her foot, obviously at her wits end. "So? So it's broken, that's what. It's always locked. We're stuck in here."

"Well hell, that's not very safe."

Two hours of pure hell. The shouting, screaming and banging hadn't helped a bit. No one heard them, and no one would. Carmen slouched in her office chair, and ran her hands through her hair. Time to face the facts. "Well, Mr. Know-It-All, I hope you're happy. We're stuck in here until morning. No one is going to come, much less hear us. Thanks to you, we're stuck."

Brent slammed a large, knotted fist against the heavy oak desk. "Thanks to me? You're the little idiot who could've fixed the door a long time ago but didn't. And who doesn't have a phone in their office? And need I mention, I wouldn't even be here, except you violated an order not to open." He pointed a thick finger at her.

For your information, mice chewed through the phone line. I was going to get it fixed--*tomorrow*." It took everything she had not to try and yank it off. "Good grief, I can't stand men like you. Bossy jerks.

Just like Doug, who thought just because he stood a half-foot taller than her, he'd the right to push her around. And look down on her. Even now she could see the disapproval in Brent's frowning jade eyes, judging her.

"Exactly why you shouldn't be open *today*. My order--"

"Oh, an *order*, is that what that was? See, 'cause I thought it was a notice. Forgive me, your highness. Let me bow and kiss your feet." Slamming her hands against the desk, she whirled her wheeled chair around so she didn't have to watch his expression. His eyes were easy to read, entirely too expressional, and at times damned heart wrenching. She just didn't want to see them condemn her for one second more. "Oh, and by the way, all the silly grievances on your *order* were fixed."

"Give me a break, Carmen. Don't expect me to believe you managed that in a day. And even if you did, you still needed to have the place re-inspected." The hard edge to his voice boomed off the walls that trapped them.

She whirled around to face him. "And don't you expect me to lose money when I don't have to." Carmen raised her voice level to match his. He needed to realize she wouldn't be pushed around. "Two more exits have been opened. Jake Warner volunteered to cut them out today. Curtains cover them now, but they are clearly marked with bright red exits signs. He'll be installing the doors tomorrow. The actual exit signs will be here day after tomorrow. I had them priority shipped. As for the fire extinguishers, Tom Harding who owns the hardware store was happy to donate several, seeing how excited he was to come tonight. And I drew three, not one, fire escape plans--very large, and very readable. They've been posted."

So there Folding her arms, she sat back in the chair and dared him with her eyes.

A little muscle in his jaw twitched and he looked so damn angry it was almost sexy. Flashes of their previous kiss invaded her mind. His lips were so soft, yet so demanding. Never had a man possessed her with such fervor. What would it be like for him to kiss her now, while his blood boiled? Would he completely ravage her, like a wild beast, untamed and out of control?

"Bull. You can't expect me to believe you got all that done, and to code." Brent practically jumped from his chair and paced.

Carmen couldn't even respond. She was too busy fighting the electrical tingles nipping at her breasts, the cream ruining her new silk thong. Hating her betraying thoughts.

What was wrong with her? Even now, after all she'd been through with Doug, she hadn't learned. A tiny piece inside of her yearned to be dominated--even ached for a man to control her

out-of-control urges.

Another one of her naughty, unfulfilled fantasies. It went right along with the firefighter one. Both wonderful to dream, but fulfilling them didn't come so easily.

Carmen propped her head on her hand, her elbow resting on the desk, and wondered what to do or say next. With the way he made her feel, she'd just as soon spend the night in silence with her back turned. Yet something tempted her to talk to him, to continue the argument, to win.

A silence had fallen between them, so thick one could whip out a knife and cut through the air. Time passed slower than molasses dripped, every second seemingly longer than the one before it.

Good grief, how would she ever get through the night trapped in this tiny box of an office with him? He was like a caged animal, prowling back and forth between the desk and the door. Sometime this afternoon his dress uniform had turned to form fitting Levi's, and a black skintight tee shirt. Every muscle in his thighs and rear flexed as he paced, and despite herself she stared. Her eyes became ping pong balls, darting to and fro between his strutting, sculpted lower half, and his rippling muscles across his shoulders. Even unflexed, his arms bulged with strength.

God she needed to turn her attention elsewhere. *Anywhere*. "This is silly Brent. We can't spend the whole night this way. Let's at least try to be civil."

He just grunted.

"Oh come on. Sit down. You're making me nervous." And hot. Very damned hot.

Amazingly, the disgruntled bear plopped into the chair across from her, his shoulders still perfectly squared. "You're right. We're adults. Let's get along."

They were adults, weren't they?

Carmen could help it. He was so close to her, just a leap across the desk. A rush of naughty thoughts boggled her mind. She'd had about enough of the tension. She wanted this man. A lot.

Damn it, she couldn't hold back any longer. Her body took control of the situation, shoving sense and reason aside. Like an animal attacking its prey, she pounced across the desk, lunging for his mouth.

Brent pulled her to him as she crashed upon him with a kiss. She wiggled into his lap, straddling him. His already hardened cock pressed between her legs. Tonight, she would have it.

Carmen was in a rush, but he wasn't. He'd wanted her so badly all day. He wanted to savor every second. Stroking his tongue along her lips and tongue, he suctioned them. She moaned, curving her back. Little by little he released them, parting her mouth to allow him in. He explored every corner of her. Along her teeth, her gum, her cheeks, he caressed her with his tongue. She tasted so sweet. Like candy. He couldn't get enough. His body stiffened with desperate need. Ever so slowly, he caressed her with his fingertips, running them across the square of her jaw and down her neck as he continued his appraisal of her mouth. Carmen responded all too eagerly. Her kisses were so hungry, so desperate, her passion undeniable.

He wouldn't refuse her, now could he? No way.

Reaching around to her sleek, graceful back, Brent ran a finger south along the exposed groove of her spine until he found the fasteners holding her costume on. The bodice laced, tied with a tight bow at the top. But the damned thing was knotted. He tugged and tugged, to no avail.

Then he grabbed the penknife from his pocket. The ribbon was coming free, one-way or the other. With one long swipe, he cut her free. The bodice fell forward and he cast it aside then pulled her breasts in his face. They were perfect, full, but not large. A mouthful.

He explored with his tongue, slowly tracing the outline of her nipples then flicking them. The buds turned into rock hard pebbles, which he took in his mouth, and suckled gently.

Carmen arched and yanked his head closer. "More, oh God. Please."

More? Oh, he could give her that. Despite that fact that he'd grown hard as steel, the thumping in his cock almost unbearable, he wanted to fool around. And Carmen, she was obviously the playful type. Some liked to rush in, seeking fast gratification. But he liked to explore, to enjoy his maximum build up before he exploded. And he intended to pleasure every inch of

Carmen.

He took her left nipple between his teeth, and rolled it, tracing his teeth lightly across the sensitive bud, all the while flicking it with his tongue. Then he pulled, and ever so slowly released it. It popped free, and once again he caught it, suckling as if to draw milk from it. He wasn't gentle in the least. He was hungry, and it showed.

With his penknife once again, he sliced away the bottom of her costume and the black lace panties she wore under it. Cocoa brown hair covered her womanhood. He pressed his fingers in the mound, all the while enjoying the taste of her tits in his mouth.

Carmen rose, allowing him to find her spot. Fire lit her body, her mind a blur with desire. She could think of nothing but him, his appraisal, and the new way her senses reacted. No one had ever touched her so thoroughly, so intimately. And certainly, she could expect a lot more to come.

