

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Madison Hayes

Miss

MARCH

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
		
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An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Miss March

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CALENDAR GIRLS:

MISS MARCH

Madison Hayes

Dedication

For Raelene

Trademarks Acknowledgement

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Corvair: General Motors Corporation

Jaguar: Jaguar Cars Limited

Playboy Bunny: Playboy Enterprises International

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Prologue

It was the happiest day of Vicky's life. The day of her wedding. She was marrying the man of her dreams, Brady Emerson Brooks—every wonderful six feet, two inches of him. She could hardly believe her good fortune in snagging the tall, blue-eyed, quiet rebel. And yet there she was, sitting in front of a vintage vanity tucked into the corner of the church's small dressing room and smiling at her reflection in the mirror, only nine hours away from exchanging wedding vows with the man she loved.

The picturesque stone chapel, located off the Pacific Coast Highway near Hermosa Beach, was a tiny but popular out-of-town destination for Los Angeles weddings. She was lucky to have booked it on such short notice but evidently someone had decided they didn't want to get married after all because there'd been a last minute cancellation. Vicky, however, had no doubts whatsoever that Brady was the right man for her, and no qualms about the bad luck that might be involved in snapping up a cancelled booking.

The pastor had been kind enough to meet her and open the chapel doors so she could get an early start on the decorations. And while Vicky sat in the dressing room, happily reviewing her prospects in life, Brady's brother Rob and his wife Shelley were outside in the nave tying white satin bows on the ends of the pews.

The dressing room had been squeezed into the small vestibule years after the church's original construction, offering brides a place to change into their wedding gowns before walking down the aisle. The old building's original gray stone made up three sides of the tiny room while the newly constructed wall—the one with the door leading into the vestibule—had been covered with drywall and brightened with a coat of white paint. Other than the low, mirrored vanity and a brass hook situated high on the new wall to accommodate a long dress, the room was empty.

Her fawn-brown eyes smiled back at her as she tugged at a dark blonde curl cascading from her loose updo. She'd risen early for her seven o'clock appointment at the beauty shop and donned a pale blue cotton print dress that buttoned down the front. Later on, when it was time to change for the wedding, she could step out of the dress without mussing her hair. Now, at ten o'clock, she turned her head slightly and gave herself an approving nod.

The hair was perfect.

Reflected in the mirror, she could see her wedding dress hanging on the wall behind her—a svelte size sixteen cut out of beaded ivory brocade, with a high neck and a long sweeping train.

The dress was perfect.

Everything was perfect.

This was *her* day and Vicky was determined to enjoy every minute of anticipation leading up to the long-awaited wedding march.

Brady Emerson Brooks. There had never been a more delicious stretch of perfectly packaged male. Long and lean, with brown hair that glowed russet in the sun and deep blue eyes under thoughtful brows, he tanned up nicely when you got him to the beach. In fact, he looked amazing at the beach, jogging out of the surf with his hair slicked away from his handsome brow and high cheekbones, water beading on his smooth, dark chest, his loose, wet shorts clinging to his thickly muscled thighs.

He was something, all right, with a face that would tempt a nun—all hard angles and clean lines—and a five o'clock shadow that got an early start every day, generally darkening his jaw and upper lip before three in the afternoon. His long mouth was seriously sexy—his upper lip lean and masculine, his lower lip deep and sensuous. His smile, though rare, would melt a polar ice cap.

All that and a cock so thick and strong, it could plug a hole in a dam.

And tonight that massive dark cock was finally gonna be hers.

Vicky grinned at her reflection in the mirror.

She'd worked hard to land the younger Brooks brother. It had taken a lot of careful maneuvering. Hell, she'd have resorted to lying, cheating and stealing to get a marriage proposal out of him! Fortunately that hadn't been necessary, but she'd had to be cautious. There were certain things that Brady couldn't know, at least not right now. Maybe never.

She'd wanted to give him everything, right from the start. But that wouldn't have worked. She'd had to withhold a lot of intimacy, intimacy that was hard to deny both herself and him, intimacy that she yearned for. Tonight all of her planning and scheming would finally pay off. It would be worth the wait and worth the work. She was *so* in love.

A rustle of sound came from the nave beyond the changing room door, where Rob and Shelley were busy working on the decorations. She could hear Shelley's muffled laughter followed by her words, "I'll check with Vicky." With an expectant smile on her face, Vicky turned on the pink plush-covered stool and waited for Shelley to open the door.

Shelley stuck her head into the room and grinned. Her shoulder-length black hair swung in front of her face and she reached up to tuck the dark mass behind her ear. "The pews are bedecked and positively bedazzling. My husband informs me there are three rolls of ribbon left. I wanted to use them to decorate the walls but Rob thinks we should save it for Brady. In case he wants to tie you up tonight."

Vicky crossed her legs, laughing. "Don't you dare waste any of that ribbon on the walls," she scolded her soon-to-be sister-in-law. "And make sure your husband passes that suggestion along to his brother."

Shelley's smile wrinkled her lightly freckled nose and twinkled in her foam-green eyes. "I guess we're done here, then, until tonight. It's going to be the sweetest little ceremony in the entire history of small weddings."

Vicky's half-formed reply was interrupted when her cell phone started playing *Here Comes the Bride*. She made a grab for it, pulling the phone from beneath the lacey veil she'd draped across the top of the vanity. "It's a text message from Brady," she squealed, pressing a button to display his message while Shelley stepped into the room and looked over her shoulder.

Vicky read the message. Then read it again as her heart stopped beating.

"What the..." Shelley muttered at her back, her voice stunned. "What on Earth?"

Vicky shook her head slowly as she gazed at her cell phone. The message contained only seven words. But they were the most desolating words Vicky had ever seen in her lifetime.

This couldn't be happening.

It couldn't be!

With a trembling voice, she read Brady's message aloud. "I'm sorry, Vicky. I can't marry you."

Chapter One

"Are you okay?" Rob asked, his voice breaking across Brady's consciousness like a drenching blast of ice-cold water.

From his seat on the bed Brady grimaced at his brother, who stood framed in the bedroom doorway. Rob didn't look pleased. And nobody could do edgy and pissed-off like Brady's older brother. Nobody could glower quite as well as he could, either. With his dark complexion and ink-black hair, Rob's diamond blue eyes blazed from beneath his brows like frigid twin laser beams.

Without waiting for Brady's answer, Rob closed the door behind him and stepped into the room they'd shared when they were teenagers. He was dressed in his customary form-fitting black jeans, brick-red cowboy boots stitched with heavy black thread, and a very white, very casual, long-sleeved shirt that had probably cost close to two hundred dollars. "I've just come from the church," he said, his tone accusatory.

Brady rubbed his palms over the coarse denim of his blue jeans, a heavy sense of disaster closing in around him, knowing what was coming, powerless to stop it, feeling that he'd brought this down upon himself and that, if his older brother was going to give him hell, he probably had it coming to him.

After glancing around the room their mother had recently redecorated, Rob singled out a chair beside the highboy dresser against the far wall. His long stride took him across the hardwood floors where he lowered himself into the chintz-upholstered French provincial chair. "Vicky's a great girl," he ventured in five precise syllables.

"Vicky's a great girl," Brady agreed in a flat voice. "Did she get my message?"

Rob snorted. "Yeah. She got your message, all right."

The next question was a bit harder than the first. "Is she okay?"

Rob shrugged one shoulder. With his booted feet planted on the floor, he slouched in the chair and let his knees fall open while he lifted a hand to his face and studied his fingernails. "Stunned," he answered ruthlessly. "I left Shelley with her. Her family won't be getting to the church before five so I told the girls to sit tight until I'd talked to you. What's going on, man?"

Brady braced himself while staring fixedly at the laces on his black hiking boots. "I can't do it. I can't marry her."

Rob's voice was stern as he moved his gaze from his fingernails to his brother. "Isn't it getting a little late to change your mind? The wedding's at seven."

"Vicky deserves more," Brady rasped, crossing his arms over his white T-shirt, feeling desperate and determined. "More than I can give her. She deserves to be loved." He raised his grim gaze to his brother's face.

Silently, Rob returned his look.

"I'm a fuck-up, aren't I?"

Rob nodded slowly, his expression turning contemplative. "Yeah," he agreed with a faint burr of affection. "But what does that have to do with anything?"

"Everything. I've always been a fuck-up. You were *vale-dic*-torian. I was just...a *dick*."

"You were never a dick," Rob countered softly.

"I was always doing the wrong thing, while you were—"

Rob shook his head. "I did the safe thing, Brady. The acceptable thing. I was never as brave as you. Don't kid yourself. You did the *right* thing. You were *always* going around doing the right thing. *That's* what landed you in so much trouble all the time."

"I got suspended three times," Brady argued in a low voice. "I spent my entire high school career grounded."

"Yeah. You were suspended. Once for smashing Goodrich into the lockers. He deserved it. He was always picking on...what was his name? The nerdy kid?"

