

Game,  
Set...  
Match?



## GAME, SET...MATCH?

...The elevator beeped for their floor, and Jaime pulled away from him. When the doors opened, they walked toward the car and she looked around the lot.

“Hmm,” she said. “We’re alone.” Then she smiled lasciviously at him.

“Yeah, until *they* come back.” Mac pointed to the one other car on the level.

“It’s only one car.” She increased the pace, tugging him along. “They might come back in a minute. They might not come back at all. That’s what makes it...exciting.”

Mac pressed the buttons on his remote to unlock the car. When he got to the passenger side she opened the door first, sat down sideways, and slipped her hands around to Mac’s bottom, pulling it toward her.

“Jaime, what are you doing?” She could hear the warning in his voice.

“I’m hoping to convince you that you don’t want to wait.” She put her hands on his belt buckle and quickly undid it. Then, before he could protest further, she undid his pants and pushed them and his boxers down just slightly. *Just the right height.* His penis, swollen and rigid, came free. She took him in her hands and guided him into her mouth.

“Oh, Jaime,” he moaned. She smiled inwardly, knowing she had him. That became her last lucid thought, as he skimmed his hands down the swell of her breasts...

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# GAME, SET... MATCH?

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BY

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AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

<http://www.amberquill.com>

GAME, SET...MATCH?  
AN AMBER QUILL PRESS BOOK

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Copyright © 2006 by Kelsey Lewis  
ISBN-10 1-59279-649-4  
ISBN-13 978-1-59279-649-6  
Cover Art © 2006 Trace Edward Zaber

Layout and Formatting provided by: [ElementalAlchemy.com](http://ElementalAlchemy.com)

PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*For Amy,  
whose talent and creativity inspire me to reach  
for the best stories I can.*

*I want to acknowledge the contributions  
of two special people, without whose help I never could  
have put this tale together. The first is my father,  
the best tennis teacher and coach I know, who taught me to play and  
love the game a million years ago, gave our family the  
amazing experience of living on a tennis ranch, and was invaluable in  
helping me get all the details right. The second is my  
friend Mike, who gave me some great Texas background and  
was a good sport about answering all my  
queries, including the “emergency Texas question” on  
Thanksgiving eve. Thanks guys!*

# CHAPTER 1

Jaime crouched into ready position, balanced on the balls of her feet, racquet lightly in hand, the way her father had shown her a thousand times. She hadn't been on a tennis court in a long time, and it felt great. She didn't miss the crowds and the local reporters and the long hours of practice. But she did miss the challenge of analyzing an opponent's weaknesses, the power she felt in her arm when she smacked a perfect forehand, the joy of dropping a shot just over the net. And of all the places she'd ever played, all the colleges and universities, all the country clubs and resorts, all the indoor bubbles, this was her favorite. The Bar None Tennis Ranch, hidden away in the Texas Hill Country, where she'd grown up. She also had a special fondness for playing on the covered courts, under the lights that came on every day at dusk. It was where she'd watched her father teach her brother, Cole, and where, jealous of the attention paid to Cole, she'd gotten the other pros to show her how to play. Where she'd watched

## *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

her father's jaw drop when he'd spotted her playing after months of secretly practicing on her own.

The serve that Evan, a grungy rock musician visiting from Colorado, slammed at her had a lot of speed, but she easily returned it into the backhand court, well within his ability to reach it. She noticed he was sweating a bit when they'd switched sides last time, and that was good. She wanted him to work for things, not think he could beat her easily. She still had her pride.

She lobbed the ball into the far corner of the backhand court, careful not to lose it in the lights. Winning that game, the score for the set was now exactly where she wanted it—five-four. She would let him win the next game, maybe after a deuce rally or two. He'd go home and tell his buddies that the Bar None was an amazing place. The lessons had helped his game so much that he'd beaten Jaime Alexander, local tennis phenom and former top female 18-and-under player in Texas. And she'd go home to Houston having had a good workout and some fun, while still having challenged herself by placing the shots exactly where she wanted them and controlling the match.

After she insisted several times that, "No, of course I didn't let you win," he invited her to join him for a drink at What A Racquet!, the ranch nightspot. She begged off; she didn't feel like facing the trophy case with all the plaques and medals with her and Cole's names on them. Besides, she wanted to try out the new ball machine she'd heard about that day from her sister Maddy. She grabbed her racquet and cover and headed for the far end of the block of courts.

On the way to the ball machine, she stopped and ran her hand over a particular spot on the wall. There was still a dent there in the wood, even though the whole pavilion had been repainted in brown sometime in the last seven years since she'd left the Bar None. At that spot, on the cusp of her own pro career, of following her brother onto the pro tour, she'd had the worst argument of her life with her father. She'd been



### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

sick of the tennis, sick of his pushing her, sick of not having a normal life. They'd both said a lot of nasty things to each other that, in retrospect, she knew they hadn't really meant. It didn't make them hurt any less, however. The fight culminated with him shouting, probably loud enough for the guests staying in the main lodge to hear, "If you're going to play for me, you'll do what I tell you." She'd slammed her favorite Wilson racquet into the wall and told him she was never playing for him again. Ever.

She found the new machine two courts over, and set it to the highest possible speed. When the balls started flying at her fast and furiously, she hit them back with equal fervor, holding nothing back this time. She practiced putting top spin on the shots, sometimes carefully placing them and sometimes whacking the hell out of them. Just like her father had taught her.

The machine ran out finally and, as she looked around for a basket to use to refill it, she saw someone watching her, holding two wire tennis ball baskets. She felt her heart skip a beat. It couldn't be her father, could it? When she'd sneaked out of the family bungalow, he was safely in his recliner, watching college football. She refused to give him the satisfaction of seeing her play, seeing that she still kept up her game.

She realized almost immediately after that momentary clutch of fear that it wasn't her father. The man was taller and obviously much younger than her father's fifty-five years. He tipped the baskets at her and, intrigued, she went to get them. As she got closer, she thought he looked vaguely familiar but couldn't place him. And, as Maddy would say, what a hottie. Jet black hair, closely cropped on the sides, but curly on top. A face lean and angular, exuding athleticism. Skin the roasted, tawny color that spoke of warm climate genes and hours spent in the sun. Then, when she was just a few yards away, she saw them. Eyes, alert, thoughtful and surprisingly blue. She only knew one person with

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

skin just that shade and eyes so blue as to be nearly indigo. Cole's friend and former doubles partner, Mackenzie "Mac" Garza.

She ran the last few steps and threw her arms around him. He dropped the baskets and returned the hug. Then she stepped back and got a good look at him.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"Thanks a lot. Nice to see you, too," he drawled, his voice dripping with Texas.

"That's not what I meant. It's great to see you. I'm just surprised. We haven't heard much about you in the last year."

"I've been keeping below the radar, rehabbing."

"How are the knees? Going back on tour next year?" She grabbed his arms and squeezed. Then she raised her eyebrows. "Nothing wrong with those biceps, that's for sure." Then she ran a hand over his stomach. "And you still have the best abs of anyone I know. I can remember watching you and Cole play, praying it would get hot enough that you would take your shirt off."

He rolled his eyes. "Well, sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not taking it off for old time's sake."

Jaime leaned in closer and said quietly but clearly, "I will if you will."

Mac's whole body jumped, and he wiped some sweat off his brow that she assumed was caused by the evening's heat. "Jesus, Jaime, you're still as much trouble as you were when you were eighteen."

"Well, you know, I believe in growing old, not growing up."

Mac shook his head. "I was watching you out there. What were you trying to kill—yourself or the balls?"

She smiled, just a little more mischievously this time. "Oh, the balls, definitely the balls. You know I always like to come to the Bar None to bust a few balls."

"I see." He paused for a long and definitely pregnant moment. "We

## GAME, SET...MATCH?

are talking about tennis balls?"

"Of course." She picked up one of the baskets and handed him the other one. They both started walking around the pristine, rubberized green court surface, popping the baskets over the balls to collect them.

"So, not that I'm not thrilled to see you, but what *are* doing here? And, what happened to your hair?" she asked, referring to his trademark long ponytail. She reached over and ran her fingers through the curls that had sprung up on the top of his head. The feeling was sensuous, a soft and silky texture. "I like it." As a matter of fact, she was liking everything about Mac just a bit too much. She pulled her hand away. She didn't want Mac to think she'd become one of the touchy-feely groupies who couldn't keep her hands off him. Time, maybe, to keep her hands to herself before she got into more of the trouble that she was legendary for at the Bar None.

"Time for a change. The short hair makes me less recognizable, which can be a good thing. I've been kind of at loose ends the last few months. I ran into Cole last week at the Open, and he asked me if I'd come and play the annual Battle of the Sexes Breast Cancer fundraiser. Seemed like a good excuse to spend the week here, see some of San Antonio and all that. And your dad's got me running a few clinics this week, charging a premium price and adding it to the fundraiser."

Jaime shuddered in spite of the eighty degree heat. "Just don't make a habit of it. There's a whole world out there besides sports. Go sell real estate or become a movie star. With a body like yours, you'd make a great pool boy."

Mac bounced a ball at her, which she deftly caught and added to her basket.

"Thanks for the career advice."

She threw a ball back at him in a wide arc, and he caught it in his basket.

"Just don't become a tennis teacher or coach. You're too nice to

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

turn into Attila the Hun.” She shuddered again. They reached the ball machine and dumped their baskets into the hamper.

“I was watching you play earlier. You were...” He paused, as if searching for the right word. “Gentle.”

“I hope Evan the rock star didn’t think so.”

“No,” he said. “Really, it was masterful. You kept every game close, and then just when it looked like you would win, you’d make a careless mistake. Ball in the net, one just over the line.”

She glanced down at her sneakers. “Yeah, well, I don’t get out as much as I’d like anymore.”

“Hmmm...”

Jaime raised her head and smiled self-consciously. Well, it wasn’t a crime to throw a match once in a while. Winning wasn’t everything. In spite of what her father had always told her.

“Feel like a real match?” Mac asked. “No holds barred? No playing...gently?”

“With you?”

He smiled, that rakish, lop-sided smile that was once the focal point of a hundred magazine and newspaper shots of him. “What, think I can’t keep up with you?”

“Hello—no. I think you’ll kill me.”

“I can’t move like I used to. I’m still getting physio for my knees.”

She looked at him and wondered. How good was he still? How good was she? She felt the old killer instinct creep up over her. She couldn’t really take him, could she? She’d continued to play competitively in college, had gotten her degree paid for on a tennis scholarship. But for the last three years, since she’d gotten her undergrad degree, she’d only played recreationally.

“How do I know you won’t take it easy on me?” Jaime asked. She’d hate to beat him and always wonder.

“How about if we put a wager on it? What’s that fancy place in San

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

Antonio Cole took us all to when he won his first title? On the Riverwalk?"

"Ernesto's?"

"That's it. Loser takes the winner to dinner tomorrow night. Ernesto's."

"Expensive place, tennis pro. That's a lot of money to risk."

"Some risks are worth taking."

A sultry September Texas night. Ernesto's. And Mac Garza, all to herself. Not admiring him from afar as he commanded the courts, sleek and powerful as a panther, smashing balls and demolishing opponents. Not competing with her siblings or members of the public for a few minutes to talk to him when he came to the ranch. Not hard to make up her mind on this one.

"Well, I guess I can't play with electric toys all my life." She tilted her head toward the ball machine. "Sometimes I have to give it a go with a real man."

"Jaime Alexander," Mac said, sounding slightly shocked. "You, uh, are not a little girl anymore."

"Glad you noticed."

As they walked toward their racquets, she thought he said, "I certainly have." She was going to comment, but decided to leave well enough alone.

They retrieved their racquets, leaning up against the wall of the pavilion on the other side of the court. "One set, first to six, no tie-breakers," he said.

"And one condition," Jaime added. "Don't tell my father I was out here playing with you."

"Okay," he answered slowly. Jaime was glad he was discreet enough not to ask any questions.

They took the fourth court from the far wall of the pavilion, which was the first one without a ball machine. Jaime spun her racquet for

### GAME, SET...MATCH?

service and won. She pulled a ball out of her pocket.

“I just love squeezing a nice hard ball, don’t you?” she said. “Makes for the most satisfying, firm strokes.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Are you trying to distract me?”

“Let’s just say, my father taught me to look for every advantage. And use it.”

“Well, you’re going to need them. Because I don’t intend to lose.”

“Neither do I.” And for the first time in a very long time, Jaime meant it.

She won the first game, but it was rough going. Just as she had toyed a bit with Evan and kept the game under control, she had the vague impression Mac was toying with her.

Now it was his turn to serve. This was always the big test. He bounced the ball a few times on his side, tossed it in the air as if he was testing the wind, and then slammed it past her, his body even more impressive as his arm stretched out its full length to meet the ball.

She looked at him, then at the ball, now rolling back to where she stood, and then back at him.

“That was practice, right?”

“Fifteen-love,” he answered, his voice sounding even deeper than before, as he took a ball out of his pocket and switched sides.