Tingles raced her spine, and heat seared at her breasts. Her nipples were so hard they hurt, the best pain she'd ever experienced.

His fingers explored her nether regions, stroking her, teasing her. He took her clit between two fingers and rubbed, followed by gentle caressing. His attentions were hard and demanding, soft and loving. Clenching with need, she lifted her hips a tad more, an invitation for him to enter her with his fingers. He did, slowly and deliberately exploring her until he hit her g-spot. She half screamed, half moaned at the touch. He followed her lead, diving into her with two more fingers to unmercifully tease that tender area.

Heaven help her, she could hardly stand it. Her body was ready to come, but she held it in, not wanting to ruin it. It was too soon to end it, though she didn't know how she could possibly continue. Her body shook with bliss, ready to overflow at any second.

"Mercy," she cried as he released her nipple and took her clit between the fingers of his other hand. "I can't..."

"Come." Husky, and deep, his voice left no room argument. "Come for me and I'll give you more."

More? How was that even possible?

Did he actually think he could make her come twice? Well, if he could, she'd certainly like to see it. And enjoy it. But no man had ever driven her to that point.

She didn't want to ruin this moment. She wanted his magical pleasuring to go on. For a long, long time. Despite herself, his deft fingers couldn't be denied. He was going to make her explode like a damned bomb. Ripples of intense bliss shocked through her, lifting her to heights of ecstasy. For several moments she teetered at the edge. Her pussy convulsed. Then she lost it. The rapturous tension inside her shattered into a million tiny pieces, and left her breathless.

Brent didn't skip a beat. As she panted beneath him, he lifted her into his arms as if she were naught but a feather. Depositing her onto the desk, he swiped it clean and spread her before him. Her rear hung rested on the edge, and he propped her feet on his shoulders.

His lips found her slit, sucking it gently then attacking it with his tongue. Up and down, back and forth, his mouth licked and appraised her lavishly. He worked in tiny circles, occasionally diving into her, but completely driving her mad. Another wave of ecstasy shook her body, making her quiver as she once again teetered on the edge. As if he sensed it, he sucked at her, gently nibbling her clit between his teeth. Carmen screamed like a madwoman, so overwrought with passion she couldn't contain herself.

Maybe someone would hear her that time. But she hoped the hell not.

Brent hadn't lied. He had a hell of a lot more to give. The blond deity stripped away his clothing, revealing his hardened body. The sight of him only increased her desire twofold. His muscles rippled as if he'd been chiseled from stone, his built pecs and six-pack stomach enough to make her gulp. Then he slid off his jeans, his long thick cock tenting his boxers.

Carmen shot up and ripped away the barrier between herself and the prize. When she found it, she swallowed the meaty rod, relishing in its size as it slid down her throat. She licked and sucked, enjoying every inch of his length with her tongue and teeth.

Brent stiffened and moaned. "Oh God, no more." He pushed away and moved atop her. Kneading each of her buttocks in his hands, he slid deep into her. All of him filled her.

Carmen moaned aloud. "Oh yes. Oh yes."

"You like that, baby?"

"You have no idea how badlyah...I've wanted you since I set eyes on you in that uniform."

He barked a laugh, increasing his uniform. "Now I know what to wear around you."

The rhythm of his hips increased as she met his demands, rocking in a passionate frenzy. From deep within her a heat filled Carmen, burning her alive with carnal needs. His thrusts drove her to the brink, and she exploded from within.

Brent pushed himself even deeper, and convulsions shook his body. His warm seed spilled inside of her, filling her with him. And then he collapsed, resting his head against her chest, obviously exhausted from the deep breath he drew.

Several moments passed before he drew himself off her, the realization of what they'd done sinking in. He was here to shut her down. Instead, the bar partied on while he was in here, fucking her.

He'd allowed her to get to him. To make him slip, and he'd made no small mistake. People's safety was compromised. He didn't take his job lightly.

A woman who could possess him like this was trouble to be around. He'd do best to remember that.

As soon as he stood, Carmen skittered to her feet and grabbed for her underwear, her hands and arms covering her breasts.

How had they gone from bliss to this awkward tenseness floating around them like a poisonous gas?

Maybe he should say something. Clear the air.

But she did it for him. "That was a mistake."

He stared at her as she slipped on her panties, a little sickened by the way those words spoken aloud, by *her*, made him feel. An unexpected knot formed in his chest and worked its way to his throat. So tight, so unbearable he wanted to throw something.

"You got that right. Let's pretend it didn't happen." He uttered words he realized he truly didn't feel.

Even now he wanted Carmen again.

Her back turned to him, her shoulders shrugged. And even though he'd just taken his fill of her, the simple sight of her sleek back made him swallow hard. The tiny groove that ran between her muscles along her spine, the daintiness of her shoulders, the escaped strands of her hair falling carelessly around her neck. Lord, help him. Why didn't she have herself covered by now? You'd think she'd put something on. "Aren't you going to put on a shirt? Or do you plan to stand there all day with your arms crossed?"

"I can't," she snapped. "You took a knife to my top. At least you have clothes."

Oh.

Well, hell. That hadn't occurred to him, any more than his own nakedness. "Just stay put. I'll throw you my shirt. Then you can toss me my boxers and jeans."

Ripping it off as fast as he could, he threw her the shirt. Never had he felt more naked than he did as he turned around and awaited his Levis, his whole backside exposed to her. "Hurry up."

He heard her turn, but no jeans came. What was she doing? Staring at him?

An eternity passed. He should demand his pants, or anything to get her moving. But a rock caught in his throat again, and he couldn't breathe much less speak. The thought of her looking at him, enjoying him, turned him on like nothing else, it was almost enough to make him not want to put his jeans on again.

Finally the thump of his clothes landed beside him. Without hesitation he threw them on, but he still couldn't turn around. He owned too great a bulge in his pants.

"You okay?" Carmen questioned.

"Yes," he managed to grit between his teeth.

Forever passed before his little man decided to give it a rest. But finally he could turn around again, and he did, only to regret it. She stood innocently, his huge shirt swallowing her up. He'd thought to cover her, but that was even worse. Because it was *his* tee on her, making her look so damned adorable. And sexy.

Then she loosened her hair. Already sweet little tendrils fell loose and graced her neck, framing her face. The rest of her silky mass followed as she dropped it free from the twist that held it, and then slowly, ever so seductively, combed her fingers through the cocoa mane.

Cocoa. How suitable. Carmen was chocolate and vanilla. Two opposite flavors twisted into one and both too tasty for any man to ever get his fill.

Having her had only made everything worse. Much, *much* worse.

The tiger returned to his pacing.

Brent was driving her crazy. Things had gone from bad to worse. It was horrid enough she was locked in this tiny room with him. But now she had to wear his shirt. It reeked of him, a woody scent, traced with a spicy musk and just a hint of their recent physical exertion.

But even worse, he *wasn't* wearing the shirt. And try as she might, she couldn't avoid the sight of those tight, knotted muscles spread across his shoulders. Or the way his triceps bulged. Or

the strong build of his pecs. His bare upper body was everywhere she looked.

And if she'd wanted him before, she was dying now. Having him had only made things worse. Now she knew what he had to offer. Knew he was the best she'd ever experienced.

Never had any man fucked her like him, and though she knew there must be, she couldn't think of a single reason why they shouldn't be doing it again.