"Iverson."

"Yeah. Iverson. Then there was the time you were suspended for fighting in the parking lot. You stopped Trent and Rigby from killing Joey."

"They weren't killing him," Brady muttered.

"He was on the ground and they were kicking him in the face! I'd have stepped in, too, if I'd been there!"

"Nobody liked Joey Shipton."

"You don't kick a guy when he's down," Rob stated firmly.

Brady lifted his shoulders in a half-hearted shrug.

Rob chuckled, his smile wry. "And Emily Baker told me about the day you shoved Dawson over the cafeteria counter. I heard he looked good in orange."

"Macaroni and cheese," Brady murmured.

Rob snickered softly. "It must have been great. He was *such* a jerk. Emily said you came up behind him while he was dissing a girl in the lunch line. You picked him up and slammed his ass into the hot food trays. What did you tell him?" Rob took a moment to recall the words his brother had shot out at Dawson Meyers ten years earlier. "*Why do you call her fat? She doesn't call you stupid.*"

Brady hung his head as Rob continued swiftly. "And now you have your own restaurant," Rob reminded his brother.

"That *you* helped me buy."

"You're paying the loan back at six percent. That's a good investment for me. Give yourself a break, Brady. Forget high school."

Brady blew out a sigh as he ran a hand back through his collar-length hair. "I wish I could."

"Why don't you tell me what this is all about?"

"You wouldn't understand. I'm not even sure *I* understand."

"Try me."

His mouth drew into a tight line as he searched for words. "I love Vicky. But I'm not sure that's why I asked her to marry me. I think I asked her to marry me because...she reminds me of someone else."

"Someone else?"

Brady nodded, swallowing hard. "Someone I've never really been able to forget. Someone I haven't been able to put behind me."

Rob stretched his legs out in front of him and crossed his cowboy boots at the ankles. "Okay," he said. "Start talking."

His cheeks warmed as he pulled in a deep breath. "Sex is great," he offered, catching his brother's eye as he started tentatively.

Rob nodded. "That's a given."

"I've been with a lot of different women."

"Don't brag," Rob admonished his brother while encouraging him with a satyr's grin.

Brady relaxed a bit and smiled. "But—I don't know how to explain—there's nothing that can match the excitement of...those first sexual encounters." He searched his brother's vibrant blue eyes. "Do you know what I mean?"

Rob's forehead creased into a thoughtful frown. "I think so. I'm not sure I agree with you...but I think I know what you're getting at."

"What I'm trying to say is that...no matter how great sex is, it can never be as wonderful as that first handful of breast or that first taste of pussy." He hesitated, trying to find the right words. "There's nothing like those first groping attempts at...at..."

"Getting fucked?"

Brady nodded, focusing his gaze on the scuffed toe of his boot as he warmed to the words. "And intimacy. Each dark secret discovered, unfolded. Each tiny step toward that first fuck. The first time you got your hand inside a girl's bra." He smiled again. "The first time you got her bra off! The first time you swiped your finger through her

pussy and found her opening. The feeling, the excitement, thickening your blood as you hit each of those highs and traveled deeper, got closer. Your heart racing, your pulse drumming in your ears, your body dampening with need. Your dick as hard as a rock and as dark as a stick of dynamite, ready to explode.”

Rob laughed sympathetically. “Oh man. Somebody really got to you, didn’t she?”

He swallowed and went on. “My first fuck,” he said softly.

“Wait a minute,” Rob interrupted, uncrossing his ankles and leaning forward to rest his forearms on his knees. “Are you trying to tell me you’re still in love with Emily Baker?”

He shook his head. “Emily wasn’t the first.”

Rob blinked with surprise.

“Her name was Torrie.”

“Torrie?” Rob exclaimed, his eyes narrowing as he appeared to search his memory. “I don’t remember a Torrie. Did she go to school with us?”

“You wouldn’t remember her,” he said quietly. “She was only there for a month at the beginning of my senior year—after you’d graduated. She dropped out after...an incident at school.”

“What was her last name?”

Brady snorted unhappily. “I’m not sure.”

“You had sex with her...and you didn’t even know her name?”

“I didn’t know she was going to just walk out of my life!”

“Yeah, but—you didn’t know her name?”

“It might have been March,” he muttered. “I don’t know.”

“March?”

“I don’t know,” he fired back, slashing his open hand through the air. “But the first time I was with her, she had *March* written on her palm in blue ink.”

Rob gave him a quiet stare. "Why would somebody write their name on their hand?"

"I don't know." Brady shook his head then lifted his gaze to meet his brother's. Rob was right. Why would someone write their own name on their hand? It didn't make sense. He should have realized that earlier. Damn, he should have realized that years ago. He'd wasted years looking for a Torrie March. "You're right."

"Was there a teacher at the school named March? A counselor? A secretary? Maybe it was a reminder for her to meet with one of them."

"No," he answered slowly. "There wasn't anybody named March working at the school."

"Well, what did your Miss March look like?" Rob demanded. "I must have seen her around town."

Grimly, Brady nodded. "You might have seen her but you'd never have noticed her."

"Why not?"

"She wore dark, baggy clothes and kept to herself," he told his brother. "And she was...heavy."

Rob's jaw dropped a full inch. "The girl in the lunch line?"

Brady flinched, then nodded again. "She disappeared after I threw Dawson into the...macaroni and cheese." He sighed, groping for the words that might explain what she'd meant to him. "But she was my first and she was perfect. Since then, I've been with other women but I've never been with anyone like her. There's never been anyone who made me feel the way she did. No one has ever felt as good on my dick."

He halted, unable to explain it any better than that. Rob probably thought he was losing it. He took another deep breath before launching into the full story. "It all started on Thursday, September ninth, 1998. My senior year. I only had a few classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays so I didn't have to be at school before noon. I was driving my

old Corvair back then—that was back before it was stolen—and parking in the lower lot. When I got out of the car, Edgerton’s car lay dead ahead, the only other car on the lower level. You remember Edgerton?”

“Yeah, I remember him,” Rob snorted.

“He was in there with Liz Finch. They had the back seats down and were going at it in the back of his mother’s SUV. Liz’s foot was braced against the rear gate window. It was September and still warm. The side windows were open and I could hear Liz moaning. As I came alongside the car, I could see her long legs wrapped around Edgerton. He was on top of her, rocking into her. By the time I cleared the parking lot I was as hard as a rock.”

Rob cocked a brow. “Go on.”

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Brady pulled open the school’s side door. Ahead of him lay a long empty corridor. The bell for fourth period hadn’t yet rung. Spiked out to the max, he strode the wide, linoleum-tiled hallway toward the central commons and the stairs leading to the upper level classrooms. The principal rounded the corner at the far end of the corridor and Brady groaned, wondering if a raging hard-on was grounds for suspension. Mrs. Green had always had it in for him. Reaching for the second door on his right, he yanked it open and stepped inside the dark storeroom.

The narrow, windowless storage room was tucked between the school’s two art classrooms. Shelves lined both walls, where several years’ worth of ceramic projects collected dust. Although there were two more doors at the other end of the room, allowing access from either art room, the long storage closet was seldom used. There was a small stainless steel washbasin on the far wall and that is what Brady headed for as the bell sounded through the school halls. At that point, he felt as though he was burning alive, arousal roiling in his blood, aware only of the overwhelming need searing his lower body.

With his butt hitched on the edge of the sink, he closed his eyes, fighting for command of his hormone-racked body, planning to “wait it out” in the storeroom until either the principal was out of range or he had himself under control again.

But neither of those eventualities came to pass.

The door on his right opened suddenly and he almost shouted in surprise. His cock surged in panic and he fought down the mounting orgasm, grabbing the sink so tightly, it was a wonder his fingers didn’t leave dents in the sturdy metal basin. With his heart thundering loud enough to drown out the high school marching band on its best day, he stared into the darkness.

Someone was standing just inside the room. She hadn’t yet seen him. He had been shielded behind the door when she opened it. But now the door was closed and, in the darkness, it appeared as though her back was turned to him. He wasn’t sure.

But it was a girl, of that he was certain. He could hear her crying.

And he was trapped at the end of the room while she stood between him and all three exits. His cock pulsed thickly, edgy and angry as blood continued to pound its way into his erection. She was standing about eight inches away. It was damn fucking awkward. Brady cleared his throat.

She spun in the darkness. “Who’s there?” she croaked, following those words with a shaky sniff.

“It’s Brady. Brady Brooks,” he murmured, hoping like hell a teacher—or worse, the principal—wasn’t going to walk in on them. “Are you...all right?”

She threw herself into his arms. Right into his arms. Talk about bad timing. He was hard as a rock, just about swimming in hormones, horny enough to fuck a post—and the girl threw herself right into his arms!