*That knee trouble has definitely not affected his power. I am in big trouble.* She got her racquet ready to meet the rockets he was about to blast at her. She hoped her arm wouldn’t be too sore the next day.

When the set was over, he’d won, 6-3. She considered herself lucky to have taken that many games, but for once, she wasn’t mad at losing. She was actually a little grateful that he’d kicked her butt and gotten her playing.

“Nice match,” he said, when he’d joined her on the other side of the court. “You sure you were playing full out?”

“Very funny.” She wiped the sweat out of her eyes with her

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

terrycloth wristband. "I guess I owe you a dinner."

"I guess you do."

"You so hustled me."

"I so did. But I got you playing for real this time." Mac flashed that smile again, and Jaime swatted him on the behind with her racquet.

He jumped and grabbed her wrist and held it. Tight. Not so that it hurt. But so that she felt the touch of his hand, like the stroke of a feather, the whole length of her arm.

"You might not be a little girl anymore, but you're definitely still a troublemaker."

Just when she was thinking of all the trouble she could get into with Mac, the rest of the evening and the next, she heard a loud and familiar voice behind her.

"Mac! Jaime! That was amazing! You have to play an exhibition at the fundraiser on Saturday. It'll be the highlight."

Jaime yanked her arm away, closed her eyes, and sucked in her breath. Then she turned around.

"Daddy."

## CHAPTER 2

Rick Alexander jogged up to meet them.

“I was just on my way to lock up the courts and turn off the lights. I saw the match going and thought—who is playing like that? Couldn’t believe it when I saw it was the two of you. Looks like the knees are slowing you down Mac, but you haven’t lost your power. And Jaime—couldn’t believe how well you kept up with him. Three games! That’s amazing.”

“Rick, nice to see you again.” Mac shook his hand while watching Jaime out of the corner of his eye. She looked uncomfortable, gaze shifting between her tennis shoes, Mac’s eyes, and back again.

“Mac. When did you get in?”

“A few hours ago. I was going to hit some serves and work with a ball machine, but then I found Jaime out here, so I thought I’d hustle me up a game.”

“When did you come out here?” Rick said, looking pointedly at



*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

Jaime.

The expression on her face—Mac wasn't sure he could read it. Disappointment? Resignation?

"You know, if you want, I could help you this week. Work on your serve a little, your net game. I bet you could take this guy on Saturday."

"Daddy." Jaime sighed. "I appreciate your confidence in me, but I couldn't beat Mac if I worked 24/7 for the next ten years. Thanks for the offer though. Call me tomorrow, Mac?" She ran off like she was being chased, leaving her racquet cover by the side of the court.

Mac watched her and then faced Rick, who looked both sad and embarrassed. And old, Mac thought. Rick rubbed his face with both hands, a face both deeply tanned and spotted by too many hours, too many years probably, spent in the sun. Then he ran a hand through thinning salt and pepper hair.

"Fathers and daughters." He shook his head. "I just wish..." He trailed off and sighed. "If you ever have kids, do me a favor. Don't ask me for any advice." He raised his hand. "See you tomorrow at noon for the lunch clinic." Then he walked off slowly toward the light switches in the corner.

Wow. Mac walked off the courts and onto the pebble path that ran around the ranch. *That was interesting.* The whole evening, from the moment he'd run into Jaime until she'd run off. She'd certainly grown up from the scrawny, energy overflowing kid he remembered, and put a little weight on, which looked amazing on her. Nice curves on top, nice curves on the bottom, and long, shapely legs. All of which were shown off by the tight, short tennis dress she'd been playing in. It hadn't been difficult to think of an excuse to spend a little more time with her.

But issues? He wasn't sure he wanted to get in the middle of them. Well, they only had one date planned. If things seemed too complicated, he could leave it at that.

When he passed by the older, outdoor family pool, he spied Maddy,

## *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

Jaime's younger sister, who was just starting her last year of high school. She appeared to be enjoying her evening lifeguard shift as she blew her whistle at a group of rowdy teenagers. She smiled, her face lighting up with surprise when she saw him. She waved enthusiastically and then twirled a finger in the air, indicating how crazy she thought the kids were. Mac smiled and waved back.

Mac heard the Saturday night party at the main lodge before the building came into view. It throbbed with lights, music and off-key karaoke accompaniment. One of the younger pros leaned a hip on the wooden split rail fence that ran around the lodge, some landscape designer's attempt to make this place that lacked for no comforts appear rough and rustic. Sam, a young pro he'd met that day, waved at him with one arm, the other encircling a cute blonde. Mac waved back, but kept on walking toward the condo he was booked into for the week. He was not quite up to a night of carousing, drinking, and the inevitable rehashing of his pro career, by people who lived and breathed tennis and would recognize him no matter how he changed his appearance.

Despite what Rick had said about his game, he knew the truth—his pro career was over. It was time to move on. He just wished he could decide what to do. It had been a long year and he was tired of feeling unsettled. He wanted more than just living out of a suitcase; he wanted to stick that suitcase in a closet and leave it there for a while.

He opened the door to the condo and placed his keys and racquet on the glass dining table. For now he'd have a great week, lend his name to help raise some money, eat well, play some tennis, relax a little. He finally had a plan, and was looking forward to working on it with Rick while he was at the Bar None. Maybe by the end of the week, he'd know what he was going to do with the rest of his life.

\* \* \*

Jaime rubbed her eyes and yawned, the cacophony around the breakfast table of her parent's bungalow enough to wake even the

### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

soundest sleepers. She was sure she must have been an axe murderer in a previous life to have been saddled with such an early rising, high energy family. She groaned when she saw the alarm clock—7:30. Well, at this hour she was usually at her desk at the Lunar Institute in Houston, catching up on email gossip from scientist friends around the country before diving into her research into moon geology. But she was supposed to be on vacation. Christmas in the Bahamas was sounding better and better.

She'd collapsed into bed the night before after a shower but without wanting to wash her thick mane, which could take forever to dry. She fished some clothes out of her suitcase, dumped them on her bed, and headed for the bathroom.

The shower was invigorating and relaxing at the same time, waking her up and bracing her for the day ahead, as it always did. She wondered how bad the heat would be today, and if she'd want another shower before her date with Mac. Mac Garza.

While the water cascaded over her she recalled his expressive face, crooked smile, and hard athlete's body. And the thick, sumptuous, short black hair, which set off his strong, square jaw in a way that his trademark, rakish ponytail hadn't. She put her washcloth on a hook and filled her hands with a slippery vanilla shower gel, and then cupped both her breasts, sliding her hands over the slick skin, trapping the nipples between two fingers. Mac, his upper body chiseled by solid muscle. Mac, the muscles in his legs rippling as he stretched for a forehand.

Glancing up at the shower head, she saw that it was still one of the '70s style removable shower massage heads. She lifted it off the holder and leaned back in the stall. With the images playing in her mind, she positioned the warm spray so it massaged her between her legs. The feeling was warming, wetting, and incredibly stimulating. She spread her legs to increase the thrumming of the fingers of water, and moved

### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

the spray back and forth. While she rode the waves of water, she imagined Mac, walking in, the curls between his legs creating a dark nest from which his cock would jut out, hard and hungry for her. He'd firmly plant his legs wide, and Jaime would run her soap slicked hands up his thighs and down his well-toned abs, circling ever closer to the object of her desire.

Sliding a finger over her clitoris and in and out of her melting softness, she imagined Mac pinning her up against the wall and thrusting up into her with his throbbing, swollen member. He'd clutch at her bottom, pulling her slightly upward, and she'd slick his shaft over and over with her wetness. Jaime clenched the two fingers inside of her, imagining the two of them melting together in a mind-numbing orgasm.

She put the shower head back and clutched the safety bar, her legs rubbery. It had been a while since she'd been interested enough in someone to bring herself to orgasm fantasizing about them, much less get herself there with them. The time off made the orgasm more intense. God, it felt good.

She quickly finished up her shower and dressed, now wide awake and raring to go. Ready to face anything. Even her family. She hoped.

Praying that her brother Wyatt, a junior and linebacker on the local high school football team wouldn't decide to tackle her, she cautiously opened the door of the bedroom. Maddy, her father, and Wyatt were all sitting around the table in the dining area of the large open concept plan house. From the kitchen, Jaime heard her mother moving around. After a moment, she caught the thread of the conversation, centering on Cole's performance in the U.S. Open the previous week. Jaime knew her father was mad she'd missed the trip to Flushing Meadows this year because of a symposium at the Jet Propulsion Lab in California. She hoped he wouldn't start an argument with her.

"Good morning, Jaime," said her father. "Do they let you get up this

### GAME, SET...MATCH?

late for your job at the loony bin?”

Jaime gritted her teeth. “It’s the Lunar Institute, Dad.” She didn’t know why she bothered. He always called it the loony bin.

“I’d call it the ‘slave drivers institute.’ I can’t believe they wouldn’t give you time off to go to the U.S. Open. The U.S. Open, for heaven’s sakes.”

“Dad, I told you, I could have taken the time off, but I didn’t want to. The talks were about imagery from the latest moon probe. It’s important to my research.”

“And those Williams sisters. Did you see how they played?” her father continued, as if he’d never heard her. “That could have been you out there, challenging them. You and Cole together—the Alexander kids.”

Jaime swallowed what she really wanted to say. *Keep telling yourself it’s only a week.*

“Not a chance,” she said finally, making a face at him. “I’m sure I would have killed you, probably with my racquet, long before I made it to the U.S. Open.”

“Your racquet, huh? Think you can take your old man? I’m not that old, you little pip.” He snaked out an arm, grabbed her by the waist and pulled her close, before she had a chance to step out of the way. Jaime, caught off guard by the gesture, remained stiff. They hardly touched anymore, and they certainly didn’t hug. Maybe, if he’d come to one of her college tennis matches or her graduation or her office in Houston, she’d feel differently. But now, she just felt like a big wall had sprung up between them that day she’d slammed her racquet against the side of the pavilion. And the years of neglect that had passed since then had made the wall so big and so tall she had no idea how to scale it. Or get rid of it.

Her father finally let go and she turned away, toward the island that separated the kitchen from the dining area. She quickly wiped her eyes

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

before pouring herself a cup of coffee, but not before her mother, who was in the kitchen, caught her and, without speaking, handed her a tissue.

“I saw Mac Garza last night when I was closing up the pool!” Maddy said, the excitement in her voice. “Did you guys know he was coming?”

“Surprise,” said their mother, Ellie, walking into the dining area from the kitchen. “Cole called last week and said he’d conned him into helping out with the fundraiser this week. Of course, the fact that I pestered him to work on Mac...”

Jaime smiled. The annual fundraiser had been her mother’s baby for the last ten years, and was now quite an event in their area.

“Wish Cole was coming this week,” Jaime said, sitting down with her coffee. And she meant it. He was always her ally, always good at deflecting her father’s unwanted attention and comments.

“Well, I saw Mac last night,” her father piped in. “Playing tennis with Jaime.”

Ellie said nothing, Maddy spit her orange juice back into her glass, and Wyatt choked on his toast. Jaime just rolled her eyes.

Jaime stood up. “You guys are all so funny. I’m going to catch up on some email and work on a report. Some of us have real lives outside of sports.”

“Check out the new water park with me after lunch?” Maddy asked.

“Sure.” Jaime glanced over at the table before she entered her bedroom. Her father was exchanging a look with her mother that she couldn’t read.

\* \* \*

“Hey, you look hot,” Maddy said. They’d rushed back from the water park an hour before, and Jaime’d frantically borrowed clothes from Maddy for the evening.

“Your dress, your shoes, your earrings. Thank God we’re still the

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

same size,” Jaime said. She had packed really casual clothes, throwing things into a suitcase and running for the door, having just returned from the symposium, exhausted and barely able to think about another trip.

“Yeah, it’s nice to see you in something that doesn’t scream ‘mad scientist.’ Good thing you have a young and cool sister.”

“My clothes do not say ‘mad scientist.’ I’m an image analyst, not the nutty professor.” Yes, she loved seeing her siblings.

“Jaime.” Maddy sighed loudly while tapping her foot and looking disgusted. “You made it in on Friday barely in time for dinner. You were wearing a blazer with crumbs all over it, your shirt was untucked, and your hair looked like a wind tunnel experiment. I’d love to go to the JPL, too, but not if I came back looking like that.”

“Blah, blah, blah.” Jaime stood up, took one final look in the mirror and decided it would do. “I suppose it would be bad form to stay out all night.”

“Hello. Once a kid, always a kid. Dad would probably try to ground you or something.”

Jaime laughed. “Yeah, and Mom would want all the juicy details.” Jaime walked over to her favorite feature of their bedroom, a separate entrance, something that had remained firmly boarded up during their teenage years. Or so their parents had thought.

“So,” Maddy said, giving her sister a surprised look. “Sneaking out, are we?”

“I’m not sneaking, I’m...maintaining my privacy. I told Mac I’d meet him at the gazebo by the condos. You think Mac wants to get grilled by dad about dating his daughter?”

Maddy did not appear to think that it was Mac being grilled that Jaime was really worried about. Jaime opened the door.