She didn't even dare as so much as speak--she didn't trust herself to.

She went against her own advice, and stared at the clock. Watching every second, every minute, every hour. Sam wouldn't be in until eight. Heaven help her until then.

When she got out of here, she swore she'd never so much as set eyes on Brent Sommers again. She hadn't come back to Rocky Falls to find romance. It was the last thing she wanted at this point in her life. She'd loved once and lost. She wouldn't do it again.

Sam was late. Carmen plopped her head on the desk, so miserable she could cry.

Again.

Flashes of the repercussions of last night's episodes flooded her mind, torturing her with the prospect. She certainly didn't need that to happen again. No thank you.

Fatigue almost yanked her to the floor as she stood and crossed her arms. Neither of them had slept last night. Oh, she'd tried. But after what'd happened, and with him right *there*--so close, so sexy, so available... well, it simply hadn't been possible.

What she wouldn't do for a strong cup of coffee and a hot shower. "Move, please," she ordered Brent, exhaustion making her voice hollow. With a weary look of annoyance, he moved from his spot where he leaned against the door and went to sit in her chair.

Minutes meandered by as she pressed her ear against the door and hoped for Sam's arrival. The clock's ticking only seemed to get slower and slower. God! Would she ever get out of here? Why was she being punished like this?

Finally, when she was ready to give up and slump to the floor in defeat, she heard the familiar clack of Sam's heels. She started pounding with all her might against the door. "Sam! Sam! In here!"

Brent flew from the chair to join her, actually lifting her to place her aside. His display of strength reminded her once again to look at those damned muscles exhibited from his lack of attire. The bang of his fist against the metal door echoed through the room, but his hollering nearly shook the building.

She was so tired. You'd think she'd have lost interest by now. But everything about his actions teased her, just as they had all damned night.

She couldn't wait another second to get out of here.

Thankfully her prayers were answered. The door swung open, almost smacking him in the face as he leapt clear. Sam stepped in, looking half asleep and as artificial as ever. As if the black eyeliner wasn't enough, she'd added charcoal eye shadow, and tacky stick-on star decals. Her hair had obviously been dyed again last night, leaving it coarse, and frizzy.

Carmen never had been more happy to set eyes on anyone. "Thank God," she muttered as Sam wrinkled her blond eyebrows in puzzlement.

"Should I ask?" she chuckled, her voice clearly hinting. "Or is this a private matter?"

"Don't ask," Brent grumbled, stalking from the room. About half way down the hallway she heard him pause, then he hollered, "Be ready this afternoon, Carmen. If this building isn't ready for inspection then you're shut down permanently. And get rid of that damned door."

They both jumped at the sound of the front door slamming. Sam turned to her, a deep frown creasing the thick makeup on her pretty face. "Can he do that?" Her voice was a tiny as a mouse.

A pang of deep despair pierced Carmen's heart, not only for herself but also for Sam, and everyone else involved. A lot of people would be hurt if Brent closed the place.

"I think so." Carmen hated the ugly truth, but there it was. "But not if I can help it. Find me some strong coffee and a screwdriver. I'm going upstairs to get dressed, then we're making this

place so damned fire safe we'll win an award."

Even after a nap and three strong cups of coffee, fatigue still pulled at Carmen. It seemed the day would never end.

At least they'd finished with the repairs so Brent's impending visit could go quick and painlessly. The new doors had been hung, while her office one was removed and replaced. Everything else was in good order. Brent couldn't shut her down now. Thank God.

After today she shouldn't have to see him again until next year. Now that was a blessing. She didn't need another last night. But resisting it would be impossible if she were near him. Damn. Whatever it was about him, she'd had enough of it.

Or, not enough, Carmen thought with a shake of her head.

She leaned in her chair, and released a deep sigh. Soon her problems would be gone.

Sudden heavy footsteps stomped into her train of thought. A tremor ran through her. It was definitely a man's walk coming towards the office. She hopped from her seat. She didn't need Brent in *here* again.

"Hey, Brent. Coming." She chewed her last bite, and headed to the door. At the last minute, for some odd reason, she got the urge to give herself a straightening. Ridiculous. But she decided to anyway. "Be right with you."

The footsteps didn't stop. She forfeited trying to smooth her hair, gave her skirt one last yank, and rushed from the room.

No sooner than she rounded the threshold, she ran smack into his chest. She squealed, the blow knocking her backward. Brent's arms caught her, drawing her to her feet.

"Sorry about that."

Their eyes locked, passion igniting around them. She'd promised herself she would do this again. She didn't need this in her life right now.

Yet...

His lips were too tempting, too full and kissable. His expression implored her, her sex wetting with memories of the night before.

She could not look away.

She did not want to.

He swallowed, a look of fight in his eyes. Yet, raw desire must've won the battle, because rather all of a sudden, his mouth crashed upon hers. He swept her into a needy kiss, his tongue invading her. It swooped along hers, caressing the inner recesses of her mouth.

She kissed him back with all her heart, aware she shouldn't. That she'd promised herself she wouldn't.

She didn't care.

Forbidding herself from him only made the kiss all the more wicked and wonderful. She dampened, her pussy growing juicy and hungry for him. His hand traveled to her left breast, cupping it. He rubbed his thumb across her hard nipple then pinched. Together they stumbled into the office, their lips locked, their hands petting.

They headed towards the desk. In their furious rush, Carmen's foot caught and she tripped. Stumbling to the floor, she landed on her rump. Hard.

"Ow!" she squealed, though more hurt by the fact they were now both rudely knocked into reality.

He offered her his hand, and she took it. Pulling herself to her feet, she yanked at her skirt and tried to compose herself.

"You had no right to do that." Annoyance bubbled in her, though more at herself than him. "I told you, I don't need--"

Damn.

She didn't know why she yelled at him when she carried half the blame. Easier, she supposed.

She shook her head. She needed to make herself clear, but she didn't have a right to put it

all on him. "Look, I'm--"

"No, I'm sorry." Brent cut her off. The tone of his voice surprised her, soft and patient. "I just can't keep my damn hands off you. But I will, from now on. I promise."

"No," Carmen shook her head. "I'm just as guilty. Look, let's just get on with the inspection. But, this shouldn't happen again and we can't allow. I returned to Rocky Falls to run this place, not get involved. So no more...episodes."

"Understood."

Rubbing the blond whiskers shadowing his jaw, he fidgeted as he stood. The action rugged, yet endearing, her lower regions tingled. She found herself summing him up once again, everything from the way the dark jeans fit against his skin to the undone buttons at the collar of his flannel. Despite herself, she wondered at his chest, undressing him in her mind. Everything in her wanted him. Wanted another last night. Needed it.

Tightness coiled in her lower regions. Her nipples hardened against the lace of her bra. Could he see them? Was he even looking?

Why did she wish he were?

She noticed the bead of sweat running down the side of his face. It wasn't hot in here, not enough for that.

No, he wanted her too, just as badly as she wanted him.

Hell, if they both really wanted to they could, right now...

And why not?

Hadn't she already discussed this with herself? Enough already!

Brent turned from her, yanking his eyes from hers, and squaring his shoulders. "How about I just run through this inspection and get lost?"

"Sounds good to me," she sighed, disappointed yet thankful.

She led him towards the bar, not missing the way he eyed the office door as they exited. As they walked into the bar, she tried to reason with herself.