She stood there, sobbing into his chest, her arms wrapped around his waist as he patted her back awkwardly. “It’s all right,” he murmured. “It’s all right,” he repeated, wondering who she was and if it was, in fact, all right. He stroked her hair, his hand sliding through the shoulder-length silk as she poured out her grief on his shoulder. She

smelled good. Not flowery, but fresh and warm—like a sunny summer day or a kitchen with a long delicious history. She felt good as she shuddered in his arms. Enticingly soft and helplessly female. She was plastered up against him, her young breasts squashed against his chest, her lush belly cradling his monstrous hard-on. He might have felt embarrassed if he weren't so desperately horny.

His nerve endings were scraped raw with a scorching male need for completion and he'd just been handed the cure. His hands were full of soft, plush, warm female and the fact wasn't lost on his cock, which continued to surge and expand as she trembled against him. The light friction of her shimmering body was almost enough to make him come inside his jeans and more than enough to drive him out of his mind when he didn't.

Stuck there, on the anguished edge of bliss, he just kept stroking her, calming her with his palms. Eventually she stopped crying. Still, he continued stroking her back, her arms, her back again, lower this time, over the top of her buttocks, down the sides of her hips, back up again, over her arms. It felt good. *She* felt good. Too good to stop.

But she didn't seem to want him to stop. She pressed against him quietly as he swept his hand low across her bottom. She was so...lush. So deliciously feminine. So soft to the touch as he ran his palms over her and explored to his heart's content, further stoking his body's growing demand for release.

She shifted in his arms and gazed up at him. By that time, his eyes had adjusted to the dim light and he could make out her features. Her hair was dark. She wore a black T-shirt and black, baggy jeans looped with a few silver chains. He'd seen her around school but hadn't paid much attention to her. Her name was Torrie, he recalled.

He smiled down on her. "Feel better?" he asked.

She didn't answer. She just continued to look up at him with her dark eyes. Within her limpid gaze there glowed a vulnerable softness.

He knew it was time to move on but his eyes caught on her mouth and he couldn't make the jump. He stared down at her luscious full lips, gleaming softly in the dim light

that had found its way beneath the doors. He gave her an encouraging squeeze, meaning to separate himself from her but she leaned toward him and her lips fluttered across his chin. He froze, startled, achingly aware that he was standing on the edge of something that must either stop there or go all the way.

He hesitated then dipped his head for a taste. It was wonderful. He'd kissed girls before but this was different because this kiss tasted of sex. It was in the kiss, communicated in no uncertain terms as his lips slid across her mouth. With that one pass, he told her of his need. With that one kiss, she told him of hers. Guilt cast a momentary shadow across his conscience. He was talking about sex. She was asking for more. Acceptance. Love. Friendship.

But it was too late to turn back. Her fate had been sealed the moment she'd returned his kiss. He reacted as any normal young male with a raging hard-on might be expected to react. His hips thrust forward as he groaned into her mouth and reached for her breasts, his hands sliding beneath her T-shirt and gliding upward.

It felt so good. All of it. Each delicious step they took together as he explored her body in erotic increments. Wonderful, unexpected surprises were revealed to him in the heady moments that followed—things previously heard from other guys but never fully believed until then. Like the erect nipples jutting against his palm—just as bold and hungry and susceptible to arousal as was his cock.

He backed her up against the door through which she'd entered and together they fought her T-shirt over her head. Her big black pants were loose and slid over her hips easily and, as they fell to the floor, he thanked her with a long, heartfelt kiss—flattening her lips with his mouth, probing inside her parted lips to lash her tongue with his.

And everything that happened after that was the best thing that had ever happened to him in his life up to that point—and far better than anything that had ever happened to him since then. For years later, when he dreamed, he dreamed of that afternoon. And when he wished, he wished to somehow re-experience the long, passion-filled, heart-shattering moments he'd spent pressed up against the door with Torrie.

"Oh," she murmured after they'd finished together. "Oh, Brady."

He found her mouth again and pressed a long series of worshipping kisses into her delicious lips, then leaned his damp forehead against hers and tried to get his breath. He felt so damn awed by the whole experience. She had been a virgin. He had barely gotten the condom on in time. Yet somehow it had all turned out so perfect. "Why were you crying?" he finally asked in a whisper.

"It's nothing," she answered in a low voice. "People can be so...mean sometimes. But they probably didn't mean for me to overhear them. I just walked into the ceramics room at the wrong time."

"I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault," she said softly.

"I'm still sorry," he told her. "I'm sorry you're sad. I'm sorry you were hurt."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Chapter Two

"And that was it," Rob stated, the sound of his voice pulling Brady back to the present. "You were in love."

"No!" he responded immediately. "Not that I realized, anyway. At the time I felt...gratitude. Tenderness, maybe. It wasn't until later on that I realized I was in trouble. After Torrie disappeared, I started going out with Emily Baker. But I...missed Torrie. It didn't happen right away. It sort of crept up on me over time. Sometimes I think it actually gets worse as the years go by."

Rob lifted his dark eyebrows. "She must have been something, for you to have fallen so hard after one fuck."

He shook his head. "We met more than once," he admitted quietly. "Maybe two or three more times. When I opened the storeroom door a week later, she was there waiting for me."

Rob snorted softly. "You're telling me you don't remember whether it was two or three times?"

Brady gave him a look of surrender. "Three times," he admitted. "And I remember every moment and every detail of those three times. And no matter how many women I fuck, it's never, *never* been anything like that."

His brother gave this some thought before he finally spoke. "I guess that's not too surprising," he finally said.

"It isn't?"

Rob shook his head. "In addition to being your first girl, she had something else going for her."

Brady waited for his brother to go on.

I've seen the women you've dated since high school. They were all like Emily."

"What do you mean?"

Rob shrugged. "They might have looked good but they probably didn't *feel* as good. Large women just feel good when you're inside them. When you're on top of them and their belly fills the hollow of your groin. When you shove into them and their soft inner thighs smother the last three inches of your shaft—the three inches that don't exactly fit inside. And inside, there's nothing sweeter in the world. Slender women are hot and wet. But the difference is like apples and oranges. Oranges are more...succulent. Those thick, juicy lips wrapping around your dick as you plow your cock through all that warm, feminine flesh."

He gave his brother a wry smile. "You've been spoiled."

"Shelley spoils me," he admitted with a quiet smile. "At any rate, if Torrie was big, I guess that explains why you were attracted to Vicky."

Brady shook his head. "Vicky isn't as big as Torrie was. And her hair is blonde. Torrie had dark hair. I don't see *how* she can remind me of Torrie, and yet somehow she does." Brady squinted at his brother. "She would have been a knockout if she'd lost a little weight. Edgerton would have been all over her."

"You mean a knockout like Vicky?"

Brady lifted one shoulder in a defensive gesture.

"So what's wrong? You've been dating Vicky several months now."

He nodded. "Ever since she started waiting tables for me."

"But the sex just isn't as good?"

Brady was silent. He couldn't truthfully answer that question.

"You *have* had sex with her, haven't you?"

"Yes and no," Brady muttered.

"What do you mean, yes and no?"

He sighed. "She...more or less seduced me the first night on the job, after all the other employees had cleaned up and gone home. She went down on me in my office. And we've covered a few more bases since then, but we've never gone all the way."

"You're kidding!" Rob growled, rubbing his knuckles across his chin. "Has she been holding out? Do you think she's...saving it for her wedding night?"

"I don't think so," he answered after a moment's thought. "I don't think she's that old-fashioned. It's more like she doesn't really want me to see her body. You know how women are, always turning the lights out right when things start getting interesting." He shook his head then brushed back the thick lock of brown hair that had fallen over his eye.

"She's probably just shy about...taking her clothes off. Most women are. Even the ones who are built like centerfold models. But maybe that's why you're getting cold feet, now. I know *I'd* certainly be hesitant to marry a woman I'd never had sex with. Maybe you feel like...you've been hurried into this marriage. Maybe you feel like you don't have all the information you need."

"Maybe," he allowed with a troubled sigh.

The fact was that he'd been reluctant to have sex with Vicky. He was afraid that whatever they had going between them wouldn't stand the test of intimacy. In the past, that was generally the point at which his relationships had fallen apart. Because, when it came to sex, every other woman had been a disappointment. None of them could give him what Torrie had given him. And none of them "did it" for him the way Torrie had.

"But I don't think so," he finally added. "We've...gone far enough for me to think that Vicky would be a hot little bundle in bed. She likes sex. She...comes on a touch."

Rob's eyebrows shot upward. "She comes on a touch? Sounds like she likes *you!*"

* * * * *

Vicky sat in the passenger seat of her car and stared at the road, silent except for the occasional direction that would guide Shelley to her apartment.

"Thanks for driving," she said, realizing she'd forgotten to thank Shelley earlier.

After Rob had left the church, Vicky had been in a daze. There hadn't seemed to be any reason to hang around the church anymore. On the other hand, there hadn't seemed to be any reason to go back to the apartment to pick up the flowers she'd left there to keep fresh until the ceremony. It had been Shelley who'd suggested they return to Vicky's place for a cup of tea while they waited to hear from Rob.