“Just don’t lock me out, okay?” When Maddy gave her a mischievous grin, Jaime added “I’m wearing your dress, remember?”

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

You do want it back in one piece, don't you?"

Maddy seemed to think about that. "Depends on how it gets messed up. But I won't lock the door. And I won't wait up."

*Ha-ha*, Jaime mouthed, as she walked out the door.

Even though it was seven, the heat of the day enveloped her as she left the air-conditioned haven of the house. She strolled down the path away from the main courts and lodges of the ranch, toward the row of condos where the guests stayed and some of the staff lived. She stopped for a moment at an old pecan tree and found what she was looking for—her initials and that of Christopher Jurgens, her first love. She'd carved them on a cool June morning, after she'd lost her virginity in the back of his car at the area's only remaining drive-in theater, in typical cliché fashion.

Turning from the tree, walking as quietly as she could in the hopes of spotting some of the way-too-tame deer that lived on the ranch, she watched as one after another of the tennis pros headed back to the condos. How she loved being back on the Bar None, especially tonight. Heat spread out from her core and warmed her all over, while Maddy's light and airy dress danced around her legs and revealed more cleavage than she usually dared to. She was enjoying feeling like a woman, and appreciating the sight of the bare-chested, well-muscled athletes around her.

When she turned the corner toward the condos she spotted Mac, sitting at the gazebo reading, oblivious to her arrival. Yup, she had to agree with her little sister, he was definitely a hottie. Although she found the sweaty, half-naked look sexy, he looked...cleaned up. Sexy in another way. A restrained way. In a spare moment on the courts, you could gaze at the guys around you, their bodies straining and moving and sweating, and fantasize about how easy it would be to rip a piece of clothing off and be in the thick of things right away. But this was different. Getting to the hard body underneath this man's clothes would



### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

take more time, more effort. This would be more of a challenge, she realized. More of a tease. If she was interested in getting his clothes off. Which, of course, she wasn't. It was just a date, really, just a dinner out. Between old friends. Of course.

Mac looked up from his book as she approached on the stone path. She could tell the moment he noticed her. His expression went from slightly puzzled to aware, as if he were noticing her appraisal of him. Then he appeared to be appraising her. Admittedly, her outfit was a little more obvious, a little sexier, than his collared shirt and chino pants. But she wondered if he was also considering the effort it would take to get her out of it. Guys always had those kinds of fantasies, didn't they?

"Ms. Alexander," Mac said, as she reached the gazebo. He closed up the book. "You look..." He paused again, apparently unsure as to what to say. Jaime wondered if she'd overdone it, had anticipated the date too much, given that she hadn't been on a date in a long time.

"Well, a lot different than you did last night."

"Thanks. I think. You clean up pretty well, too." She smiled slightly, giving him a frank and fairly obvious once over. When he smiled back at her, she continued. "Let's get out of here. I'm hot and I'm hungry."

"My kind of woman."

"Is that so?" She chuckled a bit, even as she took the arm he proffered, always a welcome support when wearing unfamiliar heels. Under Mac's shirt, she could feel the unflexed but still strong bicep. She squeezed gently, trying not to be obvious. It felt solid, like a tennis ball right out of the can that still had lots of definition and strength. "Do you always use double entendres?"

"Well," he started, as they left the gazebo, "not everyone gets them. Helps me sort out the serious prospects from the..."

"Yes?" She leaned in a little closer.

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

“One-night-stands.”

She punched him on that solid arm, not hard but enough to get his attention. “You’re as bad as my brothers.”

“That,” he said, “is not entirely an insult.”

They walked over the path toward the parking lot, stopping once to watch a small armadillo skitter through the trees.

“I made an eight o’clock reservation,” Mac said.

“Sure I can’t convince you to sample the burgers at the A&W?”

“If you don’t stop whining, I’m going to think you’re cheap.”

“Maybe cheap, but never easy,” Jaime answered.

“I’ve heard a lot of stories about you from Cole. And none of them imply you are easy.”

They reached the parking lot, which, as usual, looked like a luxury vehicle sales lot. Jaime remembered one of the highlights of her high school years, seeing a DeLorean there and convincing the owner to give her a ride in it. They passed two Jags, a Mustang, a couple of Porsches, and the usual contingent of Town and Country minivans and Lincoln Navigators. Mac stopped in front of a pristine silver convertible.

“Oh,” she said, feeling weak at the knees. “This is yours? What a sweet car.” She walked around it twice, checking out every detail.

“I think so. Just bought it. Drove it over from my apartment in Dallas.”

“I forgot you were originally from there.” She checked out the make. “Volvo. What model?”

“C 70.”

“Very nice. Could we...” She was almost afraid to ask, but...

“Yes?”

“Put the top down?”

“Seriously? Sure.” He seemed surprised and more than a little pleased. “Most girls I know are afraid of what it does to their hair.”

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

“I believe the polished look is seriously overrated.” She hopped into the passenger’s seat. The seats were a matching silver-colored leather, buttery soft and supple. She massaged the fabric while Mac hit the switch for the top. The tiny back trunk opened, and the top slipped inside. She smiled broadly at Mac, and she could tell he was pleased with her response.

“I could fall in love. With this car.” She leaned back. “This is going to be fun. Let’s see what this baby can do.”

Raising his eyebrows and smiling slightly, Mac sped off toward the I-35 and San Antonio.

## CHAPTER 3

Although Mac had had his doubts about the evening, he was glad he'd resisted the temptation to cancel the date. That Jaime was hot was obvious. He had to make a conscious effort to listen to her and not stare at the way her dress hugged her every curve and the hem blew around in the wind to reveal and then hide her legs. But what wasn't quite so obvious, and was only being slowly revealed during their drive, was that she was a lot different from the other women he'd dated the last few years. Spending her life around tennis pros as well as the celebrities who frequented the ranch had definitely raised her "awe quotient." She wasn't someone who was going to be impressed with him and hang on his every word just because he spoke them. That, in itself, was challenging. And refreshing.

From talking to Cole about his family, and the sporadic times he'd seen her before, he knew she had a strong single-mindedness and intelligence. But even as he shook with laughter at her stories—the

## *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

time she and her siblings spiked the Gatorade containers with vodka during the New Year's Eve midnight tournament was his particular favorite—he wondered about the things he didn't know about her. Did she have a naturally wild streak? Or had she been rebelling?

When Mac had suggested Ernesto's, he'd mostly been trying to catch Jaime's interest on the court. But when he saw the expression on her face as they settled into their table, he could tell it was a perfect choice. It was hard to imagine a more romantic place on a sultry September night. They were seated at a table right on the river, the candle and multicolored umbrella creating a private enclave for the two of them. Music throbbed from the mariachi band playing on the steps across the river, tour boats floated by, and the whole Riverwalk glowed with lights that begged patrons to sample what the city had to offer.

"Great spot," she said, sipping her prickly pear margarita. "And the guacamole—I've never seen it made tableside before. The orange in it is wonderful. I'm going to have to try that at home."

Mac picked up his margarita. "To...a rematch?"

Jaime had picked up her glass, ready to clink his. "To," she paused for a moment, "talking about something other than tennis."

"The world beyond tennis." Mac clinked his glass with hers, just as the waitress showed up.

As Mac ordered, Jaime shed the filmy little black jacket she was wearing and placed it on the back of her chair. When he turned back to face her, he had to make a conscious effort not to let his jaw drop. The neckline on that dress was legal, he decided. In a brothel, maybe. After scowling at the man at the next table wearing a ridiculously large Stetson who was also enjoying the view, he said "Are you sure you want to take that off?"

"Oh, yes—aren't you warm?" She took some cold drips from her sweating drink glass and rubbed a little just below her neck. Mac watched the path of one drop of water as it ran down between her

GAME, SET...MATCH?

breasts.

“Mac?” Jaime caught his eye. “Feeling overheated?”

He shifted a little in his seat. “Yes, definitely a warm night.”

“Too bad you...wore so many clothes.”

“What?”

“Clothes. Shorts probably would have been more comfortable.”

“Comfortable, yes.” *Definitely a wild streak.* He also thought he’d better change the subject, before he decided that the best way to cool down would be to shed all of their clothes. Quickly.

“So...” *C’mon Mac, engage your big head, not your little one,* “what do you do when you’re not...” *God, don’t say tennis.*

“Doing the unmentionable?” she responded, a glint in her eye. She leaned back in her chair. “I’m trying to help put men back on the moon. And hopefully some women this time.”

“No way.” Mac leaned back, surprised. Fascinated. Cole had told him she was some kind of scientist, but hadn’t elaborated, saying no one in the family really understood what she did. “Star Trek fan?”

“A little. I was more into the documentaries and historical movies growing up. *Apollo 13. The Right Stuff.*”

“Ever see *From the Earth to the Moon*?”

“No way! I loved that! I used to take the video on the road with me and watch it in the hotel rooms while my dad watched sports in the lounge.”

“Here’s a secret about me that never appeared in the papers. When I was little, before I started playing tennis seriously, and occasionally after, my dad used to take me out and teach me constellations.”

“You’re lucky. I used to sneak out on my own. Fortunately Maddy is a sound sleeper. I’d take a book, a flashlight, and my dad’s binoculars that he used for the cheap seats at football games.”

“Why do I have no trouble believing that about you?”

“See, there’s way more to me than just the ‘T’ word.”

## *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

“I can see that.” And he could, by the way her eyes lit up when they talked about the stars. But he’d also seen her intensity on the courts yesterday and the pure joy on her face when she won a game. How had she lost that?

“So, do you have a telescope and all that?”

“I do. And I brought it with me.”

“Interesting.” Just how involved did he want to get with her? Then he considered her: amazing cleavage, long, deceptively delicate fingers grasping her glass, red and blond curls cascading over her shoulders and glistening in the candlelight. Fun, in a kick-your-ass and drive-you-crazy kind of way. What could one more night hurt?

“So...” he started, dragging out the word, “if I asked you to show me some constellations tomorrow night, to generously give of your time to help me reconnect with an old childhood activity that I loved, you wouldn’t think that it was just a pretense to...”

He let the question linger between them and turn into the hundred possibilities of things that could happen in a warm, quiet place, swept up by the darkness, the moon and the stars.

“Well.” Jaime ran a hand down her neck and across the swell of her breasts. “I wouldn’t think it. But I might hope it.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Mac said. He just hoped he’d be able to get those images out of his mind between now and then.

They continued to chat through a meal of spicy gulf fish and some side dishes that they both agreed were pretentiously described but ridiculously delicious. He regaled her with stories of her brother on the tour, and she told him about her research, examining imagery from the moon and trying to look for the best site for a new moon colony. It was complex science, but not all that hard to understand, he decided. Especially when she explained it. You just had to pay attention. And not let your mind dwell on thoughts of being alone and in the dark, leaning close together over a telescope, or lying on a blanket looking up

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

at the sky. He wasn't sure why she was so touchy about tennis, but decided this night was probably not the time to ask why she'd quit. Especially since they had tomorrow night.

\* \* \*

A long, leisurely hour later, when the waitress took their plates, Jaime turned down dessert and shuddered at the thought of hot coffee or tea. She debated having another drink, but was already feeling pretty mellow and warm inside from the food, the alcohol, and the conversation. With Mac looking terribly sexy, that short hair she could hardly get used to curling mercilessly in the humidity, she decided another drink might make her do something she really didn't want to. Or rather, really did want to.

Before they left he tried to get the bill or at least split it with her. She refused to let him, but she appreciated him all the more for the gallant effort. After paying, they got up and looked at each other, a long drawn out question that was as awkward as it was deliciously fraught with anticipation.

"Would you like to go home?" Mac asked.

Jaime was suddenly aware of how very close he was. How the heat seeping into her was not just from the night. He had just a little sheen on him, and his skin, moist from the hot evening, glistened in the candlelight. She wondered what it would be like to explore his whole body on a hot night like tonight. To cool him off by removing all his clothing. And then heat him up again.

"Well, I'm awfully full and this is really pretty. How about a walk?"

They strolled along the paved walkway, serenaded by strains of jazz in one spot, soft pop and sultry piano in others. At one point the tourist traffic was a bit thick, and Mac grabbed her hand to keep track of her. As they threaded through the crowd, Jaime squeezed his hand and stroked it, not letting go even when the crowd thinned.



## *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

They continued walking, not saying much, awareness swirling around them like a gathering storm, full of tension, the potential for wind-whipped wildness just under the surface. His hand was strong and firm, callused from the thousands of hours handling a tennis racquet. She drifted closer, brushing her body up against his, and felt a strong pull of desire, of interest, of want.

They walked under a bridge just as another tour boat drifted by. Stopping to listen to the tour guide and wave at the passengers, Mac let go of Jaime's hand and pulled her up against him, her back to his front. Then he slid his arms around her waist.

For the first time that night, the smells from the restaurants and the river faded, and she smelled only him. The scent was musky, simmered by the evening's temperature until it was dark and sexy and complicated. She breathed him in a little more deeply. The potent scent brewed an intense arousal in her that she felt from the tips of her toes to the top of her head.