Another romp with him wasn't what she needed. Wanted maybe, but needed--no. The sooner this was done, the better. Besides, she felt like crap. Though Brent appeared to have taken a shower and caught some sleep, she hadn't. No doubt she looked like pure hell. "I'm pretty tired."

Flipping out his little notebook, he nodded. "Yeah. Me, too. Long night last night."

Long didn't even begin to describe it. Besides, she could think of better words. Like tantalizing. Heavenly. Erotic.

Shaking, she left him to sit at the bar. She scooted on a stool, feeling as if she were losing her mind. For him.

"Sweetie, ya okay?"

Carmen looked to her left to see Sam, finally returned from lunch. Thank God. This morning she'd thought she'd never be happier to see the girl, but right now she wasn't so sure. This moment sure could contend for winner.

Carmen ran a hand through her hair. "Sam, I need you to look after things."

Sam plopped onto a bar stool next to her, her movements as exaggerated as her style. "Okay, sure. Everything all right?"

"No. Yes. I don't know. Brent's here, doing the inspection. But I'm just too tired."

"What if he fails us?"

"Then he fails us. But he has no reason to. Look, Sam, I'll hardly roll over and take it. But let's face it, there's no chance of me convincing him to do anything but what he wants. If there's any more trouble, I'll just go around him. Don't worry, Sam. Just take care of things."

But for now, she had to escape. And change her underwear.

Stepping into the bathroom, Carmen flipped on the heat then turned on the water. It poured from the faucet, steaming hot. Perfect. All she needed now was bubbles. She found the bottle under the sink, and dumped a very generous amount into the water. Suds frothed, filling the room with the scent of vanilla sugar cookies. Inhaling deeply, she stripped away her clothes, and

stepped in.

"Ahhh." Heaven wrapped around her as she leaned back and rested her head against the bath pillow.

Before she had a moment to enjoy it, her cloud nine was grossly invaded. Thoughts of Brent raided her mind, and as hard as she tried to push them away, she couldn't. Her relaxation time disappeared as her body tensed at the thought of him. At what he could do to her, and the places he could take her.

She wanted to go there again, very, very much. Never had she experienced such pleasure. All she could think of was his hands on her, in her, rough and calloused but ever so soft. The way he coaxed her body, teasing her unmercifully before he took for himself.

Her nipples hardened. Her lower body tightened. She clenched against the desire boiling within her. Was Brent really so different, so great? He was just a man, which she hardly needed in her life. Maybe she just needed sexual release. Maybe it wasn't him at all. Maybe it was her. After all, it had been so long since she'd been properly sated. Actually, had she ever been? Not until last night. No one had ever pleased her body like Brent did.

Slowly she let her hand drift south. Men did it all the time. So did a lot of woman. Why shouldn't she? She sunk deep into the water, fondling her breast as she touched herself. Thoughts of Brent danced in her mind, from his muscles to his tight buns. Mimicking the way he'd touched her, she escaped into a fantasy of him, where he touched her, loved her. Not herself.

Forever she searched herself for her release. A heat built within her, filling her, and even tipping over the edge into bliss. But it wasn't the same. No great explosion. The world didn't shatter.

Leaning back, Carmen rested her head against her hand. She was tired, and just plain sick of simply reaching the point of lukewarm release. It never really satisfied her. Not like last night, when she'd touched the stars. It had been like flying away on a magic carpet ride.

But she could never find that in her own hands, or any other man's. Somehow, deep down she knew it to be true. Call it a woman's intuition. Call it anything you want. But she couldn't doubt the facts. Only he'd been able to turn her inside out with ecstasy. And if she ever wanted to experience that again, she needed him. Brent Somers was the one, the only one, who could ever complete her happiness.

Heaven help her.

Weeks passed by, ever slow slowly, each day spent on her toes. Never knowing when or where, but having to face the fact that Brent was everywhere. At the grocery store, the hardware store, even the library on one occasion. Almost every time she left home she ran into him. Just today she'd went for lunch at the corner diner, only to be conveniently seated at the table next to him.

Life just wouldn't fall into place. When she'd returned, she'd imagined a peaceful life. Quiet and secure with no worries, and least of all no men problems. So much for that.

At least Brent had finally passed her on the inspection. She'd been able to stay open, though she'd spent all week worrying if about having the actual doors and signs installed.

Carmen grabbed her keys with a jingle, and stuffed the over-filled ring into her crammed purse. Swinging the straw bag on her shoulder, she headed for the door. What she needed was a break from it all.

Brilliant rays of sunshine greeted her as she stepped out the door. Squinting her eyes, she dug through her bag and found a pair of dark sunglasses. Already her skin warmed under the heat beating on her. The perfect day for what she had planned. She'd been a teenager the last time she went to the falls, and swam in her favorite hole. Hopping on her bike, she pedaled lightheartedly and hummed to herself as she headed from of town.

Brent couldn't believe his eyes. Frozen where he stood, he watched Carmen slowly peel away a tiny striped tank top. Underneath she wore nothing. No bra. No bathing suit top. His mouth watered as he traced his eyes along the length of her graceful back, the delicateness of her shoulders, the smooth deep caramel coloring of her skin. Like a tasty morsel of the most delectable yet forbidden of candies, he craved her.

He hardened against his blue jeans. God help him, he should get lost. But the sight of her shirking off her cutoffs, revealing a tiny black thong paralyzed him. What he wouldn't give to trace the path of that tiny thread of coverage, slicing between her perfectly rounded rear, with his fingers. Exploring. Slowly she bent and removed the panties as well, casting them aside as she stretched in her full glory. Beams of lights filtered from between tree limbs cast shadows against her body, making her look ethereal as she stood upon his rock next to the cascading falls. Diving gracefully, she splashed into the clear, pristine water.

Taking another step back, Brent's mind pleaded with his feet to leave. This was just like that time in high school, when he'd caught her here. Except this time he would never be able to sit behind a bush and watch. Now he was a man. A man with needs.

He stood there, his cock as hard as steel, watching as she bathed under the falls. The water ran over her slicked hair, dripping down her face and breasts as she reveled in it. She looked like a woman enjoying great pleasure, so natural and so sexy.

Before he could think things through, his clothes were flying off and he raced to the water's edge. Carmen's beautiful cocoa eyes caught his. The initial shock in them faded into desire as he splashed into the water and swam to her. All he knew was that he wanted her, needed her. Ravenously. Greedily. Savagely. And he'd be denied her no more.

His presence caught her by surprise, but as soon as she saw him, great warmth filled her. Though she'd denied it even to herself, she'd been pining for this very moment. A chance when

they couldn't relinquish to reason or reject what they really felt in exchange for rationale. A time when passion could cast aside doubts, ruling both their actions.

Brent swam to her in powerful strokes, his muscles glistening under beads of water as their strength rippled with might. She glided from under the falls and into his waiting arms. They wrapped tight around her, pulling their naked bodies together. Her breasts squashed against his rock hard chest and teasing electric shocks ran through her nipples. They tightened into buds ready for his kissing.

His mouth claimed hers, taking it into a fiery embrace. His lips and tongue were impatient, searching and teasing her as if he'd been starved. She responded with equal fervor and a battle ensued.

His manhood danced between her legs, the water making the rock hard rod float. It brushed against her, teasing her with its presence. Slowly she drifted one hand along the length of his body, tracing her nails lightly against his chest. She continued to fight him with her tongue. It was a war he would win and one she'd surrender to. Her attentions were being distracted to elsewhere.