"No problem," Shelley answered warmly.

"I guess I should call my family," she finally suggested, dreading the prospect.

Shelley sent her a quick glance as her eyebrows pulled together in sympathy. "Let's wait a bit longer and see what Rob finds out."

"I should have known this would happen," Vicky whispered, gazing at her fingers curled in her lap. "I should have known it was too good to be true. But, God. I wanted to believe. I wanted so badly to believe that it was true—that Brady was in love with me." With one hand, she reached up to squeeze the bridge of her nose.

It was over. It was hard to face, but it was over. Even if Rob could get Brady to change his mind and go through with the wedding ceremony, Vicky would always know that he hadn't wanted to marry her. It was a fact that would haunt their marriage and doom it to almost-certain failure right from the start.

"I'm sure he wouldn't have asked you to marry him if he wasn't in love with you."

"Evidently he changed his mind," Vicky sighed, turning her head to gaze out the side window.

"How could he change his mind? He only asked you two weeks ago!"

"Sixteen days," Vicky sighed again as she corrected her. "I don't know. I just know it isn't fair. I've loved him for so long."

Shelley sent her another quick look. "You guys have been together for about six months now, haven't you?"

"Yeah. That's how long we've been together," she admitted, rubbing her fingers into her forehead.

"I'm sure Rob can help Brady sort through all this."

Maybe. But what difference would it make? How could she marry Brady now, even if he did change his mind? "This is it," she told Shelley, lifting her hand and motioning a right turn into the parking lot in front of her apartment.

After Shelly had pulled the silver Saturn between two white lines, they climbed the stairs that rose through the center of the modern apartment complex. She unlocked the door and Shelley followed her inside. "I'll make the tea," Vicky offered.

"Let me do it," Shelley insisted, joining her in the kitchen. She took over after Vicky had put the water on to boil and had set out the teacups along with a box of teabags.

Stepping from the small kitchen into the adjoining living room, Vicky dropped into a wide, square, overstuffed chair.

"Are these yours?" Shelley asked suddenly, her gaze caught on a grouping of clay pots that sat on the half-wall separating the kitchen from the living room.

"I made them, if that's what you mean."

"They're beautiful!" Shelley exclaimed. "Rob would love them! When he sees that black one, he's going to want one just like it."

"Maybe I could make him one," she mumbled, her lips turning downward as she wondered if, after today, she'd ever see Rob and his wife again. "Or he could have that one, if you think he'd like it."

"Why don't you make him one?" Shelley suggested with a smile that seemed to say they'd be seeing each other again.

Gratefully, Vicky returned her smile.

Shelley carried one of the delicate china cups into the living room. After placing it on the glass-topped coffee table in front of Vicky, she returned to the kitchen for her

own tea. "The thing is," she started hesitantly, "I don't know how to say this, but I've always...wondered about Brady."

"What do you mean?" Vicky asked, staring listlessly at the bunches of violets decorating the pale blue teacup.

"I don't know how to explain it. It just seems as though he's...haunted at times."

She turned to look at Shelley. "Haunted?"

"Like...there's someone else."

Vicky stared at her. "You think he's seeing another woman?"

Quickly, Shelley shook her head. "Not exactly. Brady's not the type to fool around behind your back. He's too sincere and honest. I just wonder if there's something from his past..."

"Something? Or someone?"

"I'm probably just being silly," Shelley answered on a light groan. "Whenever I've mentioned it before, Rob's always insisted I'm imagining things. And he's known all of Brady's girlfriends from high school on down. He says there was never anyone special before you. I'm sure he's right. After all, he knows Brady better than anyone." She reached across the table and patted Vicky's hand. "Brady's probably just having some sort of panic attack."

"Brady doesn't panic," she argued loyally.

"I just can't understand!" Shelley exclaimed, after a short silence. "You two seem to be made for each other. What about sex. Does it work?"

Does it work! At Shelley's question, images rushed in to fill Vicky's head, some shadowed and secret, some crisp and fresh. Brady panting as they pressed together in delicious hungry surges, whispering dark, gritty promises in her ear while he dragged his fever-hot skin over her soft flesh and rubbed restlessly against her. The unbearably tight, full feeling—almost painful at first—that built inexorably into pleasure and ultimately into wild, thrashing, silent release. Brady leaning back against the desk in his

office at the restaurant, resting his weight on his hands behind him while gazing down on her, his heavy cock jutting fiercely from his open pants, bulging with veins, reaching for her mouth.

“Brady’s a wonderful lover. Right from the very start, he was more concerned about my pleasure than his own,” she answered, her voice wistful, her thoughts drifting back.

She had waylaid him that first night on the job, dragging her feet and hanging around the restaurant, making a mission out of cleaning the wait station.

With the last of the customers gone, Brady had stripped off his shirt and tie, donned a stiff white apron and gone to work in the kitchen. His arms and shoulders had bulged with strength beneath his close-fitting white T-shirt, the short sleeves almost bursting apart where the thin fabric pulled tightly around his biceps. As she had straightened the shelves and watched him from the corner of her eye, he’d moved about the kitchen quickly, loading pots and pans into the dishwasher while the kitchen staff finished their nightly chores and punched out.

She’d been nervous, afraid of rejection, but determined to make her move and catch his eye before someone else beat her to the prize...

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Vicky smoothed her hands over the ruffled white apron covering the full skirt of her dress. Thank God Brady had picked out a cute uniform for his waitresses—a dark blue and maroon madras with a crisp white collar and deep scoop neck. Tiny white buttons pulled the bodice tightly together across her chest.

“You look hot,” she told him after pulling in a deep, bracing breath. She gave him what she hoped was a sultry smile as she rested her elbows on the high counter separating the kitchen from the wait station.

Steam poured from the dishwasher as he yanked the door open and pulled out the last tray of cookware. “I am,” he said after checking her eyes. The corner of his mouth

twitched with humor as he gave her an interested look. "What are you doing here? Hasn't the wait staff gone home?"

"Yeah, but we drew straws before everyone left—to see who got to hang around and seduce the boss."

"Last time I looked, there wasn't any straw around here," he pointed out with an utterly male snort.

"A minor detail," she scoffed, waving a hand in the air.

"Well, I'm glad Brian didn't win," he grunted.

Vicky laughed, relaxing a bit at his obvious willingness to exchange banter.

"So you won?" he asked as he filled his strong arms with pots and pans.

"I don't know. I'll tell you after I seduce you."

He cut another interested glance her way, hesitating before he said, "I don't generally...date employees."

"I've been thinking I'll quit," she offered swiftly.

"You've only just started!" he laughed as he reached above his head and hung a large frying pan over the central stove.

"Well, if you don't *want* me to quit..."

He shot her a grin. It looked like an I-don't-want-you-to-quit grin and it almost brought her to her knees—it was that devastating. With a bolstered sense of courage, she forged ahead. "It's not meant to be a full-blown date, anyhow. Just a quick seduction."

"Can you make it a full-blown seduction?" he tempted, flashing her a darkly sinful glance.

"If that's what you want, I'll g-give it my best," she answered, her voice unexpectedly catching on a shy stutter that came out of nowhere and rattled her confidence and made her feel like an inexperienced schoolgirl.

As she sank her teeth into her bottom lip, his head jerked up and his eyes narrowed on her, as though searching for something.

"So, where's your dishwasher tonight?" she asked quickly.

Still he searched her face as he answered slowly, "I sent him home early. He had a date."

"That was nice of you."

"I know what it's like to be a teenager and in love," he told her. Then, as though he realized what he'd said and was embarrassed about his confession, he lifted one shoulder and sent her a dismissive smile.

"Damn. You're a pretty romantic guy, aren't you?"

"I can be," he answered.

Vicky watched while he hung up the rest of the pots and pans, her heart hammering so loud it was a wonder it wasn't rattling the counter she was leaning against. "Wanna show me?" she finally suggested, then held her breath as she waited for his reaction.

He gave her a sharp look, his cobalt eyes drilling into her for several seconds as he untied his apron and threw it at the open laundry bag. Reaching for the hem of his T-shirt, he worked it up over his rugged six-pack abs, then on over his head. With the clean white fabric balled in his fist, he pressed the T-shirt against the damp stubble on his chin. "Meet me in my office," he told her.

How she made the trip to his office, she'd never know. Her legs felt like overcooked noodles as she made her way out of the wait station and across the restaurant in an absolute haze of nervous anticipation. Brady was there waiting for her when she stepped through the office door—leaning back against the desk, his T-shirt lying in a crumpled ball behind him, his arms crossed over his muscle-ridged chest.

Feeling suddenly unsure of herself, Vicky glanced around the small windowless room. Inside his tiny office, there was barely room for the scuffed wooden desk with one chair behind it and another in front.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” he asked, drawing her gaze.