They stood there for a long moment, Jaime feeling every muscle of his body mold to the curves of hers. Then she felt his erection pressing against her back. She thought he'd pull away, but he put his lips on her neck, kissed her gently, and then worked his way up to her ear.

"Are you sure," he whispered, "you don't want to go home?"

His breath, sighed into her ear, filled her like a scorching rush of air. She wanted to take him, then and there, and not some time after the forty minutes or so it would take to drive back to the ranch.

She turned around and pushed him back a little further, into the shadows, until his back was against the brick wall. Framing his face with her hands, she pulled it toward hers. Their lips brushed gently for a moment, but the tentativeness evaporated quickly with the heat of desire. She slid her hands down his body as she opened his mouth with her tongue, pulling his body to her, teasing his chest with her breasts, thrusting her pelvis toward his.

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

“Are you sure,” she asked, her lips tracing his, “you don’t want to go someplace closer?”

He plastered her to him, his hands roaming over her back and through her hair. He kissed her again, his breath and his tongue full of want, full of need. Then she felt his hand slip between them and begin to explore the low plunging edge of the neckline of Jaime’s dress. The fingers began to circle lower, leaving behind a trail of singed skin.

Somewhere in the back of Jaime’s lust-fogged mind she heard the faint click of shoes on stone. As the sound got louder Mac stilled his hands and put them both around Jaime’s back, pulling her closer, if possible, into the shadows. Jaime felt the long hard length of his body pressing up against her, and the almost unbearable excitement of not being able to move, along with the danger of being caught.

Just as she thought she would lose her mind, was about to risk sliding her crotch along the leg that was wedged between hers, she heard, “Have a nice evening,” along with a little chuckle.

Jaime giggled as she turned her head and watched the cop continue walking down the path. Mac shook his head and tipped it so their noses were touching. She noticed he was not smiling, and he was breathing hard.

“I think we better get out of here, before we melt the clothes between us.”

“Okay.” Jaime slid her hand down his back and gave his buns a squeeze. “I could use a change of venue.”

“I was thinking my condo.”

“Hmmm,” Jaime said, looking about. “I don’t think I can wait that long.”

“Very funny,” Mac answered.

Jaime didn’t think he sounded amused. She thought he sounded...worried. He entwined his fingers with hers and they started walking toward the parking garage. “Are you always this impatient?”

## GAME, SET...MATCH?

Jaime smiled in the dark. "I don't know. Want to find out?"

They walked past a band playing on some steps. Jaime slung her arms around Mac's neck, and swayed with him to the strains of "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes." Seductively. Sliding her pelvis against his, as much as she could. Teasing him, as best she could. Trying to bring him close to the brink. In public. With all their clothes on. Because she wanted him to not be able to wait, either.

"Jaime." Mac's voice tightened into a growl. The sound vibrated with arousal, and possibly a little desperation. *Perfect.*

"Let's get out of here," she whispered on his lips. She wanted him feeling and wanting and acting on instinct. Definitely not thinking too clearly. Completely drugged. By her.

They stopped at a crosswalk and let some people pass. Jaime pulled a little closer and nuzzled his neck. The electricity buzzed between them, and Jaime thought Mac felt it, too, as he started a little. God! She was becoming completely intoxicated.

When they reached the edge of the parking garage, she walked faster, increasing the pace so that he had to move along to keep up with her.

"Pretty empty," she said, noting the first level of the parking lot. There were only about two or three cars in sight.

They ran to the elevator, got in, and Mac pushed the button for the third level where they were parked. The elevator started moving, and so did Jaime's fingers. Down the front of Mac's shirt.

"Think anyone's watching?"

Mac glanced around.

"Probably. There's usually a security camera. Are you nuts?"

"Probably." She reached for his belt buckle and circled fingers around it. As she did, she noticed the front of his pants start to billow out. Smiling, she began to move her index finger lower.

Mac yanked her against him, hiding her hands between their bodies.

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

She felt the sparks kindling between them ignite as he crushed his lips against hers. While the fire between them built, she slid her finger even lower, until it grazed the top of his erection. He sucked in a ragged breath and pressed her closer as she did.

The elevator beeped for their floor, and Jaime pulled away from him. When the doors opened, they walked toward the car and she looked around the lot.

“Hmm,” she said. “We’re alone.” Then she smiled lasciviously at him.

“Yeah, until *they* come back.” Mac pointed to the one other car on the level.

“It’s only one car.” She increased the pace, tugging him along. “They might come back in a minute. They might not come back at all. That’s what makes it...exciting.”

Mac pressed the buttons on his remote to unlock the car. When he got to the passenger side she opened the door first, sat down sideways, and slipped her hands around to Mac’s bottom, pulling it toward her.

“Jaime, what are you doing?” She could hear the warning in his voice.

“I’m hoping to convince you that you don’t want to wait.” She put her hands on his belt buckle and quickly undid it. Then, before he could protest further, she undid his pants and pushed them and his boxers down just slightly. *Just the right height.* His penis, swollen and rigid, came free. She took him in her hands and guided him into her mouth.

“Oh, Jaime,” he moaned. She smiled inwardly, knowing she had him. That became her last lucid thought, as he skimmed his hands down the swell of her breasts.

Streamers of delicious sensations swirled all over her body, making the area between her legs soft and wet. She greedily sucked on his erection, pursing her lips tightly around the shaft and slowly sliding them up and down. In hungry response Mac’s fingers found her nipples

### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

and rolled them round and round. Jaime rocked her pelvis on the edge of the seat, aching for release.

When Mac thrust into her mouth, Jaime knew she wanted more. She moved back, lifted her head and gazed into his eyes. They were hooded and dark with passion. Without taking her eyes from his, she found the edge of her dress and lifted the skirt. When she reached her hips, she grabbed her panties, ripped them off, and tossed them on the floor of the car.

Mac shook his head, but Jaime reached up and sheathed his erection with her hand. One hand on his penis stroked up and down, using the little bit of liquid that dripped out to slicken the shaft. Mac gasped as she clutched one butt cheek tightly and pulled him closer. While she tortured him with pleasure and enjoyed the sight of him writhing under her hands, her clitoris throbbed, burning with need.

Finally he bent over her, poised to take her. She reclined back on the leather console between the seats, grateful the stick shift was far enough forward so that it wasn't in her way. Leaning over, he parted her inner lips with the tip of his penis, slathering it with her wetness as he teased the head back and forth between her opening and her clit.

"I can't believe I'm asking you this, but are you comfortable?"

Jaime cupped his buns with her hands. "Comfort is not my overwhelming concern right now." Then she pulled him forward, taking what they both wanted.

The feeling was overwhelming, more than she could have imagined and yet not enough. As her senses came alive, she breathed in deeply the scent of the leather and of sex, blended and intensified by the heat. It wasn't hugely comfortable, but it was exciting. She couldn't believe how turned on she was doing something so wild and out-of-control. The danger of the situation, the thought that someone could walk out of the elevator at any moment and see them there, in public, screwing away in the car, whipped her into a mindless frenzy. She thrust her hips

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

wildly against Mac's, grinding her clit against his stomach and clenching her vagina around his cock, harder and harder, faster and faster.

"Jaime, I don't think I can hold on much longer," Mac said, his voice tense, astonishment rippling over his face.

"Don't hold on, Mac," Jaime said, lightheaded as her heart pounded and she practically gasped for breath. "Don't hold back." She screamed his name as she clenched his penis and felt herself go over the edge. Again and again and again.

Somewhere in her foggy mind she remembered the sensation of Mac violently spurting into her body. They both stayed very still for a few moments, panting like they'd just run a marathon. Mac slipped out of her and stood over her, his arm leaning on the top of the car.

She met his gaze, and thought he looked about as dazed as she felt.

"What the hell was that? I feel like I just survived a hurricane. Barely."

Jaime sat up and linked her fingers with his. "Tropical storm Jaime?"

"It was certainly a wet and wild ride," he answered, smiling at her.

They heard a loud ding, and turned toward the sound. Realizing it was the elevator, Mac cursed, let go of her hand, and grabbed for his pants. Jaime casually retrieved her panties from the floor of the car, put them back on, and smoothed down the edge of her skirt. Mac positioned himself so the door of the car was between him and the elevator, and then stood as still as possible, his hands working the button on his pants and then his belt buckle.

When he was finished, he closed her door, walked around to his side and got in. They sat very still in Mac's car, waiting until the other two people, who Jaime recognized by the large Stetson as a man from Ernesto's and his date, got in their black pickup truck and drove off.

When the truck had cleared the level, Jaime glanced sideways at

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

Mac's completely horrified face. She couldn't help herself, she started laughing uncontrollably.

"That was unbelievably risky. They could easily have walked in on us about two minutes before."

"True. That's what made it exciting. Some things are...worth the risk?"

He shook his head. "Using my words against me—very clever." He sighed. "Tell me you're not into sex in public on a regular basis. I don't think my heart can take it."

She stopped laughing, reached over and ran her fingers through the moist curls on the top of his head. Then she skimmed her hand down one side of his face, outlining his lips with a finger.

"I'm not. Truthfully, I've never done anything like that before. I really...I'm no virgin, but I don't have all that much experience. I don't know what got into me."

*You. You got into me. Into me and over me and under my skin. What's up with that?*

"I'm not sure if I should be relieved about that or"—he took her hands in his and looked down at them, then up at her—"disappointed. That was amazing. Really, Jaime, I don't think I've enjoyed an evening this much in a long time. Or come so quickly."

"Well, next time, maybe we'll both take it a little more slowly."

"I'd like that." Mac started up the car. "I'd like to take a little time to explore tomorrow night. Both the night sky and you."

"So would I."

## CHAPTER 4

Jaime finally roused out of bed around nine, having pulled a pillow over her head when Maddy's alarm went off for school. She was met with a note at the dining table: Dad off teaching for the morning, Mom grocery shopping, hoping to meet for lunch at the house around noon. Peace and quiet, she thought with wonder, as she poured herself a bowl of cereal. An hour later, having eaten, put her dishes in the dishwasher, and read the paper, she was bored. It just wasn't normal for the house to be this quiet. Four kids and twelve of their closest personal friends running around, diving for plates of nachos, screaming over a college or pro football game on TV—that was normal at her parents' house.

She looked around the bungalow, checking out pictures that took up almost every corner—a table covered with black and white photos of her grandparents in small intricate silver frames, a wall with dark brown wooden frames containing her and Cole's high school and college grad photos, along with the latest school pictures of Maddy and



### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

Wyatt. The whole place was done in what she lovingly described as Texas kitsch, with a small Lone Star State flag on one wall, Southwest multicolored valances over shutters, and lots of rough hewn beams. In a Houston apartment it would have made her gag, but here it was homey. It was home.

She wondered what Mac was doing. Probably teaching. She paced the small common space of the house, feeling restless. She headed toward the front door, thinking about taking a walk. Strategically placed next to the door she saw the bin of tennis racquets, always full. She was just about to leave when she spied it half hidden in the bin—the latest in the Prince Zephyr series. Reverently she picked it up and pinged her palm against the strings, checking the tension, which was just the way she liked it—nice and tight for lots of control. It was light. It had a huge sweet spot and a monster head. She wondered if it was Maddy's or if Dad was demoing it. She wondered if she could get away with testing it out and return it without anyone noticing.

Probably not, she decided, but wasn't sure she cared. She took a few swings and put it back into the bin. Maybe she could take it out some night and test it against one of the ball machines or hit some serves with it.

She walked toward the main lodge, thinking she'd pick up the mail for her parents. She wasn't looking for Mac, she told herself as she checked out each set of courts. Just wondering about their condition. How busy the resort was. Were any interesting movie or rock stars visiting? When she reached the courts by the family pool, she spotted Mac.

She was going to walk on by, albeit slowly, but something in his voice—the deep rich timbre, along with confidence, and something else, a real pleasure and enthusiasm—made her stop. Standing behind him, so he didn't see her, she watched as he taught a private lesson to a young boy, who looked like he was about twelve or thirteen. Probably

### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

on vacation with his family, she decided. The boy's shots were all over the place, and one he actually hit over the fence. Mac explained and demonstrated the same positioning with the racquet, the same follow through directions, and the same stance over and over. But it was what she didn't hear in his voice that really impressed her. No impatience. No quietly exasperated sigh. Not even a humorous tease, which would have been mortifying to a kid that age. She was sure she would never have been that persistent or patient. Of course, Mac, the ranch, and the fundraiser were probably being paid the budget of a small country to teach this lesson. But he genuinely seemed to enjoy this. And he was good at it.

"We're really lucky he's here," her father said.

Jaime started, feeling like a kid caught doing something she shouldn't.

"The money he's helping raise is great, of course, but I never would have guessed that he's a natural as a teacher. This is the second private lesson he's taught today. He's terrific with the kids, and they worship him, so they actually listen and work hard to impress him."

"Daddy. You've finished your lessons?"