She grasped his cock with her fingers, caressing the long shaft in her hands. It responded with a twitch as Brent groaned low and deep. He sounded savage, like a beast ready to claim his mate.

He pulled her closer, wrapping her legs around him. His demanding hands gripped her fanny and spread her sex open. She held his shaft in a firm grip and used it like a tool against her nether lips. Another desperate growl rumbled from him. Even in the cool water, her body lit on fire. She traced the length of her pussy, then massaged his sex against her clit. The power of control made her greedy.

"No more," Brent commanded. Of course he was right. She couldn't stand anymore toying much less expect him to. Now was the time. She relinquished her hold, grabbing his powerful shoulders for support. He dived into her with a deep, forceful plunge. Her nails dug into his back as pleasure shocked her body and she released a wild cry.

Holding her hips in an unyielding seize, he drove into her with no patience. Demanded her body to meet his. She matched his hard, fast thrusts.

"I want to see you. I want to memorize your beautiful body while I fuck you," he murmured and pulled her backward by the shoulders. She floated in the water, her legs still wrapped around him. Licking his lips, he held her by the waist and drove into her once again. "Perfect."

Water swished around her as he took her, making her feel as primal and as basic as her incredible surroundings. The hot ecstasy building in her mounted, now at the edge of explosion. His pace slowed and he dived into her with little circles that pushed her to the edge. Screaming out, she convulsed.

Distantly, she became aware of Brent's own orgasm as he shook within her, animalistic sounds grunting from him. When he finished, he pulled her from the water, and held her tightly in his arms.

Slowly the pleasure filled high faded, and reality settled in around them. Carmen waited, knowing he'd likely pull away once again, as she should do. Glorious fulfillment encompassed her. Quickly she decided she wouldn't. Not this time. She'd found something, someone, who could take her where she'd always dreamt of going. Her heaven was in his arms. She was tired of running from it.

Brent's hold on her released and she swam away, contemplating her decision. Was she crazy? Perhaps. But better mad than unhappy.

Brent splashed closely behind her as they crossed the pool and climbed on the large, jutting rock.

Squeezing out her hair, Carmen turned from him as she spoke. "I'm not sorry that happened." When he still made no response she continued. "Like you once said, we're both adults."

"I'm not sure about a relationship between us. We're just not..."

"Compatible? Oh please ... and a relationship? Is that what you think I want?"

Leave it to a man. When she was thinking fun, he thought in more permanent terms. It should be vice versa, him thinking of her as nothing but a play toy. But here he was, mucking up their fun for fear of complication.

"Brent I have no use for a man in my life except in one area. I don't want you. I want your body. The same as you want mine. If you didn't, you wouldn't have come after me today."

"True." A wicked grin curled on his face as he caught onto what she suggested. "What exactly are you proposing?"

"Some fun." Shrugging, she licked her lips. "A lot of fun. Nothing more. Nothing less. Whenever we want, for as long as we want. Nothing complicated, certainly no relationship."

Realization washed his face as he ran his thick fingers through slicked blond hair. A devilish look entered his green eyes. "Bend over then."

"What?"

"You heard me." His voice flat, each of his few spoken words carried a certain challenge.

One she'd be all too anxious to meet.

Maybe he thought she wouldn't. Thought if he pushed her too far she'd relinquish this crazy idea. But little did he realize she wanted to go too far and then some. She'd denied herself the pleasures of this world for far too long. Now she wanted to experience them all, and through him.

Her body tingled in anticipation as she obeyed his command. Never had she felt more exposed, or so deliciously naughty at the prospect. She braced her hands against the cold, wet gradual slope, her fanny posed high in the air. She expected him to drive into her, but that didn't happen. He knelt between her legs, caressing their length with his fingers. Electrical shocks tingled through her at the touch. She clenched in anticipation.

He spread apart her pussy lips with his fingers, his touch gentle yet sensual. Holding them spread, he licked her as if she were a lollipop or ice cream cone. He tasted her from front to back. Thoroughly. Never had any one ever explored her so. The new touch made her ignite in a fresh way. She clenched her hands, bracing herself though positive she'd crumple into a pile at any moment.

Brent's mouth taunted her, sucking and nibbling. Moving back and forth. He alternated with circles, some tiny and forceful, others large and playful. His tongue dove inside of her, flicking. Her body constricted under his attention, building to a point she could hardly bear. "Brent, please."

"Oh, but you taste so good." Sucking on her clit, his fingers explored her, and her nether lips quivered. Her whole body shook, tremors of ecstasy quaking through her.

He stood and drove himself into her, holding tight to her hips as he plunged. He did not pull out, but worked himself in circles, his cock as far inside of her as possible. His consistent depth rubbed at her g-spot, giving her no rest from the orgasm that recently shook her body. An almost unbearable force built in her. Pleasure so intense, so fierce she couldn't bear it. She wanted to beg him to cease, to grant her mercy. But she knew he'd give none. And as much as she wanted it, she didn't.

Brent reached around, attacking her pussy with his fingers as he fucked her. His big, thick thumb rubbed at her clit unmercifully, making Carmen pant and cry out. She meant to order a cease to this torture, but instead she howled, "More, more."

At his hard, final thrust she shattered. Both her body and her mind experienced heaven as it shook with final release. They both collapsed on top the rock into each other's arms.

Brent surprised her by laughing, his chuckles like that of a teenager boy, light and happy. As if he hadn't a single care in the world. His humor was contagious and she joined him. She giggled until it hurt.

"That was great, Brent," she murmured and moved closer to him. He made no response, except to pull her into his arms and cuddle her against his chest. "By the way, thanks for passing

me."

He grunted. "Yeah, you owe me big for that."

"Oh no, you don't!"

He laughed. "I know. I just thought I might get a blow job out of you."

"Ass." She gave him a playful shove. "You'll probably get one anyway."

He made no response, except to pull her into his arms and cuddle her against his chest.

Everything between them quieted, a calm settling in.

There wasn't any telling how long they lay together, the whooshing sound of the falls blended with the sweet melody of birds a peaceful lullaby to them. Occasionally the crunch of a nearby deer or skittering squirrel intermingled with nature's song. Beams of sun peered through the trees, warming their naked bodies.

Such peace surrounded them she dared not move. At this very moment she felt better than she could ever remember in her whole life. Tranquil. Content. Complete.

A shame it could not last forever. In time, the chirping of crickets warned of nightfall. Soon she'd have to get home. If only she could convince herself to budge.

Brent made the first move. He stood, stretching his lithe naked body and then he dove into the water. No goodbye, no kiss until next time. Could it be that he'd already tired of her? Of their plan?

Feeling like a desperate fool, Carmen called after him. "Next Monday, Brent. Same time, same place."

For several moments he gave no response as he swam toward his clothing, but then he paused and turned to her. "That was nothing Carmen. You're playing with fire. I hope you're ready."

Anticipation at the promise raced through her. She watched him swim to the tiny rocky beach, and bend to gather his clothes. The muscles in his powerful legs pulled, tightening into ripples of strength. His rear retained its rock solid shape. She decided it was indeed the cutest thing about him.

Through and through, Brent was as good looking as they could come. No wonder she wanted him so much.

If only she could get him in those damned suspenders.

Once again, Carmen licked her tongue along her teeth, her hands unconsciously falling to her hips. God help her, she couldn't wait until next Monday.

Jeans on, Brent walked away, stopping only once to shout a final warning. "Next time I won't be nearly as nice."