She looked up at his deeply bronzed face, the firm line of his sensuous mouth, the hard angle of his strong jaw roughened with a sexy shadow of dark stubble. His heavy eyelashes framed his deep blue eyes. Within his gaze, she read his own hesitancy, as well as a smoldering flicker of heat.

Yes, she wanted this. She’d offered him a full-blown seduction and if he wanted to get blown, she was going to do her damndest to see it through. She’d never given a man oral sex before—in fact it had been ten years since she’d had any sort of sex—but she’d read enough romance novels that she had a fair idea of how to go about it. And she wanted to do it. She wanted to push him over the edge with nothing more than her mouth. She wanted to excite him and make him come. Feel him come. Watch him come.

“I’m sure,” she murmured, pitching her voice to a low, husky purr as she dropped to her knees in front of him. Before he had a chance to react, she slid her hands up over his thighs toward his crotch. “Am I moving too fast for you?” she asked at his sudden, sharp intake of breath.

“No,” he answered, his voice scraping low and gravelly. “I’m just not sure what to make of you.”

“Never been seduced before?” she teased him, arching an eyebrow his way.

“Not recently,” he murmured, reaching out with one hand to thread his fingers into her hair.

Holding his cobalt gaze, she brushed her hand over the front of his gray dress slacks and felt him up. She couldn’t hold back the low hum of arousal that broke from her throat when she found his wide cock stiffening inside his pants. As she rubbed her open palm into the hard ridge, it stretched out into a long, hard, powerful line. Leaning forward, she tilted her head and pressed her open mouth to the bulge in his pants.

He gasped as her teeth nipped at him through the fabric of his slacks. "What are you doing?" he muttered, his voice thick with lust as he dug his hands into her hair and lifted her face.

Turning her head, she rubbed her cheek into the thick ridge that strained inside his pants. "I can't wait to get my mouth on your cock," she murmured.

A ragged groan burst from his chest as he pulled her face into his groin and held it there for several seconds. The moment he loosened his strong grip, she turned her mouth and kissed her way up his fly. With her tongue, she located the metal zipper. With her teeth, she latched on to it and tugged downward. As he leaned back and settled his palms beside his hips on the desktop, she reached up and worked on the button that closed his waistband.

Her hands were shaking by the time she finally got his pants open. With trembling fingers, she reached inside and swept her hand low, pulling his heavy weight into her grasp and handling the thick, full package that filled his low-slung cotton briefs. As tenderly as she could, she cupped his balls in her damp palm as his chest rose and fell in short, rapid breaths.

When she gazed up at his handsome face, his dark blue eyes shifted from her hands to her face then back to her hands again. His tongue flicked hungrily over his bottom lip several times as he watched her hands caress the thick bundle that weighed down his shorts.

"Touch me," he finally rasped. "Quit your damn teasing, woman, and get my cock out."

At his raw command, she hooked her little finger over the elastic edge of his briefs and pulled downward. His cock sprang free, jutting hard and high, brutally dark and purple at the head. The beautiful thick stalk looked so savagely powerful it made her mouth water and her pussy flood with a burning wash of need while her clit thrummed with dark interest. As she stared at his massive hard-on, she found herself longing to taste him, to take all that raw, masculine power inside her mouth and feel his cock

throbbing between her lips. Without thinking, she buried her face in the silky black curls at the base of his cock, while she rubbed open-mouthed kisses into his thickly-veined shaft.

“Damn,” he whispered, his voice gritty and raw. “Damn, you don’t know how good that feels.”

She wrapped her fingers around his wide root, squeezing as she stroked her hand up his delicious long length. She loved the silkiness of his flesh, the steel-hard mass, pumping blood, buried beneath the sliding skin. The feel and sight and unbelievable girth of that wicked erection made her body ache with an overwhelming craving that almost consumed her.

As she worked her hand and mouth over his cock, she heard him groan again and felt his legs stiffen. Turning her head, she saw his knuckles whiten as he grasped the edge of the desk and held on. Slowly, she moved her mouth along his shaft, feeling him surge and expand beneath her lips, feeling his skin tighten even more and his cock turn into vein-ridden stone. Bit by bit, she moved her mouth up his hard length, licking and sucking until she got to the flaring crown.

As her lips touched the molten silk of his cock head she had to stop to catch her breath, almost overcome by the carnal sensuality of the moment. Brady’s full, dark cock was so ragingly beautiful – savage in its masculinity. Her blood pulsed to a thundering cadence, urging her to submit to him her most intimate places. To offer them up to the ravaging demands of his body and his wickedly thick erection.

Her pussy burned at the thought of his possession, drenching her panties with a gush of heat as she spread her knees wide and let the slick moisture trickle down the inside of her thighs.

Hungry to experience the taste of that proud, rigid, jutting flesh, longing for its brutal thrust claiming her mouth, she flicked her tongue against the broad tip and watched breathlessly as a thick upwelling of moisture seeped from its tiny slit. She captured it quickly on her tongue and rubbed it over her lips before drawing it into her

mouth and savoring its tangy taste. With a purring sound of pleasure, she pressed her lips underneath the flaring edge of his plum-shaped crown and nibbled at the flesh stretching just beneath the crease in his engorged cock head.

A deep, guttural groan ripped from his throat—a sound of perfect agony. His hips jerked and his cock punched so far upward that she lost her hold on him. Her wet lips ended up nuzzling the sparse hairs that roughened his balls. She opened her mouth and licked his hot, rigid flesh while his hips moved jerkily, sliding his cock up and down over her parted lips.

“Fuck,” he grunted, his fingers still clutching at the desktop as his hips worked and he fed his length over her mouth.

An exhilarating sting of excitement built deep inside her cunt as she watched Brady thrusting his cock over her lips in hard, driving strokes. Her panties were soaked, her thighs slippery and slick from the liquid spilling from her pussy.

With a murmuring sound of pleasure, she tilted her head and pulled back her lips, letting him shove his erection over the smooth edge of her teeth. As she watched, he suddenly reached for his cock and grasped the root, squeezing it so tightly the veins bulged on the back of his hand.

“I’m about one lick away from coming all over your face,” he panted, roughly.

“I promised you a blow job,” she panted back.

“Well, I’ve changed my mind,” he grunted. “I’m not coming without you. Get up here on the desk and spread your legs, lady. You’re about to get the ride of a lifetime.”

“Please,” she begged softly, touching his arm and leaning forward to kiss the fingers fisted around his cock. “Please don’t stop me. I want this. I want you to fuck my mouth.”

Before he could answer, she covered him with her mouth and rubbed her tongue beneath his mushrooming tip, looking for that sensitive spot again.

"Jesus," he hissed, fisting a hand in her hair so tightly that her eyes watered. With an iron grip on her head, he thrust his hips at her face and filled her mouth with thick, hard cock.

Her lips stretched wide to take the massive girth of his pulsing flesh and she moaned at the beauty and strength of the man filling her mouth. He smelled like male animal and sin, hard work and honest sweat, master and man. The power pounding between her tightly stretched lips was sweetly intoxicating in its raw, provocative sensuality.

Her mouth filled with cum and she swallowed it down. It tasted salty and sharp, potent and virile as it burned a path down her throat. Again and again she swallowed as his cock flexed and he kept coming in hot, blasting liquid surges. Finally, he pulled her mouth off his cock. Together they watched as a final upwelling of semen poured from his slit and slid down over his flesh, coating his shaft.

"Oh Brady," she murmured, leaning forward again to rub her lips over his wet flesh.

She felt his hand tighten in her hair again before he yanked her head upward. A strange, stark expression was etched into the ruggedly handsome lines of his face as he gazed down on her.

"Brady?" she whispered, afraid that she'd said or done something wrong, "what is it?"

"Nothing," he croaked after a long moment. "You just sounded...you just...it's been a long time since I felt this way with a woman," he rasped, his voice uneven and raw.

She gave him a soft smile then nuzzled her mouth into the base of his cock again.

"You should have let me fuck you," he ground out.

"No," she argued in a husky whisper. "I wanted you in my mouth."

"Come here," he said gruffly, loosening his grip on her hair and pulling her from her knees, up between his legs. With one hand gliding along her thigh, he pulled her right knee up over his left leg. Then, with a hand gripping her bottom tightly, he pulled her up his thigh.

Vicky moaned as her lust-swollen pussy dragged up his leg. Without even thinking, she started rocking on him, pushing her hungry mound against the hard muscled thigh spreading her legs.

"Oh Jesus, you're something," he muttered. "So sexy and hot."

While she rode his leg with shameless abandon, Brady loosened the buttons on the bodice of her uniform and pushed his hand inside. His rough touch sent a violent tingle racing up her spine as he dug her breasts from her tightly fitting bra. His harsh stubble grazed her sensitive flesh as he buried his face in her cleavage then turned his cheek, closed his teeth on one of her nipples and gave the rosy crest a sharp tug.

"Oh!" she shouted, her back arching in pleasure.