"Between them. Another in ten minutes. So, think you could give him a run for his money? You know the rules for this tournament—guys against the girls, guys can't hit hard serves. Come on, it's a breast cancer benefit. Prince is one of the sponsors, and they sent their latest Zephyr. You never could resist a new racquet."

She took one step back. And then another. "I'll make a donation." Then she walked toward the lodge, picking up the pace to a run after a few steps.

On her way back, as she fanned herself with the mail, she saw Mac talking to her father. He walked away when she got closer, and she approached Mac.

"Still interested in seeing the stars with me tonight?"

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

“Best offer I’ve had all day,” she said, glancing over at her father. “When are you free? I could get the lodge kitchen to pack us a picnic dinner.”

“I can be ready to go by six. Eager to get an early start?”

“All those stars to find.”

“I was thinking more about all that exploring.”

“Hmmm...” She looked him up and down. “You do know the dress code for exploring, don’t you?”

“Dress code?”

“Easy to remove clothing. In case you’re too hot from all the...exertion.”

Mac’s expression was clearly pained. He waved over at his next lesson, a girl who looked like a slightly older version of the boy he’d taught earlier. “Jaime, maybe you shouldn’t visit me on the courts this week.”

“Why is that?” She walked two fingers up his chest.

“Because, my teasing red-haired temptress”—he took her fingers off his chest and swallowed them up in his enormous hand—“I only have time for so many cold showers a day.” She smiled as he walked away, and was still smiling when she reached the lodge kitchen.

\* \* \*

Jaime found Mac loading the tiny backseat of the car with flashlights, blankets, and binoculars when she approached him, cooler in one hand, large canvas bag slung over another shoulder.

“I would have picked you up,” he said, taking the cooler from her.

“I would have asked. I just...I want to keep you to myself for at least another day. I don’t...the last time my dad found out I was dating someone, he broke us up.”

“That’s rough. When was that?”

Jaime carefully placed the canvas bag in the back of the car and then stood up and leaned on the top of the car.

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

“Senior year of high school.”

“Senior year? Jaime, that was long time ago. I think maybe things have changed a bit.”

*Some things never change. Some people.* “You don’t know my father. He can be brutal. Overbearing. Pushy. He’s never seen me as anything but a tennis player. I’ve offered a few times to give him a tour of the Lunar Institute, where I work. No interest.”

“I do know your father. I’ve known him for years, and I’ve been watching him the last few days.” Mac paused, the expression on his face guarded, careful. “I’ll admit he can be a bit...overwhelming?”

Jaime huffed a bit, thinking the word didn’t even begin to cover it.

“But he’s also a terrific teacher. I’ve seen him get a lot more performance out of some people than I thought he could. You should keep asking him.”

“Hmmm. Anyway, I’ve got a great telescope and a great dinner,” she said, definitely not wanting to talk about the main thing that kept her away from the Bar None. She tilted her head toward the back of the car.

Mac’s face lit up. “You are a goddess.”

“It’s nice to be appreciated.” She couldn’t say how very much she meant that.

“So, where to?”

Jaime smiled. “It’s a bit complicated. How about if I drive?”

Mac, who was leaning over to get in the driver’s side of his car, stopped and slowly stood up.

“How about if you *what?*”

“You should see the expression on your face. Drive. It’ll be easier than my explaining every last move to you.”

Shaking his head, he tossed his keys over the top of the car, and Jaime deftly caught them.

“See, athlete’s reflexes. We’ll be fine.” She practically skipped over

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

to the driver's seat, hopped in, and starting adjusting the seat and mirrors. She decided to leave the top up this time, thinking the wind would be a bit of a distraction.

Mac moved the seat back far enough to accommodate his long, lanky frame and got in. "Uh-huh. Just remember, I'm now an out-of-work tennis pro. I don't think I could afford the jump in insurance if I had to..."

Jaime popped the clutch and laid some rubber down.

"Make a claim," Mac finished, his voice pitched a little higher than normal.

"Sorry, haven't driven standard in a while." With some reluctance, she slowed the car down to below the fifteen miles per hour required on the slow roadway. "Really, she's in good hands. I'm a very cautious person."

"Yes, this from a woman who likes to have sex in parking lots."

"That was fun, but for a real thrill we could always try it..." She placed her right hand on his inner thigh and started walking her fingers up toward his crotch.

"Put both hands on the wheel!" Mac said. A little louder than necessary, Jaime thought. She laughed and pulled out of the ranch on to the main road.

She drove out of town toward northern Comal County, until they reached FM 306. Heading toward Canyon Lake, she turned into a new subdivision.

"A little too much light pollution here," Mac observed, "and not exactly the right conditions for exploring."

Jaime smiled. "Just wait." She drove to the end of the subdivision, and then pulled onto a dirt road. They went up a hill, and when they'd cleared it, laid out before them was Canyon Lake. Finally locating a particular grove of oak trees, she pulled over by the side of the road and parked. Quickly they unloaded the car, and Jaime directed Mac to a

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

path through the trees.

At the end of the path the grove of trees ended. They walked ahead into a grassy field, which was shielded from the dirt road by the trees. At the far end of the field lay a sandy beach and the lake.

Jaime set her bag down while Mac looked around.

“This place is just a little too perfect. I’m wondering how many times you’ve been here before *exploring*,” Mac said.

“Never for *that* kind of exploring. I took an astronomy class in high school, and we came here one night for a viewing.”

Jaime grabbed the edge of the worn, enormous patchwork quilt she’d packed, flipped the other edge to Mac and helped him spread it out. As he moved the cooler and her bag onto a corner of the quilt, along with his bag, she sat down. Several times she smoothed the lime green flouncy skirt down over her legs, so that it covered her just below her knees.

She was nervous, she realized, a little more aware this time of where the evening was going to lead. The night before had felt like a storm she’d gotten swept up into. She was surprised at how attractive she found Mac and at how much she enjoyed spending time with him and talking about the things she loved.

He sat down beside her.

“They packed us a ton of food. I hope you’re hungry.”

“Starved.” Somehow, she didn’t think he was talking about the food. She decided she’d better pull open the picnic hamper right away, or else they’d be rooting through it with flashlights.

It was a typical Bar None ranch feast, gourmet enough for their high-end guests but Texas enough for the out-of-state visitors. To start, Jaime laid out some locally made German sausage, Texas mozzarella, smoked over pecan shells, and crisp water crackers.

Jaime fixed him a morsel with everything on it and held it out to him. Instead of taking it, he raised her hand to the level of his mouth.

### GAME, SET...MATCH?

He nibbled, bite by bite, on the snack, and then, on her fingers.

“Mmmm,” she said, closing her eyes as he laved his tongue over her index finger. Then, one by one, he engulfed each of her fingers with his lips. The sensation of his velvety mouth flowed into every corner of her body, pooling heavily between her legs. Then, just when the feeling was almost unbearable he closed her hand up, caressed it, and then grazed his fingertips up the length of her sensitive inner arm. As he did, she trembled and jutted out her breasts slightly, aching for his hands, aching for relief of the building tension.

He took his hand away and immediately Jaime felt the loss. She opened her eyes and saw he was preparing an appetizer for her. She wanted nothing better than for him to forget the food, lay her back on the quilt and devour her. But, oblivious, or maybe more aware than he was letting on, he continued to cut up the treats and prepare the cracker for her.

Jaime took the hors d’oeuvres in one hand and finished it off in one big bite, while tracing Mac’s hand. Deliberately, she explored the curve of each of his fingers, noting the strength of the muscles, the bone structure, the neat, square cut nails. Taking the index finger to her mouth, Mac’s eyes locked with hers, she placed it into her mouth and slid her lips down halfway. After she repeated the action with a second finger, she noticed that Mac’s eyes were becoming dilated and dark.

Gently he pulled his hand away and stood up.

“We’d better watch the hors d’oeuvres,” he said. “Wouldn’t want to become engorged.”

*Way too late for that.* She felt like her entire body, from her heavy breasts, her tight nipples, the soft wet area between her legs, as well as every inch of her skin, was already engorged.

He stood up. “How ’bout if I get out the wine while you put out the main courses.”

Jaime flared her nostrils while she raked him over, from toe to

### GAME, SET...MATCH?

crown. Raising her eyebrows, she settled her gaze on his all too obvious erection.

“Yes, I think I’m ready for the main course.” *You look like you are, too.*

As much as he seemed interested in more than the food, he sat a short distance away from her while they ate. The dinner of grilled dove breast, wrapped in bacon and stuffed with a jalapeño slice and cream cheese, along with Caesar salad and fresh, crusty bread was a delight. But Mac took every opportunity while they sat there, eating, talking, laughing, to glide his skin over hers. When they passed the food he “accidentally” brushed a thigh against hers, stroked a hand over her bare shoulders, or skim a finger over hers. She felt herself completely disassociating a few times as she sucked in a ragged breath or clenched her thighs, overwhelmed by sensations.

After giving her a light kiss that she leaned into but he pulled away from, he moved their plates to one side and poured her another glass of wine.

“Interested in seeing what’s for dessert?” he asked.

At first, her foggy mind was puzzled at the question. Then she just felt the anger that comes from desperation.

“Mac.” She ran her fingers over her face, needing that touch, any touch, over her hypersensitive skin. “I don’t want dessert. I don’t want any more wine. I don’t even want the god damned stars, hard as it is for me to believe that.” She gestured at the sky, a rich shade of cobalt. “I just want you.”

“Patience, sweet Jaime,” he said. He took the glass from her and placed it beside his, out of the way. “You’re always in such a hurry.”

She punctuated her impatience by lying back on the quilt once her hands were free, and reached up for him. He took her hands and placed them on either side of her, on the quilt.

“The night is young,” he said, “and I don’t have to get up until



### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

noon. I was thinking that exploring is best accomplished when you can see what you're doing."

He bent over and placed a lingering kiss on the tip of her nose. She was a little doubtful, but then she gave him a slow smile and fluttered her eyelids closed.

The next thing she felt were hands on her feet, ever so carefully slipping off her sandals, one at a time. Then she felt his hands, working together, expertly massaging one foot, then the other, alternatively using all his strength to manipulate and soothe her muscles, and then barely grazing her skin with his knuckles.

He swept his fingers up the insides of her legs, tracing the curve of her calves. The trail he left tingled all the way up to her very core, and she spread her legs, the tension building. She felt the edge of the skirt caress her skin as he slid the fabric up her legs and pooled it at her waist.

Jaime shivered as Mac's tongue blazed a trail up the inside of her thighs, finally reaching the apex. As her clitoris throbbed, he pulled down her panties, removing the last impediments. A slight breeze swept over her now naked waist, just before Mac parted her inner petals, swirling and dipping fingers.

When she felt his tongue lick and his lips nip at her swollen nub her whole body quaked, startled by the intensity of the pleasure. Just when she felt the sensations building, felt herself close to the edge, he stopped and took her hands in his.

When she whimpered in protest, her body trembling, he said, "Help me," his voice raspy. He placed her fingers on either side of her most intimate lips, showing her how he wanted her to hold them open. As he resumed pleasuring her with his tongue, she felt his hands wander up her body and slip her peasant blouse down her shoulders, exposing her breasts. Capturing her nipples between his fingers, he gently twisted them round and round while his tongue continued to tease her to the

### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

point of madness. She felt as if she were spinning toward unconsciousness, her whole world shrinking to the tiny pinpoint of existence that was right there, right then. Just when she didn't think she could stand another moment, she felt Mac's fingers plunge deep inside her. Her eyes flew open in surprise and, meeting Mac's eyes, as wild and out-of-control as she felt, she blew apart like a supernova exploding into a million balls of fire.

A few moments later, she felt Mac lay down next to her, throwing an arm over her. She turned on her side toward him. Mac's nostrils were flaring and his eyes were very dark. He seemed to, just barely, be keeping himself in check. Jaime started tossing her clothes left and right.

"What are you doing?"

"Making myself irresistible to you."

He helped her with her skirt. "You would be irresistible in a potato sack." He assessed her now completely naked body. "However..."

She grabbed the edge of his shirt. "You're not the only one who gets to enjoy the view." After she'd managed to help him out of all of his clothes, she surveyed him.

"Wow." The way she'd felt Saturday night, when she first saw him, checking out his abs, running her hands through his hair, was nothing compared to how irresistible he was to her hands at this moment. Splaying them on his chest, she gently pushed him down onto the blanket. As if they had a will of their own, her fingers roamed over his skin, finding it slick with sweat. Her hands couldn't resist tracing the curves of his arms and shoulders, and then kneading and squeezing the muscles, enjoying their strength and definition.

While she explored the mountains and ridges and valleys of his upper body, she lay down next to him and nuzzled his neck, nipping the skin with her lips and breathing deeply. The scent was tangy and dark and all Mac. When she blew gently into his ear and circled it with her

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

tongue Mac groaned, low and long. The sound penetrated to a spot deep inside her, a place she'd never felt anyone reach before. With an answering, primal tone, she took possession of his lips. Mac's hands were suddenly everywhere, and so were hers. They couldn't feel and touch enough, they couldn't get close enough. Penis plunging into her, she rode him like a wave, the passion rolling over them again and again until they clutched tightly at the final crest, and crashed over to the other side.