Thank goodness. His truck was parked under the old twisted oak tree next to the path leading to the falls. A strange relief flooded through her, releasing the tension that had built in her all week. With each passing day she'd been more and more sure he wouldn't come. That he didn't really want to do this. And though she swore to herself she didn't care, it had kept her on tippy toes all week.

Riding her bike on the trail until it became too bumpy and rocky to continue, she ditched it against a baby pine. She continued on foot, gingerly making her way through the sticker bushes that grew in over the years. Maybe Brent would trim them.

Ouch! One stuck her, drawing a droplet of ruby red blood from her forefinger. She bit back a curse on the tip of her tongue and continued as quietly as possible. She didn't want him alerted to her presence. Not yet at least. Let him be surprised, like she'd been the last time.

The falls could be heard before seen, the sound of gushing water against rocks a soft roar. Soon the woods opened to the clearing, where a rocky landscape surrounded the pool of water at the bottom of the cataract.

Her quiet was well rewarded. Unaware of her, Brent swam in the water's depths. Wetness sleeked his blond hair from his face, accenting her view of his strong features. Even from a distance his eyes glowed with green depth. His lips teased her with notions of what they could do. He moved under the falls. The cascading water poured over him as he stretched. The movement tightened every muscle in his glistening chest, pulling taut his pectorals and six-pack stomach. If only he would turn around...complete the show.

But she couldn't wait until then. Seeing him only made her impatient. A week of built passion bubbled in her. She wasted no time tearing off her clothes and diving into the pristine pool. Though she wanted desperately to rush into his arms, she didn't swim to him. If he desired her, he could catch her.

"Nanny, nanny, boo boo," she taunted. "If you want it, come and get it."

Brent took the bait and gave chase as she half-swam, half-ran from him. By any means, she was no match for him, especially not when laughter spoilt her ability to flee.

Brent pursued her with a look of pure determination. And won. He caught her in tight embrace, crushing his lips upon hers. Demanding, the kiss smashed her with a desperate passion.

One thing was clear. Brent meant business. She laid her head in the water, all too happy to enjoy his eagerness, even the slight pinch of pain that came from such an intense, furious appraisal. His roughness lit a deep fire in her, one that secretly burned for domination.

Leaving her breathless, he released her. "I'm in no mood for games."

"Too bad for one of us, huh?" she teased, pushing away from him in the water.

"Don't toy with me, hellcat." False warning rang in his voice.

"Or what? What will you do about it?" She continued to float in the water, moving farther and farther from his grasp.

He disappeared under its depths, catching her by surprise as he appeared under her. In one swift movement he threw her over his shoulder and headed toward their rock. "I'll teach you a lesson you'll never forget, that's what I'll do about it."

One of his hands cupped her rear, and held her place. When she wiggled in response to him, determined to act the bad girl, he squeezed hard. His thumb pressed hard into her, pushing into an area never entered before. The touch was new to Carmen, as was the intense feeling that

flooded her lower stomach. He laid her on the rock and she scooted away by natural inclination.

"Don't you move another inch," he growled as he pulled himself from the water.

Of course, Carmen deliberately ignored him. His hand flashed out, gripping her by the ankle. "Keep toying with me."

"Just try and stop me," she purred.

Stop her he did. His fingers grasped her nipples, pinching them tightly as he pushed her against the slab of cold granite. He attacked her pussy, spreading her lips and working her clit with his fingers. Pulling at it slightly, he used his other hand to caress her pussy. Moaning, she arched her hips for more.

And more he gave, though she never expected it. His finger pressed into her anus. With his other hand, he inserted three fingers into her pussy. She screamed at the touch, shocked by intense pleasure of it.

His fingers gave her no mercy. They worked hard to drive her to a point of insanity. They slid in and out, playing with her. Sometimes he went deep. Other times he simply teased her. The torture made her moan and writhe as shocks of intensity coursed through her. Her breasts burned with heat, her lower body tingling.

He withdrew his fingers, and pulled her hips to him. He drove into her with his rock hard cock. Her body gushed with pleasure, nearly spilling as he once again inserted his finger into her anus. She held strong, determined to enjoy this moment to the max.

He was greedy as he rammed into her body with no mercy. She met his thrusts with her own, slamming herself against him harder and harder. The sound of the skin meeting skin smacked through the air amongst her cries.

"Are you ready for me?" he half asked, half moaned.

"I'm going to come soon. Too soon," she panted. "Oh God, yes. Give it to me."

"Good." With that his movements ceased and he had her by the hips once again, pushing her around. "On all fours."

His order filled her with a naughty anticipation. She told herself to refuse to obey. Let him make her. That would be more fun.

Her dominant lover quickly caught onto her game. Grabbing her tightly, he pushed her into place and slapped her rear with his open hand. She jumped at the sting, and naturally moved away. He grabbed hold of her, locking his hands tightly around her hips. He pulled her ass against his manhood. It poked and prodded slightly before he gently pushed into her and thrust. It hurt for a moment, but faded as he reached around and explored her pussy with his fingers.

Gradually he worked himself deeper into her, all the while fucking her with his fingers. Her pussy clenched against him, her body threatening to give into ecstasy at any time.

Deft fingers worked her clit in hard, tiny circles. The pressure overcame her, sending her off the edge. Her back arched as she cried out, shaking as she grasped at the rock's cold surface for anything, something, to steady herself with.

"Oh, oh, ah," she panted, begging for what she did not know. Everything went white for a moment. She swam in a sweet oblivion. Rode on her magic carpet.

Brent's own violent climax brought her from her fog. He shook as he grabbed at her hips, and flooded her with his seed.

Brent stood and dived into the water, abandoning her to the rock. Rolling, she sat up, breathless. She watched as Brent let the cascades flow over him.

The way he looked under the water was too good to pass on.

Standing, she stretched and slid into the water. It's coolness wrapped around her as she stroked towards him. Diving under, she popped up right in front of him.

She swiped the water from her eyes, flashing him smile.

He grunted a surprised laugh, and grabbed her. "Come here."

He drew her against his chest, holding her tight. She relished the warmth, the way her bare chest pressed against his muscles. The water churned and bubbled around them, creating sensations against her skin.

She wrapped her arms around him, letting her finger trail his spine. "You seem tense today. Serious."

"It's been a long week."

"A bad one?"

"Well, that depends on how you look at it." He tangled his hands in her hair, kissing along her neck. "In everything I did, every moment, every second, all I thought of was you. Today. I'm afraid meeting Mondays aren't enough."

"Oh?" She raised her brows. "Hmmm..."

He floated, pulling her towards the dripping rocky wall. From a small ledge, he grabbed a bar of green soap.

"You come prepared."

His eyes frisked her. "More than you know."

How it could be possible after the climax she'd just experienced for her body to light on fire again so quickly? It beguiled her. Just the thought of him washing her seduced her...

She wanted that soap to clean every inch of her body. Every inch.

"Mmm, what can that mean?"

He ran the soap across her breasts, circling her hardened areolas. Burning desire lit her lower regions, her clit throbbing. Slowly he slid the bar south, leaving a soapy trail behind.

The suds slid down her belly, and around to her back once again. He massaged her as he cleansed it, gradually working farther and farther south. He slipped between her rear, over her anus, to her throbbing, hungry pussy. She moaned and arched, so hot for him she could no longer relax and enjoy it.

"Mondays aren't enough," she moaned. "Not near enough."