"Oh Jesus," he grunted. "I'd almost forgotten how much I like big tits." While he rooted between her breasts, alternately nipping at the hard buds that crested her areolas then soothing the puffy, swollen flesh with the harsh lap of his tongue, his hands slid behind her, beneath the skirt of her dress and inside the legs of her panties. His fingers bit deeply into the soft flesh of her ass as he pulled her cheeks apart and sank his fingers into her crease.

Vicky threw back her head and whimpered as he rubbed her into his leg and she drew closer to the edge of orgasm. His fingers dug deeply between her cheeks as he pulled her harder, faster, bruising her tender pussy lips as he worked her pussy over his thigh. But the ache in her outer lips was nothing compared to the hungry, scouring ache that built inside.

"Are you close?" he demanded in a rumbling growl, sinking his fingers deeper still between the cheeks of her ass. His little fingers slid over the wet flesh rimming her

vulva while his forefingers tugged at the sensitive skin that closed around the tight bud of her ass.

She groaned in answer, distracted by the delicious sensation of his fingers stroking temptingly at both of her intimate openings.

He chuckled darkly, collecting the juices from her streaming cunt and rubbing them into the sensitive skin surrounding her tight kiss. "Tell me you're close, sweetheart."

"Oh!" she shouted as one of his fingers slid around her tiny puckered hole. "God, yes," she sobbed. "Yes! I'm close."

"Then give me your ass," he growled, stretching her vulva wide while reaming her hole with the sudden thrust of two fingers.

She grunted as she canted her ass for him and took his fingers deep. The sexy, erotic burn of his thick fingers stretching the tight ring of muscle pushed her into oblivion, the orgasm exploding over her as she jammed her pussy against his hard leg, crushing her clit on his thigh and writhing against him to keep the pressure rolling across the stiff knot while the pleasure broke over her nerve endings in a never-ending stream of shuddering ecstasy.

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Chapter Three

"It's just a little late to be changing your mind," Rob suggested carefully, right after he'd pointed out how much Vicky must love his brother. Rob looked around the room they'd shared as boys, his eyes focusing for a moment on one of the many baseball trophies they shared. "The folks adore Vicky. If you were still hung up on this other girl, then why didn't you do something about it a little sooner?"

"I was a teenager!" Brady exploded, bolting to his feet and throwing his hands into the air. "I didn't know I was in love with her! She'd probably been gone six months before I realized how much I missed her." His voice dropped to a soft whisper. "Before I started...longing for her."

Brady lifted his gaze to meet his brother's. "I didn't know her name. I probably wasted a lot of time looking for someone named March. I kept thinking maybe she'd find *me*. But if she were going to find me it would have happened by now. I thought after I got the restaurant, word would get around and I'd be easier to find. For the first several months after I opened The Game Trail, I kept expecting her to walk in one day. But she didn't. Since then, it's just gotten worse. I just can't seem to get over her. I thought that marrying Vicky was the answer."

"Maybe it is the answer, Brady. You're in love with Vicky."

Brady lifted his chin. "Maybe. I think so. But what if it's only because she reminds me of Torrie? That's not fair to Vicky. Rob, I need to find her."

"Brady, that was ten years ago," his brother argued, "even if you found her, it probably wouldn't be the same. You're not eighteen anymore. You'd react differently. The excitement wouldn't be there. The novelty. The first-fuck factor. It would just be...hunger and heat, at best!"

Brady's shoulders sagged, though he wasn't sure he agreed with his brother. At best, it would be love. "You're probably right," he finally said. "I just wish I could convince myself of the fact."

"Jesus, Brady. She could be married by now! With four kids! She could be dead for all we know!"

"Don't say that!" he shouted.

Rob pushed out a frustrated snort. "Just stop and think about this. You hardly even knew the girl."

He shook his head. There had been plenty of times in the past when he'd gone looking for Rob's advice. And though he'd always respected Rob's opinion, this time his brother was wrong. He knew her. He knew Torrie—the sweetness of her love as well as the sweetness of her soul. He sent his brother a sour look and said, "This from a guy who writes romance novels for a living."

Rob's expression took on a wry light. "I write romance novels for women, not men."

"Are you telling me you don't believe in love for men?"

"I didn't believe in it before I met Shelley," he admitted after a reluctant moment of silence.

"Then try to imagine losing Shelley for ten years," Brady told his brother and watched with no little satisfaction as a shiver rattled Rob's long frame.

"You know," Rob pointed out with a surrendering sigh, "most men don't marry their first...love."

"They used to," Brady countered, digging in like a pit-bull, "a few generations ago. And I can't help but wonder if they weren't better off going to bed every night with their first girl."

Rob gave his brother a wry smile. "I don't know. I just know I'm glad I ended up with Shelley."

"Trust you to be happy," Brady muttered on a soft growl. "You always do the right thing."

"Yeah," Rob admitted reluctantly, "if it were me, I wouldn't leave Vicky standing at the alter. At this late stage, I'd do the acceptable thing. I'd marry Vicky and try to forget about Torrie. But," he inserted sharply, "that might not be the *right* thing to do." Digging in his pocket, he pulled out his cell phone and flipped it open.

"What are you doing?" Brady asked.

"I'm going to find your old girlfriend," Rob stated.

He lifted his head. "How are you going to do that?"

"I'm going to call everyone I ever knew in high school. And every teacher who still lives around here. Every administrator. What was the principal's name? Green?"

Brady nodded.

"What else can you tell me about Torrie?"

"That's it," he said slowly. "About five-six, black hair."

"Eyes?"

"I'm not sure. It was dark," he hurried to explain.

"You never saw her in the halls?"

"Only once, at a distance."

"What about the cafeteria? You saw her in the lunch line when Dawson—"

"Her back was turned to me. I heard what Dawson said and saw red. When I was finished with him, I turned around to talk to her but she'd taken off and was halfway across the cafeteria."

"I'll find her," Rob growled. "But if she's married or dead, or serving in Iraq, you marry Vicky at the end of the day. Okay?" His gaze was severe as his eyes locked on his brother's.

"Okay," Brady answered, scraping a hand back through his thick hair. "But I can't stay here. Dad will be in here next, asking me what the hell is going on."

Rob got to his feet and dusted off his knees without thinking. "Can I drop you off somewhere?"

He nodded. "You might think I'm nuts, but I want to go back to the school, if you could give me a lift. Just...don't tell anybody where I am."

"Brady, it's Saturday! The place will be locked up."

"Yeah, but Joey works there on weekends."

"Joey?" Rob questioned, his eyes narrowing into vivid blue slits. "Joey Shipton?"

"He has a weekend job there as a janitor."

"Is he still a jerk?" Rob asked with a sharp snort.

Brady gave him a wan smile. "You know Joey."

Rob grinned. With an arm around his brother's shoulder, he herded him through the bedroom door.

* * * * *

After dropping Brady off at the bottom of the school steps and watching to make sure his brother got inside the doors, Rob glanced at his watch. Noon. He still had seven hours before the wedding. He gave Shelley a call on the way back to his parents' house, to find out where she was and to tell the two women to hold tight.

Although Shelley plied him for details, he kept his answers deliberately vague, still hoping he could somehow fix this thing and deliver Brady to the church before seven o'clock, ready and willing to exchange vows with Vicky.

He was determined to find his brother's old girlfriend, convinced that Brady just needed some sort of closure to a relationship that had ended suddenly—too suddenly for his young, idealistic heart. With any luck, after ten years, this Torrie would be happily married to someone else, or deeply involved in her career, or simply not interested in Brady anymore.

If he could just find her and get her on the phone, maybe she could give Brady permission to move on.

When Rob got back home, he grabbed the local phone book from a hall cupboard and tossed it on the dining room table. The dog-eared book skidded across the polished cherry wood surface and knocked a few papers onto the thickly carpeted floor. Leaning over, Rob snatched up the envelope and card from the floor, noting that it was one of Brady's wedding invitations. He returned the papers to the center of the table, setting the heavy, cream-colored card on top of the neat, square envelope.

Then he pulled out a chair and went to work. Two hours later, he'd talked to three teachers, one administrator and several old friends from school. His last conversation had produced Emily Baker's phone number—she was married but her parents still lived in town. Her mother was happy to help out once he'd identified himself and reminded her that he was Brady Brooks' older brother. He dialed the number she'd given him and listened to the phone ringing at the other end of the line. "Pick up," he muttered. "Come on."

"Hello?"

"Emily! Emily Baker Brown?"

"Yes."

"This is Robert Brooks, from high school. How are you?"

In the background, he could hear a baby crying as Emily answered, "Rob! I'm fine. Up to my knees in toddlers. We had twins. Moira and Marilee. They're redheads just like Don's father. Did you ever meet Don? He went to—"

Same old Emily.

"No," Rob cut in. "No. Emily, I was wondering if you could help me."

"How's Brady?" Emily asked, a trace of longing softening her words.