\* \* \*

A warm breeze, whispering over bare skin, woke Mac first. When he opened his eyes, he was treated to a magnificent curtain of stars spread out above them, along with a crescent moon. Glancing to the side, the view was quietly seductive, shadows of dark chased by glints of light, hiding and illuminating Jaime's hair as it flowed over bare shoulders, a relaxed but swollen, well-kissed mouth, ample, well-rounded breasts. He reached over, reluctant to wake her but unable to stop himself as he stroked the spot just under her ear, the indentation around her collarbone, the swell of strong, well-developed shoulder muscles. The skin was petal soft, but as he ran his hand down her forearm, he felt the muscles of an athlete, the inner strength underneath the surface.

"Mmmm," she said, without opening her eyes.

He leaned over and brushed his lips over hers, barely grazing them. They were warm and pliant and terribly inviting. She smiled, and Mac saw a genuine happiness and peace on her face that he hadn't seen there in all the time he'd spent with her the last few days.

She rolled onto her side, facing him, and Mac was lost. How can it be so different and yet so amazing each time, he wondered, as she entwined her bare legs with his. This time she seeped into every pore of his body, like a rising mist, something he was barely aware of as it slowly engulfed him from all sides. Before he knew it, every inch of his

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

skin felt alive, felt her, was communicating with her body in ways he hadn't thought possible. Without thinking, he pushed her onto her back and covered her body with his, pressing her into the ground until they were one. Slowly, erotically, he slid in and out of her, increasing the pace when he felt the gentle arousal fan smoldering embers into hot flames. Matching his rhythm, her body rose and fell with his until the fire they'd kindled burst into a thousand glowing embers.

Tenderly he stroked her face with his open palm. She leaned into it and sighed.

"You're not going to fall asleep on me again, are you?" he asked.

"I don't know. If I do, will you wake me up the same way?"

"Probably." She started to move to get up, but he pulled her closer. She snuggled up to him, and threw an arm over his chest.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Probably," she answered, echoing his words. He smiled, even as he took a deep breath, wondering just how good she was feeling.

"Why did you quit playing tennis?"

She stiffened.

"I still play. Almost beat you on Saturday. Well, took three games anyway."

"You know what I mean."

"I thought we weren't going to talk about tennis. I thought we were here to look at the stars and have manic sex."

Mac waited a few beats. He thought, hoped, that what was developing between them was more than just sex. Maybe he'd been reading her wrong.

Just as he moved to get up, she put her arm across his chest, stilling him.

"I don't talk about it much. It was toward the end of my senior year. I'd spent most of it on the road, was preparing to turn pro after high school. I was starting to doubt whether that was what I wanted to do,

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

starting to get really tired of having such a one-dimensional life.”

Mac stroked Jaime’s naked back, trying to soothe the tension he felt building in her.

“It just wasn’t fun any more. I tried telling my dad, and he said that didn’t matter. It wasn’t about having fun, it was about living up to my potential, my talent. Being the best. Then the senior trip was planned—a week in Houston, culminating with being at the Johnson Space Center during a shuttle launch.”

“Uh-oh.”

“You guessed it. It clashed with a major tournament. I can’t even remember which one any more, there were so many. But somehow, if I didn’t compete it would tank my chance to play for the first time in the U.S. Open. They were both chances of a lifetime, and I had to make a choice. My father didn’t exactly agree with my choice.” She ended by telling him the story of the dent in the pavilion wall.

Mac lay there quietly with her for a few moments, stroking the silky skin of her shoulders.

“That was a lot of years ago. You seem like you still carry a lot of it with you.”

She sighed, a shaky sound. “We can’t seem to get beyond what happened. I’m not sure he’s ever forgiven me for quitting. I was his star. Now I’m just his daughter who gave up and didn’t want to work hard enough to be a pro. I just wish he could accept me for who I am.”

“Are you so sure he doesn’t?”

Jaime paused for a long moment. “I’m pretty sure. I’m ninety-nine percent sure. I guess I’m afraid to find out if I’m one hundred percent right.”

“Well, there’s no denying you’re a mean tennis player, but”—he squeezed her tightly to him—“I think what you do is pretty amazing. I certainly couldn’t do it.”

“That from a pro player. Thank you.” She squeezed him back.

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

“Thank you. For not being like him.”

They lay there for a few more moments, and Mac started to feel himself get aroused. Again. At this rate, she would start to wonder just what it was he found amazing about her. And he wanted it to be more than her spectacular ability to turn him on.

“Well then”—he removed his arm from under her—“looks like nature’s putting on quite a show for us. I’d love to have you guide me through it.” He stood up and started throwing her clothes at her as he located his. “But please get dressed, because if I have to choose between looking at the stars and looking at you...”

She raked her gaze over him, lingering at his beginning erection but wisely deciding not to comment on it. “Yeah, I might have a tough time concentrating on the heavens, too.”

He threw her skirt at her head.

After getting all the right clothes back on all the right places, Jaime set up her telescope, then walked away from it and pulled out star charts. First she showed him the sideways W formed by the five brightest stars of Cassiopeia. Mac surprised her by spotting the great baseball diamond in the sky formed by stars in the Pegasus constellation, although she did have to comment that “only a guy would find a constellation using a sports object.” Using Pegasus as a guide, Jaime showed Mac how to follow a chain of stars coming away from “first base,” until they found a dim blob of light. Using Mac’s binoculars, Jaime showed him how that light turned into the combined light of the billions of stars that made up the Andromeda galaxy.

When Mac asked what the telescope was for, she told him, “patience, patience.” She moved it around and adjusted it until she pulled away, smiling.

“Come take a look.”

It was Saturn, the queen of the planets, in all her glory. The rings were spectacular, and they took turns looking, with Jaime pointing out

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

several noteworthy features.

Just as Mac took one more peek, he saw Jaime suppress a big yawn. Reluctantly, he pulled away.

“Tired?”

She smiled. “Let’s just say I’m not the same as my family in many ways, but we Alexanders are not late night people.”

He turned on the flashlight he had handy, and dug another one out of his bag. “How about if we get this stuff packed up then, and get you home before you turn into a pumpkin.”

Jaime started collapsing her telescope. “You’re going to take me...to your home? Your condo?” She looked just as impish as she had earlier in the day when she’d suggested easy to remove clothing.

“Very funny,” Mac said, folding up the quilt. “Don’t you think you’d better bring me home for dinner first?”

Jaime carried the telescope over to where Mac was. “Do you want to come home for dinner?”

Mac thought for a moment. *Yes, actually, now that the idea was brought up.*

“I think so. What do you think?”

She sighed. “I’ve kept this fairly quiet—only told Maddy it was you I was going out with. If I tell everyone, it will make things a whole lot more complicated. We’re a big messy family.”

*And you have a lot of issues with them.* He put the quilt back in her bag and turned to her, taking her face in his hands.

“I had a wonderful time tonight, the last two nights. The stars, the food, the Riverwalk. But mostly you. I feel something with you I haven’t felt for someone in a very long time. I don’t know where it’s going to lead. Hell, I don’t know what I’m doing with my life right now. If we keep seeing each other, and I’d like to, if you would”—he paused a minute, trying to read her face in the dim light of the stars and the flashlights—“it’s going to get complicated, even if we don’t involve

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

anyone else.”

Jaime was silent for a moment. Then she raised her head and kissed him, gently but passionately. “Just remember, it was your brilliant idea.”



## CHAPTER 5

“Hey, Mom, you gave me seven plates. Aren’t there only six of us?” Jaime yelled to her mother, who was crafting one of her world famous salads in the kitchen.

“Mom says seven.” Maddy dumped a pile of silverware in the middle of the table.

“Nice to actually see you home for dinner, Sis.” Wyatt added napkins to the growing pile. “Can’t believe you’ve been sneaking out with Mac the last two nights without telling us.”

“You guys are a lot of help. And I was not sneaking,” Jaime yelled at Wyatt’s back, as he stepped out the door to help their father with the barbecue.

“It’s okay.” Maddy brought several barbecue sauces from the kitchen. “If I was dating a hottie like Mac, I wouldn’t bring him home for months. Wouldn’t want to scare him away.”

The same thought had occurred to Jaime. Over and over that day.

### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

After she'd tried at breakfast to casually suggest maybe having Mac over for dinner, everyone had gone crazy. When Wyatt had said something about photo albums and home movies, she'd thrown a napkin at him. He was just kidding. She hoped.

She went over to officially invite Mac, and to suggest that if he was too tired, too busy, too something, he didn't have to feel obligated. They could always do it another time. Maybe in a few weeks or months. No rush. But when she found him on the courts, he and her Dad were teaching a class together. Looking way too chummy, in her opinion. When it was over, Mac gave her a quick kiss and told her he'd already been invited and would see her at six. She felt a bit railroaded. Or, rather, a bit on a runaway train. She just hoped the evening wouldn't be a train wreck.

Three kids, Mac, and her parents. Last time she counted, that was six. "Who's the seventh?" she yelled back into the kitchen.

"What's going on?" The front door had opened without her noticing.

"Cole!" Jaime launched herself at her big brother, who dropped the junk in his hands and picked her up in his massive, strong arms, swinging her around the room.

"'Bout time you got here." Their mother stood in the kitchen, sounding stern but smiling broadly. "Didn't think I could keep it secret from our scientist much longer. She always did have to check the math on everything."

Jaime just shook her head. She definitely felt, at moments like this, that her mother was the proverbial "man behind the curtain," controlling things without any of them realizing it.

Before she could ask what he was doing there, there was a knock on the door. Cole put Jaime down and reached over and opened it. Mac walked in.

"Cole! 'Bout time you got here." He shook Cole's hand, which

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

turned into a hug.

“Did everyone but me know he was coming?”

“When he invited me, he said he’d be following in a few days. Your mom asked me not to tell you,” he explained, waving at her mother, who waved back. He handed Jaime a wrapped floral bouquet. “For the prettiest gal in Texas.” And then he kissed her. The kiss wasn’t long, or passionate, but it was possessive. And in front of her family. Her brother Cole whistled as Mac murmured in her ear, “and the smartest.”

When Mac pulled away, Jaime caught the expression on Cole’s face. It was surprised, seasoned with just a little wariness. “Like I said before. What’s going on?”

“Well,” Maddy started, popping into the living area, bright smile on her face, “Mac’s been...”

“Maddy.” Their mother appeared in the dining area, an expression on her face that Jaime knew meant “that’s enough.” “Please go check and see if your father and Wyatt need anything. Including something to drink. Jaime”—she reached over and took the flowers—“I’ll find a vase for these. Thank you very much, Mac.” She tilted her head at Mac, who smiled and tilted back. “Please get Mac and Cole something to drink. Mac, if you could please help Cole get all that junk out of my living room.”

\* \* \*

Mac followed Cole into what his friend referred to as “the boy’s dorm,” the room he’d shared with Wyatt growing up. The decor always made him smile; the walls of the room were covered with sports memorabilia, including a signed Cowboys jersey Cole had gotten for Wyatt from a charity dinner, along with tennis and football posters, trophies, and ribbons. Cole shook his head and rolled his eyes as they both threw his suitcase and tennis racquet bag onto one of the queen-sized beds in the ample room.

“You think my mother would throw some of this junk out.” He

## GAME, SET...MATCH?

pointed at a 10-and-under tournament blue ribbon on the ribbon section of the wall.

“You know your parents and your brother. They adore you.”

Cole raised his eyebrows. “Yeah, speaking of *adoring*, what’s up with you and my sister?”

“Well, she’s not sixteen, or even eighteen anymore...” he said, tentatively, trying to decide how little he could get away with telling Cole.

“Hey, I suggested you come here to get some idea of what you wanted to do with your future *professionally*.”

“I’ve been doing that. Your dad and I talked for a few hours this afternoon. About my buying one of the condos, and staying on to teach and coach while earning my certification.”

“That’s great—congratulations. Sounds like you settled your future in spite of being distracted by my sister.”

Mac chuckled. “Something like that,” he said, as they left the room. When they reached the dining area, he caught Jaime’s eye as she was finishing setting the table. She smiled, and he smiled back. He definitely felt like, after a very difficult year, he had settled his future. So why, when he looked at Jaime, did he feel so unsettled?

Before he knew what was happening, which was usually the case at the Alexanders’, they were all settled down at the dinner table, fighting over the salad, roasted potatoes, and steaks. Somehow, Jaime had ended up nowhere near Mac at the table, a situation he wasn’t so sure he liked.

After Cole started in with some stories of Mac on the tour that he thought were way too exaggerated, Mac changed the subject, asking about the chances for Wyatt’s football team that year. Maddy teased Wyatt about a few cute cheerleaders who had just bought memberships in the ranch’s country club program for the locals, causing Wyatt’s face to turn as red as the stripe in the Lone Star flag. He piped in, “Uh, Mac.

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

Uh...what are you doing after you leave here? Going back on tour?"

Mac's eyes flicked to Cole's and Rick's. He deliberately avoided looking at Jaime.