His mouth suckled her clean skin, working down to her collarbone. "Then we forget the rules?"

"No. Mondays are a must. But whenever else, whatever else, hey, we're adults right?"

"Right..."

His hardened cock danced between her legs, and she pressed against it. How she wanted him in her. "You know, I still haven't had you in uniform...I want a fireman to put out my fire."

"Tomorrow," he promised, lifting her. "Tomorrow."

Cradling her in his arms, he carried her to the water's edge. "I'm hungry. How about you?"

"Starved. What's to eat?"

"You." Depositing her on their rock, he climbed from the water and stood before her, gloriously naked and dripping wet. His weathered skin, just slightly tan, glistened. The shine accented shadows across his muscled body and she longed to run her hands through the tiny curling blond hairs across his chest.

She gulped, half from the sight of him and half from his answer. What could he mean? Anticipation of the worst kind washed through her, making her skin tingle in excitement as he reached into the basket.

First he pulled out a blanket and spread it with the simple flick of his wrist. "Lie down."

Licking her lips, she obeyed, all too anxious to see what other treasures the basket held. Out came a can of whipped cream, followed by strawberries and a jar of cherries. Chocolate syrup. A banana.

And last but not least, an expensive bottle of white wine, along with two glasses. Popping the cork, he filled only one then drank it in one full swoop.

"Thirsty?" he asked as he refilled the glass and brought it to her lips. He tipped it into her mouth and the sweetly bitter liquid flowed over her tongue. Trails of it ran from the corner of her mouth, and down her neck as Brent chased to catch them with his tongue. When he'd licked away the spillage, he tilted the glass and poured a liquid path between her breasts, over each nipple and into her belly button. Slowly he suckled and drank it away as well.

Peeling the banana, he took the tip of it and ran it along her mouth sensually. In the spirit of things, she attacked the banana with her tongue as he pushed it into her mouth. Eagerly she

gave head to the fruit, all too aware of what the display did to Brent as well as herself. His long thick cock jutted forward, standing ready for its own attention. Biting off the banana, she swallowed and went for him.

But Brent pulled away, taking the remainder of the banana with him. She gasped as he positioned himself between her legs and used the fruit on her nether lips the same way he had on her mouth. First he softly teased her with it and then he pressed it just inside of her. He only inserted far enough into make her pulse for more. Wanton needs made her whole lower region unbearably hot and tight for him.

Next he opened the cream, first squirting it around her nipple, then down her belly and lastly covering her sex. The coolness of it tortured her, only making her sizzle with desire. He topped each whipped cream mountain upon her breast with a cherry, as well her lower region. Then he poured chocolate over her, swirling the syrup all across her body.

He'd finished his artwork, but the true torment had not even begun. Yet, Carmen was so alive for him she could hardly bear it. It took everything in her to lie still and wait for more. She tingled from her thighs to her breasts so intensely it felt more like electrical currents shocking her body.

"Time to eat," Brent announced as he gathered several strawberries. Feeding her one, he used it to tease her lips as he allowed her tiny bites. The remaining strawberries he used to dip in the dessert covering her body, just barely brushing her skin with the red fruit.

When he'd eaten every last one, he went for the banana. He bit it down, nearly to where he'd inserted it. With tantalizing licks and strokes of the tongue, he consumed her and the remaining dessert. He ate his meal slowly, enjoying each taste and the fact that she was writhing under him. Her hips arched against his appraisal as she cried and begged for both more and for him to cease.

All she needed was a nudge and she'd fall over the edge. As if he sensed the fact, Brent went for the remaining banana, slowly pulling it from her with his teeth. The sensation pushed her to the limit and she went flying to cloud nine in a blinding swirl of ecstasy.

A smile as wide as her happiness spread across her face as she hummed and finished the last of the bookkeeping. Time only made business flourish, and with the influx of tourists in the area for the up and coming end of summer events in town, she'd done great this week.

Clicking off the computer, she stood and stretched. Life couldn't be better right now, though this winter she might be singing another tune. There wouldn't be as much business, and there certainly wouldn't be any more swimming at the falls.

She supposed they'd just have to find another private spot, because no way she would give up their meetings. This past month she'd had the best sex of her life. But not only that, she enjoyed Brent. After their lovemaking sessions, they'd developed a habit of talking. Never about themselves, or anything important. Just chitchatting. Mondays with him were so intense, and yet so casual.

A look at the clock made her realize it was only lunchtime, and she'd finished what she needed to accomplish for the day. A rarity, and one she'd just have to take advantage of.

The firefighter calendar hanging on her corkboard caught her eyes. Licking her lips, she stared at the three hot men leaning against the fire truck. Wearing only tight jeans, one held a yellow hat, another a big hose, and another axe. All of them rippled with muscles and sexuality.

If only she had three of Brent.

Her lower regions heated, desire grabbing her psyche. She realized Brent was working today, but that made it all the more tempting. They'd been so *busy*. She'd yet to see him in his territory.

Would stopping by be okay? Surely no one would mind, especially not if she brought lunch.

Grabbing her purse, she headed out the door, jumped in her car, and sped off. Her body itched for satisfaction, making her drive a little faster than she should.

Surely Brent could take a little time off.

Her lips curved in a wicked smile as she pictured him in her mind, wondering what he might be wearing. After all, she was headed over to the fire hall with a little hope of catching him in those yellow pants and red suspenders.

He'd better be.

Pulling into Dana's Fast and Fresh Chicken, she drove to the first window and placed her order. "One bucket of extra crispy chicken, two orders of potato wedges, and an extra-large Coke please."

"Nine eighty-eight. Pull around please."

She pulled to the next window, and waited, opening her wallet. She paid, waited for their lunch, and then sped off. Within a few minutes she pulled into the station. One fire truck was parked around the rear, two guys washing it with large brushes.

Not Brent though.

Shoot, she'd have to look for him. A nervous bubble tingled in her stomach as she approached the men. She hoped she wasn't bothering anyone by coming here.

The closer she got, the more she noticed the men. The way the tee shirts and blue jeans clung to them, wet from the water they squirted from the hose. The way their muscles flexed as they washed. She didn't even look at their faces. She didn't want to. Their bodies were h-o-t.

Yet, despite her attraction, she experienced no rush. No tingle down her spine or warming.

They weren't Brent.

Right then and there she realized she was falling for him. And she didn't mind a bit. Her reasons for not wanting a relationship had dissolved, overpowered by the compatibility. Physically, emotionally, they clicked.

She nodded a smile, and held the chicken in front of her as a peace offering. "Hi. I'm looking for Brent. Is he here?"

"Depends." The taller one flashed a smile. "Is that chicken for us?"

She laughed. "I'm Carmen, by the way, and yes, it can be. If you get me Brent."

"All right, Carmen. Fair warning from Mack--Brent is a terrible cook. Remember that before you decide to marry him." He chuckled, his eyes sparkling with fun. "You'll have to feed us all when it's his shift to cook. Let's go, Doug."

Doug dropped the hose and snatched the bucket from her. Mack grabbed a piece of chicken, then another.

She gave a light laugh as they bickered about a leg and headed off. "I'll keep that in mind."

They disappeared through the door next to the bay, and seconds later the buzz of the door slowly shutting filled the air.

Brent pulled on a pair of yellow turn out pants over his jeans then put on a fire helmet. Reaching for a pair of red suspenders, he clipped them to his pants. Though many people thought it, firefighters didn't always wear red suspenders. But he'd bought them especially for Carmen. They were part of her fantasy, and he wanted to give her that.