"Fine. He's getting married today."

Her voice dropped an octave. "Really?"

"Yeah," he responded enthusiastically. "At least I hope so," he muttered under his breath.

"I can't believe it. I didn't think he'd ever marry. He always seemed so...like he could live without women. Like he could live without me, anyhow. Who's the lucky girl? Is it anyone I know? What time is the wedding? Why wasn't I invited?"

Rob nodded through all of this, silently grinding his teeth and waiting for an opening. "Emily! Listen. I need your help. I'm looking for a girl. A girl from high school."

"Well. I knew *everyone* in high school," she said.

He spared her an impatient chuckle. He could almost *see* her preening on the other end of the line. "Thaaat's what I was thinking. Emily knew everyone."

"I traveled in a large crowd," Emily cut in. "Kristen, Amanda, Karla, Stephanie, Kelsey —"

"Yeah, I know," he came back swiftly. "But this girl wasn't part of your crowd."

"Well, what group was she part of?"

"I don't think she was part of any group."

"What was her name, then?"

"Thaaat's what I need help with, Emily. She was a loner, as far as I can tell. A Goth. She was kinda heavy with black hair and —"

"You mean the girl who was in love with Brady?"

Rob stilled. "Maybe."

"Yeah. The heavy girl with baggy jeans and chains. The one with the awful dye job. She was always watching Brady with those big brown puppy-dog eyes."

"Dye job?" He groaned. "Are you telling me she colored her hair? It wasn't really black?"

"Of course she dyed her hair," Emily snickered. "She had blonde roots. Sheesh. It was obvious."

Damn! Her hair wasn't black? That didn't help a bit. "Do you remember her name?"

"Yeah. Torrie."

"Do you remember her *last* name?" he asked, grabbing the first thing available – the thick wedding invitation – and waiting with pen poised to write.

"Yeah, I remember her. She got kicked out of school for fighting in the lunch line or something. Why are you looking for her, Rob? Sheesh! If I'd known it was *you* who was looking for her, I'd have given Brady her name years ago."

What the hell? Emily had known her name all along? "Brady asked you for her name? And you never gave it to him?"

"Wellll. Try to understand, Rob. I was in love with Brady for years after he broke up with me. I wasn't about to help him find some other girl he might be interested in. Not if there was any chance we might get back together again."

Fucking hell. "What was her name?" he growled.

"Sanderson. Torrie Sanderson."

Rob dropped the phone. It clattered across the polished cherry wood and spun away from him as he grappled for it, scooped it up into his broad palm and rushed it to his ear again. "What did you say? Torrie...Sanderson?"

"Yeah. So why are you looking for *her*?"

He tucked the phone between his ear and shoulder as he made a few marks on the heavy, cream-colored paper. "Long story. Thanks for the help, Emily. Goodbye."

As he disconnected the call, his mother appeared in the dining room arch. With a bright smile, she did a little spin, modeling the pale mint-green suit she was evidently planning to wear to the wedding. Rob forced a smile onto his face and pointed at the price tag hanging from her elbow.

While she hurried away, he returned his attention to the marks he'd made on the invitation and shook his head. Moments later, when his mother came back with a pair of scissors, he rose from his chair and clipped off the white cardboard tag for her while she babbled on about the wedding.

She was so excited.

"Do you have your speech finished?" she finally demanded with a stern laugh.

He gave her a curt nod. As best man he'd been charged with the task of toasting the bride and groom at the reception. "Although I might need to tweak the ending a bit," he muttered.

Her eyebrows arched upward, questioning him. "Rob? What's going on?"

Again, he made himself smile. "Nothing you need to worry your pretty little head about," he answered, knowing that she'd hate the condescension but love the compliment. His mother was a feminist par excellence and, as a family practitioner, managed a very busy free clinic. But she wasn't above accepting flattery from her son, especially when it contained the word "pretty".

"Where's Brady?" she asked, checking her reflection in the mirror on the dining room wall and patting at the silver threads that gleamed in her dark hair. "Has he headed over to the church, already? Because the groom's really not supposed to see the bride before the wedding, you know. It's considered bad luck."

"In this case," he muttered to himself, "it will be very bad luck for the bride if the groom *doesn't* see her before the wedding."

"What was that?" His mother turned, pinning him with a sudden shrewd look.

He returned her gaze, trying to hide his concern. He'd found Brady's old girlfriend. But he wasn't sure, now, if he should share the information with his younger brother. After what he'd learned, he wasn't too certain Vicky was the right woman for Brady, after all.

If Shelley had been there, he could have talked it over with her. But Shelley was with Vicky and he could hardly have that conversation over the phone, with Vicky listening in. Next to Shelley, he valued his mother's opinion and intuition above almost all others. She was, after all, the one who'd encouraged him to write. "Mom? Do you really think Vicky..."

His mother's expression softened as his voice trailed away. "Yes. I do. I think she's a lovely girl. And I think she's perfect for Brady. Your brother's been lonely for a long time. I don't know why he dragged his heels so long finding someone but I'm glad now that he did. I'm glad he waited for Vicky."

Rob sighed. He wished he felt as certain.

"Just like I'm glad you waited for Shelley," his mother added warmly. "Where is she, by the way?"

"I'm on my way to see her now," he admitted, dropping a kiss on his mother's forehead before grabbing the invitation from the table, pocketing his cell phone and heading for the front door. Once out on the road in his classic Jaguar, Rob made a call to his wife to find out if they were still at Vicky's place. A few directions guided him to the apartment on the west side of town.

Chapter Four

Vicky watched the golden stream of steaming liquid as Shelley tipped the teapot and filled her cup again. Almost mechanically, she lifted the fine china to her lips. She'd never felt so hollow or empty in her life. Stunned. Shocked that all of her planning and maneuvering had brought her so close to the one thing she wanted more than anything else in life, only to ultimately leave her lost and alone.

As Shelley settled the heavy ceramic pot on the coffee table, a curious look fell over her face. "What's that on your hand?" she asked.

Vicky turned her wrist and showed Shelley the capital letters inked in blue ballpoint on the heel of her palm. "It's was my to-do list for today."

"H-C-A-F-W?"

"Hair. Church. Apartment. Flowers. Wedding," she explained dully. "I tend to lose notes, so I write reminders on my hand." She rubbed a thumb over the last two letters, smudging them slightly, as she turned her gaze toward the baskets of spring flowers sitting just inside the door to her apartment.

"Don't lose hope," Shelley insisted, grabbing her hand and giving it a squeeze. "Rob's on his way over. Maybe he'll have some news for us."

The words were barely out of her mouth before a heavy knock rattled the apartment door. As Vicky watched, the buxom brunette jumped to her feet and moved quickly across the living room. "That will be Rob," she announced, her voice unnaturally bright.

Rob's face was grim as he stepped across the threshold and pulled his wife into his arms. He held Shelley with a strange fervency, as though she was his anchor in the rough seas of his life. Vicky felt her heart contract with sharp yearning as she watched

Brady's brother with his wife, so obviously in love. So devoted, yet so full of strength. So tall and straight and so like his handsome brother.

"Have you been with Brady?" Shelley asked while Vicky looked on.

"Yeah," he answered, dragging a big hand back through his raven locks. His hot blue eyes cut to Vicky.

"Is he...all right?" Shelley asked.

"He's okay."

"Rob," she demanded, almost boiling over with impatience. "What's going on?"

Rob took a steadying breath before answering his wife. "Brady's in love with another woman."

"Oh!" Shelley exclaimed in a soft voice, her pale green eyes widening as her hand traveled to her mouth.

"Yeah," Rob said, pinning Vicky with his frigid gaze then forging ahead. "He lost track of her several years ago and ever since then he's been waiting for her to walk back into his life."

"Rob!" Shelley cut in, obviously trying to silence her husband for the sake of Vicky's feelings.

But Rob continued ruthlessly. "He only settled for Vicky because she *reminded* him of his old girlfriend."

Vicky gasped, feeling her heart splinter into small, sharp pieces as her stomach clenched in a painful knot. She turned her face and pinched the bridge of her nose in an attempt to halt the tears that burned at the back of her eyes. "That's probably more than I needed to know, Rob."

"I don't think so," he said in a menacingly low tone.

She turned back to face him while blinking back the tears that made him look like a watery wraith. "Rob. Today was supposed to be my wedding day. I love your brother. Learning he doesn't want to marry me is bad enough. I don't need to know all the

heartbreaking details." Her voice wobbled then broke. "Why would you come in here and tell me about the woman Brady's in love with?"

"Because I thought you should be the one to tell Brady who she is," he said, tossing a creased square of cream-colored paper in her direction. "Her name is on the card inside that envelope."

Despite her horror, Vicky's eyes were drawn to the invitation on the table. Moving in slow motion, she reached for the envelope and drew the card from its sheath. She stared at Rob's hastily scrawled note on the back of the card then opened it up. "Where is he?" she whispered.