"No, I think those days are over. Maddy, what are your plans for next year? Applied to colleges in Texas, or out of state? What are you thinking of studying?"

Maddy narrowed her eyes at him. "Nice try, cowboy, but I know a dodge when I see one. Have you and Jaime cooked up something we don't know about? Don't tell me you're moving in with her in Houston?" She had a broad smile, her eyes held that mischievous glint he was beginning to recognize as an Alexander trait, and she was eagerly looking at her sister for confirmation.

"For heaven's sakes, Maddy, where do you get your imagination?" Rick glowered at his youngest daughter. "Mac came here to play in the tournament and talk about his future with me. Jaime saw how great he is on the courts teaching. He's going to work here teaching and coaching until he gets his certification."

"Mac?" Jaime said. The expression on her face was a complete blank, but her voice, so quiet, was loaded with more layers than Mac could cut through. *Damn it!* He'd wanted to tell her himself, privately.

"You're going to coach? And teach? Tennis? How long have you and my father been planning this?"

Mac could hear the ticking of the wall clock in the kitchen.

"I've spent a lot of time thinking about what I wanted to do, visiting and teaching at clinics around the country. I've been out a few times this year working with your dad. Part of this trip was about finalizing things."

"I see." Jaime glanced at her father and then back at Mac. "I'm sure you'll be very good at it. My father's a...great teacher." She shook. "Wow, is it ever cold in here. Must have the air cranked up, or I've caught a chill." She got up so fast she rattled the table. "I'm going to

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

step outside for minute to warm up.” Without waiting for anyone’s answer, she walked out the backdoor by the barbecue.

Mac glanced around at Jaime’s family, who, for once, didn’t seem to know what to say. *Shit, shit, shit.* “I’m feeling a bit chilly, too. Be right back.”

\* \* \*

Jaime was sitting down in a chair by the barbecue, staring at an anthill.

*Mac. Her Mac. Was going to be a teacher. And not just any teacher, but a tennis teacher. Like her father. Anyone who wanted to have a relationship with him, a life with him...it would be like living with her father. Mac could end up pushy and demanding and single-minded. Not just could, but probably would. Just like her father. Would he lose perspective, lose his respect, someday, for what she did? Sports were powerful and exciting and intoxicating. No one knew better than she.*

She heard the door open and felt Mac sit down beside her. Out of the corner of her eye she saw his bare leg, so close she could have entwined it with hers if she wanted to. She moved just a tiny bit farther away.

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner?” she asked finally.

“Would it have made a difference?”

Her mind reviewed the last few days. Her joy at seeing him on the courts, the fun of testing her skills against him, her surprise at dinner when she found out he loved star-gazing, laughing as she drove his car out of the parking lot. And the wild and wonderful passion between them. It might have made a difference. And she would have missed all of that.

She ran her hands through her hair

“Don’t you think the world has enough tennis teachers?” she asked, not looking up.

“It’s what I love, Jaime. Developing talent. Teaching young kids.”

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

“Pushing them. Pounding on them. Letting the sport consume their lives. And yours.”

He was quiet for a moment. “Giving them a lifelong sport. Helping them achieve their dreams.”

“Wearing them out. Getting so wound up and involved that you lose your perspective. Tossing them away.”

“Jaime! Where the hell did that come from? I’m not going to do that.”

“I’m not sure I think it’s possible to avoid it.”

He chucked a finger under her chin and raised it up.

“You mean your father, don’t you? He couldn’t avoid becoming that way with you, could he? This isn’t really about me, is it?”

Jaime looked away and stared out at the ranch. “I can’t do this, Mac. I don’t think we should keep seeing each other. It’s not going to go anywhere. We should quit before we”—her voice broke—“get too involved.”

“Too involved? Too involved!” He stood up abruptly, knocking the chair over, and started pacing, looking like he didn’t know where to put his anger. He picked up the chair and slammed it down. “How can you possibly think we’re not already involved? What was I, just some little vacation fuck for you?”

*Oh God, oh God, oh God.* “Mac, that’s not what I meant at all. I’m sorry. I just...”

“Yeah, I get what you ‘just.’” He paced around again, kicking up stones with his toes. “You’re upset with your father because you think he can’t love you for who you are. How do you think I feel? I’ve spent the last ten years having people fawn all over me because I’m a pro tennis player. I finally meet someone who’s not the least bit impressed with my celebrity. Someone I can talk to. I finally figure out what I want to do after a miserable year of wondering if my life was over, the best years behind me, at twenty-eight.” He glanced down at her and his

## *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

expression softened, just a bit, like he was remembering the last few days, too.

He sighed. “You’re probably right. We probably shouldn’t see each other any more.”

“I am?” To her own ears, she didn’t sound convinced. Just incredibly unhappy. But there were worse things, she knew, than deciding it was over after two dates. Like deciding it was over after two months or two years or two decades.

Mac caught her gaze and held it for a long moment. Then he looked away and said, “I’m like your father, Jaime, in some ways, and not like him in others. I can argue until I’m blue in the face with you that I’m different. But until you solve your issues with him, it doesn’t matter. You’ll always be suspicious, and I’ll have to prove it to you every time you hear me so much as raise my voice to a student, so much as push someone or take a strong stand on anything, demanding they put in another hour or give them an ultimatum if they miss a practice. I can’t have you seeing your father every time you look at me. And you will, if you continue to have this ongoing feud with him.” He looked at the back door.

“This is going to be interesting,” he said, more to himself than to her. Then he walked in the door. And, Jaime was sure, out of her life.

Stomach churning, she got up out of the chair and followed him inside.

\* \* \*

Interesting didn’t even begin to describe it, Jaime thought. When she walked back in, the conversation stopped for a few moments, and then everyone started talking, too much and all at once. Mac answered a few questions put to him, finished his dinner, and left. After dinner, Cole, their father, Maddy and Wyatt went for a walk around the ranch to show Cole some of the changes since he’d been there last. Jaime was going to hide in her room, check her email, and think about a way to



*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

gracefully escape and cut her vacation short.

“Don’t even think about it,” her mother said, in a tone that Jaime knew meant she was going nowhere. “I’ve got some last minute phone calls to make tonight on the fundraiser, and I need help cleaning up the kitchen.”

“You could have made everyone else stay and help,” Jaime complained, as she stood at the sink, loading the dishwasher.

“I could have.” Her mother returned from the table and opened the refrigerator, putting away the sauces and the few potatoes that were the only remnants from dinner. “But they were all eager to have some fun, and you were just moping about.”

Jaime clanged the salad bowl a little louder than necessary in the stainless steel sink and started scrubbing it. Her mother closed the refrigerator door and leaned a hip against the kitchen island.

“What happened with you and Mac outside? You were both unusually quiet when you came back in, and he left pretty quickly after dinner.”

She felt a hand on her arm. Even though she was sure that not seeing Mac was the right thing, that continuing any kind of a relationship was a mistake, she stopped scrubbing the bowl, needing all her energy to stay in one piece.

“We both decided that it wasn’t such a good idea to continue to see each other. There was no future in it.”

“Hmmm...”

“Hmmm yourself. What’s that supposed to mean?” Jaime wiped her eyes with a knuckle and turned around, drying her hands on a nearby towel.

“Just that everything seemed to be fine, until Mac said he was going to study teaching and coaching.”

Jaime started twisting the towel. “I told him... he said...” She stopped and looked her mother in the eyes. “Mac said that until I solve

### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

my issues with Dad, I'll see Dad every time I look at him. And that will always be between us. Something like that."

"What do you think about that?"

"I think it's probably true."

"What do you want to do about it?"

Jaime thought for a moment. "Go back to Houston. In the morning. Maybe tonight. Put this whole week..."

"Behind you? Just like you've put the fight you and your dad had your senior year behind you."

Jaime twisted the towel again. It was hard to know what to say when someone was right.

"We've known Mac a long time. There's always been a bit of a connection between the two of you, so I wasn't surprised to see it click together this week. I'm sure you could probably go back to Houston and eventually find someone else, have a relationship with someone else, if that's what you want. But Mac, he reads you, he knows you, he challenges you in ways other people can't. He got you playing tennis here, didn't he? And when's the last time you took someone out to look at the stars with you?"

Not since high school, Jaime knew. She went out a couple of times a year now. But usually alone.

"Jaime, it's time you made up with your father. We miss you. Believe it or not, your father misses you. I know you love this place, but you almost never come home."

"I'd like to clear the air." Jaime put the towel down finally and turned back to the sink. Started scrubbing the bowl furiously. "But what should I say? That I'm sorry? I'm not. How about—why the hell didn't you ever come see me play in college? Couldn't bear to see me waste my talent? Where were you at my college graduation? How come you've never come to see me at work? Never even ask me about work?" She grabbed the towel and vigorously dried off the bowl.

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

“I don’t know Jaime.” Her mother sighed. “How about if you start by talking to him. See where it leads from there.”

“What if he says...”

“Stop. Stop what-iffing. Just talk to him.”

“I’ll think about it.” *Maybe*. She added the bowl to the pile in the dish drain. “Done?”

Her mother sighed again. “Go talk to your friends on the internet.”

Jaime practically fled the kitchen.

When she got into her bedroom, she stopped and stared. On her dresser, her mother had placed the flowers. The bouquet was a fairly standard mix of daisies, roses, and carnations. Added in were three tall, silvery, swirly decorations. They were covered with stars.

She wished she’d never come home.

## CHAPTER 6

The next morning, Jaime went up to the main lodge for a latte at their coffee shop. She carried the soothing liquid out into the warm, dry morning, and sipped as she walked out to the courts. She saw Mac teaching—he ignored her—and she saw her father teaching farther along. She was going to continue back home but she stopped to watch.

He was giving what was obviously a beginner's lesson to a young woman in her mid-twenties or possibly older. He was working with her on her forehand, starting with the grip used by most beginners, which Jaime heard her dad call "the eastern forehand grip." He showed her how to turn sideways and take the racket back in preparation to hit the ball.

"As the swing starts forward," Jaime heard, "the racquet should be slightly beneath the ball and continue forward and upward to a follow-through." The woman took a few practice strokes, with her dad reminding her to return to the ready position after each shot.

### GAME, SET...MATCH?

Jaime smiled in spite of herself, remembering all the years she'd watched her father teach lessons like this. It had been a long time since she'd actually seen him in action. She remembered all the pushing, all the yelling, all the pressure he'd put on her. What she'd forgotten was how good he was, and how much some people really liked him as a teacher.

The lesson ended with her father hitting to the woman from his ever-present ball bucket, placing each shot perfectly in her forehand court, close to her, and her actually making contact, hitting most of the balls over the net and in-bounds. Jaime heard her thank him profusely when it was over and say she couldn't wait until tomorrow for the backhand lesson.

"Jaime." Her father waved and approached her.

"Have any more lessons this morning?"

"Not until one. Then I have a weekly women's clinic with a group from town."

They stood there, father and daughter, quiet, watching the people and other matches going on at courts farther away. "Talk to him," her mother had said. Jaime wanted to, she just didn't know where to begin. It occurred to her that her father seemed nervous, too.

*Well, I guess we'll start where we always do.*

"Courts are pretty busy today. Want some help cleaning up?"

He looked surprised. "Sure, love some."

Jaime grabbed a basket and she and her father worked together, not speaking, popping balls into them. After a few minutes they were done, and they walked them down to the section by the ball machines where they were kept.

"So, what are your plans for today? You and Mac going out again? He seems to be occupying a lot of your time this week."

"I'm not sure if Mac and I are going to keep seeing each other." She looked down the courts at the same moment that Mac looked over her

### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

way. He held her gaze for one long moment and then walked away toward the main lodge, probably for lunch. Jaime took a deep breath.

“I think, maybe...” She rubbed her face with her hand. Of all the risks this week, this one was the hardest. “Mac and I argued last night. About you.”

“Me?”

“Can we take a walk, Daddy?”

They left the courts and started toward the paths she knew so well, that ran through the wooded areas of the ranch.

“I want to ask you something,” she started. She took a deep breath. “After our fight, and I went off to college, I still played tennis there, just not for you. How come you never came to see me play in all those four years? As mad as I was, it hurt me. Made me feel like you were still mad at me. Didn’t love”—her voice broke—“didn’t love me unless I was playing for you. On your terms.”

She stopped. Shit, why had she decided to do this? She felt the tears start and she covered her face. She would not cry. She would not cry.

She felt her father’s arm around her and the dam broke. A sob escaped and she tried to push him away, but he held her tighter and wouldn’t let her.

“Jesus, Jaime, I’m sorry. If I’d known that’s how you felt...” He held her while she cried.

When she quieted down, he said, “I did come see you. I just never let you know.”

Jaime pulled away, stunned.

“What?”

“I used to watch from windows in the athletic centers with binoculars, or I would sneak in and be very careful that you didn’t see me. I knew you were angry with me, and I felt badly about what happened. I wanted you to keep playing and I was afraid if you saw me, you’d quit again.”

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

“I thought...I thought you were mad at me.”