He'd arrived from training some cadets this morning and just finished showering when Doug had announced she was here. He could believe it. His shift was over. Her timing was perfect.

How many times had she mentioned her fire fighter fantasy? Quite a few...

He'd been meaning to indulge her for some time. Now, he would.

Finished dressing, he took wide strides outside. She leaned against the fire truck, her brown hair cascading around her shoulders. The hardened buds of her nipples jutted, visible under the light blouse she wore.

Damn, he wished he had a camera. She looked sexier than ever. Lately she'd had a glow, an aura about her. He hoped it was because she was enjoying herself as much as him. His cock twitched, ready to come to life.

"Hi." She raised her brows, flashing him a smile. "Wow."

"Hey."

He leaned against the truck, placing his hand above her head. "What's up, sugar?"

He tangled her hair around his finger, relishing its silky feel.

She looked at him with huge, needy brown eyes. "I'm on fire, baby. I need a fireman to put me out."

He couldn't help a laugh as he lifted her. "I better hurry than. Wouldn't want you burn."

He threw open the rear door to the fire truck, lifting her into it. She scooted back, lying on the slim bench. She propped up a leg, and her skirt hung open, allowing him a view of her silky black underwear.

Damn.

His cock stiffened, a surge of lust searing through him. He needed to have her. Now. He didn't give a crap if they were in public, in a company fire truck at that. The naughtiness of it thrilled him.

Climbing inside, he slammed the door shut.

Wet desire dripped between her legs. She couldn't believe it. Her little fantasy was reality, and even better. They were going to do it in a fire truck?

Yes!

She began to unbutton her shirt as he climbed over her. Propping himself with one knee, he brought his mouth to the exposed skin on her chest. He suckled and kissed at her as she opened

for him. His lips trailed along the edge of her bra. He slipped his tongue under the silky fabric, darting for her nipple. He brushed the hardened bud, driving her crazy. She needed more.

She slipped the straps off her shoulders, scooting the bra to her waist. His mouth claimed her left breast, licking around her areola. She arched, flooded by desire.

He trailed his kisses south, to the rim of her skirt. The edge of his helmet caressed her skin, sending excited tingles through her.

His hands slid up her skirt, pulling down her panties. He tossed them aside, rubbing along her thighs. His fingers explored her lower regions, toying with her clit. The nub pulsed, pleasure radiating through her. She arched her hips for him, inviting more. With two fingers he plunged inside her, then three, then four.

She cried out, bucking against him as he moved back and forth. She wanted more than this!

"Brent, please!" she moaned, pushing her hips against his hand. "More."

He chuckled. "Say it."

"Say what?"

"You know..."

She could only think of one thing fitting. "Oh Brent, put out my fire. Please!"

A pleased look crossed his face as he slid his hand free. Unbuttoning the thick, mustard colored pants, he freed his cock and positioned himself between her legs. She grabbed onto the suspenders, drawing him to her. With one hard thrust, he buried himself inside her.

He fucked her so fast and hard she swore he was shaking the fire engine. She screamed, meeting his demands. Ecstasy wrapped around her, threatening to burst at any moment.

He plunged deep within her, hitting her g-spot. Moaning, she tightened her lower muscles around him. He slowed, continued to hit the special area.

She exploded into an orgasm, coming in a series of quick convulsions around his cock. He moaned, diving deep and jerked, spilling himself inside her.

Collapsing on top her, he shook his head and laughed. "I can't believe we did this."

"You're a wild one, fireman."

"Me? You're insatiable."

"Only when it comes to you, Brent. Only when it comes to you."

He nodded, pausing. He lifted himself off her, kneeling beside her. He frowned, seriousness contorting his face. "I've been thinking. About us."

"Us?"

She stilled. He'd said it so soberly. Was he going to end it?

She didn't want to end it. If anything, she wanted more.

With each passing day that feeling in her had grown, despite that how hard she tried to reason it away. Now no amount of rationale could change her mind.

Today she'd realized it full force. She was ready for another relationship. She wanted Brent in her life.

She waited for his answer, but the wail of a siren cut through the air.

His eyes jumped. "Shit." He leapt to his feet, buttoning his pants. "Get out of here. Fast."

Her heart skipped a beat then leapt into a race. She rushed to obey him, flinging down her skirt, yet her mind held back. Confusion boggled Carmen.

Had they been caught? What was he going to say?

"What...?"

He cut her off before she could finish.

"There's a fire, Carmen!" Urgency flared in his tone. "Hurry up."

Shoot! Again the need to rush burst through her. She worked the buttons on her blouse, her fingers fumbling. He did not wait for her as he flung open the door, bounding out it.

A wave of men's laughter burst through the air, mingled with the loud howl of the warning siren. A moment later, it silenced, replaced by clapping. Hooting.

She looked up, finding a crowd of six or so men shrieking in hilarity. Face reddened, bent over, ready to puke laughing at them.

They'd been caught.

Carmen clamped her shirt closed with her fist, embarrassment heating her. She didn't know what to say. To do. Never had she been stuck in such a situation before.

If Brent were going to break up with her before, he'd really do it now.

Brent rubbed his jaw as if he'd been hit.

"There's no fire, huh?" Deep and gruff, his voice coated with humored annoyance.

"No," one of the answered. "Except in that truck."

More sniggers followed, continued by, "Nice suspenders!"

Carmen prayed that meant it was all being taken in good humor. She'd hate to see him in trouble because of her fantasy.

"Shit." Brent shook his head. "You guys..."

Suddenly, he whirled around, jumped in the truck, and slammed the door shut.

"Forget them." He shook his head. "They've had their fun, hell, they'll have it for the next two weeks -- if I'm lucky. But, there's something I want to say to you."

Carmen chuckled, listening to the sound of their ragging outside. "Easier said than done."

"About what I was saying..." He ran a hand along his jaw, and imploring her with his eyes to listen.

Nervousness bubbled in her. "Yes?"

"I want us to start getting to know each other."

Relief rushed through her, washing away the tension. "Are you kidding me?"

"No." He frowned, looking doubtful himself. "I just thought maybe..."

His voice trailed off, leaving her with the obvious knowledge that he was afraid she'd say no. He really did want this.

He wasn't just talking about sex anymore. He really wanted to be *with* her. A bubble welled inside of her, filling her with both excitement and happiness.

"Oh, yes. Hell, yes," she answered.

A smile beamed on his face. He bent, and pulled her close to him. She nuzzled in his chest and enjoyed his warmth. Wrapped in his embrace, she realized she'd belonged there all along. If only she'd known years ago, her prince charming had laid within the same man who'd called her Pinky and given her wedgies. Sometimes life just isn't what you expect, and the man of your dreams is the last person you'd imagine.

He wrapped his fingers in her hair, drawing her close to him. Together they relished in the new closeness between them.

He kissed her forehead. "What do you say we start tonight? The carnival is in town, we could go, then afterward..."

She lifted a brow. "You'll wear your suspenders?"

"The suspenders *and* the hat."

"It's a deal," she promised with a quick kiss.

Brent leaned in, sweeping her into a sweet kiss. His lips touched her with passion. Slowly, he slipped his tongue along hers. She matched his appraisal, increasing the kiss from nice to naughty. Fire blazed its way through her body, one he'd need to put out. Good thing he was a professional.