“Well, of course I was mad at you, at first. I thought you were being foolish and wasting your talent. I still do.”

Jaime looked at him, ready to be mad again, but saw he was smiling.

“But it’s your life, not mine. I saw you had other things you wanted to do and I got over it.”

They started walking again, this time with his arm around Jaime’s shoulders. She let it stay.

“You pushed me so hard. I tried to tell you over and over that I wanted a normal life, or at least an occasional day off. You never listened.”

They came upon a bench, placed by the side for walkers and joggers, and took a seat.

“I know. I pushed you hard, harder than I ever pushed anyone, including Cole. Harder than I should have. It’s tough when you get caught up in things. You had, have, so much talent, and I wanted you to be the best. Someday, if you’re lucky enough to be a parent, you may understand a bit better. It’s a parent thing, to always want your children to be the best they can be.”

“I am the best. Just not at tennis.”

“I know. I tell all my friends that you’re a hot-shot scientist at the loony bin.”

“Will you please stop calling it that?”

He smiled. “At the Lunar Institute. Part of NASA. You do image analysis research to support future moon colonization.”

She turned her head toward him, surprised. Shocked actually.

“I know what you do. I checked it out on the Internet. Cool website.”

“Then how come you’ve never come to see me? I’ve invited you at least three times since I’ve been working there.”

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

“Gee, let’s see. You call me up and say, ‘Dad, can you come up next Wednesday?’ I know I’m not some hot-shot scientist, but I do have a job and a life. How about if you pull out your calendar and I pull out mine and we pick a date that works for *both* of us?”

She felt abashed, embarrassed even. “I can do that.”

How had she read him so badly? Her anger had blinded her to the way things really were. And her fear of rejection had prevented her from reaching out.

They sat there in silence for a few moments, watching the rabbits and the squirrels. Eventually they got up and started for the bungalow and lunch.

“So, why did you and Mac have an argument about me?”

Jaime sighed. “It’s complicated. He thought I had some issues to work out with you, before he and I could really go anywhere.”

“And have we worked them out?”

She didn’t answer immediately. There were a lot of bad feelings and a lot of years for them to be erased by a single conversation. But that wall between them didn’t seem like a wall anymore. More like some speed bumps, to be negotiated.

“I think, Daddy”—Jaime put an arm around him—“that if you came to see me in Houston, it would go a long way toward working them out.” She couldn’t believe how stupid she’d been, how long she’d let things fester. Had she lost Mac, over her stupidity and pig-headedness?

“But Mac...I have to work things out with him. I’m not sure talking to him is going to help.” Then she had an idea. It was a crazy idea, a risky idea. But it might just work. She really didn’t have anything to lose by trying.

She smiled up at her father and squeezed his arm. “My favorite thing you taught me, that helped me through a lot more than tennis, was ‘you can’t always win, but you damn well better always try!’ I was wondering if you remembered some of the advice you gave me after I



### *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

played Mac last Saturday night. I'm wondering if you can help me try to beat him in the tournament."

\* \* \*

Four days later, after endless hours of practice and strategizing with her father, she approached the court for the final match of the tournament. She spied Mac by the temporary bleachers, signing autographs, young girls from town literally shaking with excitement as they passed their programs and pens to him. Then he strode, like a predatory tiger, over to the bench where his towel, water, and spare racquets were. He grabbed a racquet, one hand on each end, spread his legs, and reached up to the sky with it, like he was making a sacrifice to the gods. Then he stretched down, extending his whole body, touching the ground with the racquet. The flexing muscles and power in his arms and legs took her breath away.

She could tell the exact moment he spotted her approaching the bench. His whole expression changed, his whole body, from warm and friendly to cool and guarded.

"Ms. Alexander." He nodded at her.

"Mr. Garza."

Anger flashed in his eyes. Did he think she was toying with him? She picked up her racquet and lovingly stroked it, up and down, from the head to the grip.

"Like my new Prince Zephyr? It has such a...steely shaft."

"Don't play with me, Jaime." She heard the warning in his voice.

"Mac. Me and my new Zephyr, we're gonna kick your ass. And what a lovely ass it is, I might add." She felt less confidence than she was putting on; even though her father had worked tirelessly with her over the last few days, but she didn't know if she really had it in her to beat him. She wanted it so badly—not the win, but so much more. She wanted what she'd lost the other day, when she'd behaved so badly. Mac's respect. And maybe, if she was really lucky, another chance with

## GAME, SET...MATCH?

him.

Mac started to say something, but the words were drowned out by her father as he took to the P.A. system. They each took a turn waving to the crowds as they were announced, with shrieks from the crowd for Mac, and whistles serenading Jaime.

When they shook hands at the net, electricity surged between them. The connection is still there, she thought, still strong and alive. But is it enough?

She had no more time to ponder their attraction and chemistry as the match began, and she concentrated on completing the task she'd set for herself when she'd enlisted her father's help. Proving to Mac, the only way she knew how, that she had really changed, in her heart. Sure, she could have just talked to him, but would he have believed her? This way, she wasn't just playing because she'd been conned into it. She was playing to win.

Girls served first in the Battle of the Sexes, so Jaime stepped up to the service line, tossed the ball into the air, and smashed it, just barely nicking the far corner of the service court. After Mac returned it, using the fabulous control of the new racquet, and her father's advice, she whipped the ball over to the opposite corner of the court, far out of Mac's reach.

Her father's coaching played in her head. *"Mac's still got a fair amount of power, but his mobility isn't great because of his injury. Moving him around is the best way to play him. Try to keep the ball deep so he can't come to the net. If he reaches the net try to hit some lobs to make him run."* For all the issues she had with her father, she'd never had any problems with his strategizing. He was never wrong.

The match consisted of an eight game pro-set, no tie-breakers. By the end of the fourteenth game, with the score tied 7-7, the crowd was riveted. With Jaime serving, they battled to deuce, the crowd roaring with each shot.

## GAME, SET...MATCH?

She stepped up to serve. God she was tired. Between the sex with Mac, the work with her father, and the long match, her body was positively screaming at all the unaccustomed pushing of her muscles. Mac stood like a warrior, legs planted wide, yielding his racquet like a weapon, body gleaming with sweat. She had the sudden, crazy urge to jump him, wrap her legs around him, and claim him as hers. She wondered if she'd ever get the chance.

Mac returned her serve easily and, her fatigue asserting itself, she lost her vaunted control and hit the ball into the net. *Shit*. His ad.

This time when Mac returned the serve she was able to hit it back, but Mac managed to get to the net. He smashed a cross-court volley that she didn't have a prayer of reaching.

"Game, set, match," she heard the line judge yell.

She'd lost the match, but had she lost Mac? She looked over at him, trying to judge his reaction. He couldn't possibly think she hadn't tried her best, could he?

"Thanks for changing your mind and coming out. And thanks for giving the crowd their money's worth," he said, cool and polite, as they shook hands. She held his hand longer than necessary, trying to gauge what he was feeling. Would she ever touch him again? Reluctantly she let go.

"Mac," she started when they reached the bench, but they were both swarmed amid cries of "amazing match," "great job," "best Battle of the Sexes ever." She wanted to ask him if she'd see him at the barbecue later, but he was swept up by some of the young pros to go sign autographs. She sighed and packed up her racquet.

"Great job, sweetheart." Her father was there. "Thank you for participating. I know it meant a lot to your mother. And to me."

Well, some bridges were mended, if not all. She would have to live with that.

"You're welcome, Dad. Thanks for coaching me this week so I

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

didn't make a complete fool out of myself."

"Any time. Coming to the party?"

She watched the crowd surrounding Mac head toward the outdoor bar set up for the party and barbecue.

"I'm soaked. I'm going to go take a shower and then maybe I'll stop by." *Or maybe not.* She wished she knew what was going on in Mac's mind. He certainly hadn't fought very hard to talk to her after the match. Maybe she'd just pack up and go home and see if he called her later.

She walked away from the crowd, back to the bungalow, and in through the back door into her room. She tossed her sweaty clothes onto her bed and walked naked into the bathroom. She stepped into the shower, the heat feeling good as it seeped into her muscles. God, Mac had looked magnificent out there, she thought. She remembered his body, moving with hers, as they lay under the stars together. She ached for him, but didn't have the heart to bring herself to climax again. It had felt good, but she didn't just want the release. She wanted Mac.

When she heard the bathroom door creak open, she froze. How stupid could she be? Had she forgotten to lock the outside door? There were about a zillion people at the ranch that day.

"Jaime?"

*Mac. Mac?*

She pulled the shower curtain slightly aside, just revealing her face. Which, she realized, was somewhat ridiculous given that he'd seen her body, more than once.

"What are you...Oh, my God!" He was naked. Gloriously and wondrously naked. And, fabulously erect. She didn't know whether to laugh, cry, or throw a bar of soap at him.

"Not that I'm not thrilled to see you, but are you crazy?"

He took her head in his hands and kissed her. She dropped the curtain and slipped her hands into his hair, and kissed him back like her

## *GAME, SET...MATCH?*

life depended on it.

“Move over,” he growled, and stepped into the shower with her.

“Are you nuts?”

“Yes. About you.” It was her fantasy come true, only, of course, so much better.

“My sister, my parents...oh, my God!” This time, there was no gentle teasing or coaxing or playing. Just a desperate want, overwhelming sensations, and crazed need, mixed with the hot streaming water. His mouth sucked her nipples and his hand rubbed and slid water and her rapidly gushing lubrication all around her clitoris and vagina until she was blind with desire. Finally, when she didn’t think she could stand it another minute, he pinned her against the back wall of the shower and impaled her with his penis. She rode him hard, bucking her hips in rhythm with his until she howled his name. As she clenched down on his shaft, he thrust into her, hard and fast until he clutched her tight and groaned with pleasure.

She held him close afterward for a few glorious seconds and then pushed him roughly away.

“You have to get out of here. I’ve obviously been a dreadful influence on you. Talk about risky.”

“Some risks are worth taking.” When she made a face at him and whipped a washcloth dangerously close to some of her favorite parts of him, he yelped and pulled her close. As they stood under the flowing water, Jaime’s breasts pressed against Mac’s hard chest, she thought she was probably the happiest she’d been in the whole time she’d come back to the Bar None.

“I’m hoping that match was your way of telling me you’re okay with my career choices. That you can accept me for who I am. For who I’m going to be.”

She smiled against his neck. “You’re going to do very well with any certification classes you have to take, because you are very, very

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

smart.”

He laughed and pulled away. “We need to hurry up and get back to the party or we’re going to be missed. Can I”—he leered at her—“soap you up?”

Jaime rolled her eyes. “Somehow I think those two are mutually exclusive. I’m done.” She stepped deftly away and out of the shower, grabbing her towel on the way. “I’ll get you a towel.”

“Spoilsport,” he yelled back at her.

A few minutes later Jaime was wondering if they were ever going to get to the party, as he sat in a chair in the bedroom, kissing her cleavage while she toweled and tried to style his curls.

“I had a fantasy earlier this week about you taking me in the shower.”

“Oh, yeah?” He sounded fascinated. “Tell me about it.”

Jaime found it hard to bring up the image of pleasuring herself in the shower when she had Mac there, in the flesh, in her hands.

“Maybe when I know you better. It’s kind of personal.”

He took her hands in his and stood up.

“That statement makes absolutely no sense.”

Jaime chuckled and picked up their towels.

“I have to go back to Houston tomorrow.” She tossed the towels into the hamper in the corner. “I think this is the first time since I left home seven years ago that I’m actually reluctant about leaving. I guess I’ll be coming home more often.”

“Yeah, about that.” They started walking toward the bedroom door. After stepping outside, he said, “I could stay here, but I’ve also had offers from places all over Texas. And a few in the Caribbean, one in Hawaii.” He smiled and tousled her hair at what she guessed was a horrified expression on her face.

“The point is I could take a job at a new resort in Houston. I’ll probably need a year to finish up my certification and training. After

*GAME, SET...MATCH?*

that,” he looked at her with seriousness, a certainty, that she hadn’t seen all week. But she saw it now. “Well, I could go anywhere. Or, I could stay. If I had something to stay for. What do you think?”

“I think I agree with what the line judge said today. Game, set”— she held out her hand and slipped it into his—“match.”

## **KELSEY LEWIS**

Kelsey Lewis has been writing fiction since she was old enough to put pencil to paper. Fortunately typewriters and computers came along, so now people can actually read it. Throughout her twenties and early thirties she worked as a programmer, and hopes none of the software she wrote caused any major catastrophes in January 2000. When her husband moved the family to Canada from the U. S., for a (supposedly) temporary work assignment, she decided to return to her dream of writing fiction. After taking her first writing course, she won a contest and published her first short story, a loosely autobiographical tale about a woman who finds true love after a fortune teller grants her the ability to read minds for a day. When Kelsey wonders where the time has gone, she has only to look at her three children, who seem to grow every time she blinks. She's hugely grateful to her husband, Steve, who quietly does the dishes and puts the kids to bed whenever the critique group comes over, instead of saying, "not those crazy writers again!"



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