* * * * *

Vicky cracked the door to the art storeroom and slipped through the opening. When she closed the door behind her, the latch caught with a sharp click. Inside the narrow, enclosed space it was dark but she could see Brady's tall silhouette at the other end of the room.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"It's me," she answered.

"Vicky?" There was a scrape of sound as he opened the door to his right. Thin light filtered in from the ceramics room, illuminating his troubled face as he stared at her. "What are you — Did Rob bring you here?"

She shook her head. "I came on my own."

He stood fifteen feet away, his fists balled at his sides. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. I didn't want to hurt you. Rob shouldn't have told you where I was."

She lowered her gaze as she twisted the thick square of cream-colored paper in her fingers. "He didn't tell me where you were. He was too mad at me. He said that if I couldn't find you, I didn't deserve you."

"Mad at *you*!" Brady's expression turned sharp with anger. "He has no right to be mad at you!"

"Don't be angry with your brother, Brady. He only thought that I'd been...keeping the truth from you. I don't know how to explain," she told him, her voice quavering as she moved between the shelf-lined walls and handed him the envelope. "But he sent a message with me."

He gave her an uncertain look before slipping the envelope open and pulling out the card. He shook his head. "I don't understand. It's one of our wedding invitations."

"He sent you a message," she insisted in a low mumble. "There's a note on the back of the card."

He turned the card over, scanned the reverse side and read aloud, "*Found your old girlfriend and circled her name.* Circled her name? What does he mean?"

Vicky nodded unhappily. "Open the card, Brady."

"He circled *your* name," he said slowly after opening the card. "Victoria Sanderson."

"That's right," she told him, swallowing hard. "He told me that you wouldn't marry me because you were in love with someone else. He said her name was Torrie and that she was your first love."

Brady lifted his gaze to meet his fiancée's. "You're Torrie. My Torrie."

He searched her face, her eyes. His expression was confused, suspicious and wary but beneath the layers he wore to protect himself, a glint of hope lingered at the back of his dark blue eyes. "Why?" he asked breathlessly. "Why didn't you tell me?"

She gazed at him, miserable, wanting nothing more than to run to him, wrap her arms around him and show him how much she loved him—how much she'd always loved him. But she needed him to reach for her first. "Why didn't you recognize *me*?" she asked sadly.

"You...look so different from the girl I knew. It was dark here in the storeroom but...Torrie, you had black hair!"

"I used to dye it," she admitted, feeling a bit shaken and uncertain about the conclusions she'd drawn six months ago when she'd walked into Brady's restaurant. Had she really changed that much? So much that she wouldn't be recognized nine years later? She *had* lost quite a bit of weight. She'd aged. Her face was certainly thinner and her hair was blonde now, rather than black.

"You should have told me," he said, slumping back against the small washbasin on the wall. "I feel like such an ass. Why didn't you tell me?"

"When you didn't recognize me that day I walked into your restaurant, I assumed it was because you had never cared about me! Brady, the moments I spent with you were the most precious moments of my life. When you didn't recognize me, I thought they'd meant nothing to you!"

"Oh Torrie," he whispered, finally reaching for her and drawing her into his arms. A rumbling sound of pain broke from deep in his chest as he brushed his lips across her temple and hid his face in her hair.

"I was so embarrassed. I expected you to smile. I expected you to recognize me—maybe even be glad to see me. Instead you told me the restaurant wasn't open until five. I didn't know what to say so I...so I asked for an employment application."

He groaned again as he wrapped her more tightly in his arms.

"I was afraid that you didn't want to remember me. That you were ashamed of what you'd done with Torrie Sanderson," she cried.

"No, I wasn't," he murmured. "No, I wasn't."

"You ignored me in the halls," she sobbed.

"No," he insisted, his voice strained, recalling the one time he'd seen her in the halls. He'd prepared himself to meet her gaze, averted his eyes nervously, forced them back again and started to smile. Then Emily Baker had blindsided him, grabbing his arm and spinning him around. Annoyed and frustrated, he'd glanced back at her as Emily had dragged him toward her locker. But Torrie had already lowered her gaze to the floor.

"I tried to smile at you. I was nervous. But I was never ashamed of you or what we did. I tried to talk to you that day in the cafeteria, after what happened, but you took off before I could say anything."

Her voice broke. "I don't want to go back there, Brady. I put all that behind me after my parents took me out of Belmar High. After college, I went on a weight loss program, got curves and came looking for you, thinking I could win you back. It wasn't hard to find you. Everyone in town knew about your new restaurant. Then when I walked into The Game Trail, swinging my new size-sixteen hips, and you didn't even recognize me, I was crushed! I'd spent the last four years fantasizing about how you'd react to the new, improved me. How glad you'd be to see me! And you didn't even recognize me!"

"You have blonde hair!" he mumbled, threading his fingers into her thick blonde tresses and leaning back to gaze into her eyes. "The girl I was in love with was a Goth! You had black hair! And you've lost a lot of weight. You look...different."

"I was so upset and so angry when you didn't recognize me," she continued before his words had sunk in, "that I decided that you were going down! I decided right then and there that you were marrying me—not the Torrie you screwed in the storeroom but the *new* me, Vicky Sanderson, and...and... What?"

Brady stared down at her, his expression uncertain.

"What did you say?" she repeated.

"You had black hair when we were in high school."

"No, no, no. Before that."

Brady shook his head as a ridge formed between his eyebrows. "I said I was in love with a—"

She cut him off with a wail. "If you were in love with me, then why didn't you ever tell me?"

He pulled her close again and rubbed his lips across her forehead. His breath was warm, his lips like damp silk. "I didn't know I was in love," he explained. "I thought I'd

get over you. I didn't know it was the sort of love you don't get over. Jesus, Vicky. Were you never going to tell me? How long were you going to pretend that we'd never been together?"

"As long as I could," she mumbled.

"How the hell did you hope to hide it from me on our wedding night?"

"I don't know. I just—"

"Because I'd know you," he continued, his voice rough with emotion. "I'd know you the minute I got inside you. You're smaller but I'd know your body—the way you move when I'm inside you, the sounds you make, how your pussy lips wrap around the base of my cock. The way you flutter inside just before you come. How you grab and hold on when you orgasm. Maybe I didn't recognize you with the...blonde hair and the...new you. But I'd know you in bed.

"Torrie," he whispered, his voice taut with pain as his arms tightened around her. "I didn't know how to find you. Where to start looking. I didn't even know your last name. I thought it might be March. But nobody had ever heard of a Torrie March. You weren't at Belmar High long enough to have made any friends. Nobody seemed to know anything about you."

The words tumbled from his mouth in a rush of anguish. In his voice, she could hear the desperation that had marked the past ten years of his life. She could feel the heavy burden of emotion he'd carried while searching for her. Her heart ached for the young man who'd waited ten years for the woman he loved—for her.

Frantic to stop the flow of sorrow that bled from him with each word he uttered, she reached for his face, cupping his rugged cheeks in her hands, trying to soothe him with the light stroke of her palms. "My parents pulled me out of school the day after that incident in the lunch line. I was so unhappy." She shook her head, gazing into his dark blue eyes. "But why did you think my name was...March?"

He gave her a searching look, his eyes moving feverishly across her face. "When we first met in this room, you had *March* penned on the heel of your palm."

"March?" She turned her hand up and gazed down at the letters marked on the inside of her hand. "Ohhh," she said quietly. "It must have been my schedule. My schedule of classes."

"Classes?"

"I...tend to write myself reminders on my hand," she explained slowly. "I probably wrote my schedule on my palm to help keep myself on track. Let's see if I can remember. M had to be for Math. C was probably for Ceramics."

"Ceramics was only scheduled on Tuesdays and Thursdays," he offered.

"That's it," she exclaimed softly. "On Tuesdays and Thursdays I had Math, Art, Rhetoric, Ceramics, and History. M-A-R-C-H."

He pulled her hand into his and rubbed his thumb into the middle of her palm. Finally, a tentative smile lifted his handsome lips as he tilted his head and inspected the letters inked on her skin. "So what do you have planned for today?"

"Well. That depends," she answered, pulling away from him and wrapping her arms around her middle.

"Depends on what?" he asked, his long frame stiffening.

"Are...we still getting married?" She held her breath, afraid of what his answer might be. After everything he'd been through, she wouldn't blame him if he wanted to step back and ask for a delay in the ceremony at the very least!

"Oh yes," he said, his words hoarse with feeling. "We're still getting married. So you can put a big M on your hand right now. And you'd better add another S or two."

"S?"

"For sex," he told her, pinning her with a hungry look.

"Ah," she answered softly as a huge weight of sorrow and anxiety lifted from her shoulders. She glanced around the dark room and took in a deep breath. It smelled of clay dust and sex and tangled memories both sweet and painful. For her, the smell and taste of this dusty room was inextricably attached to sex. Sex with Brady. When she

closed her eyes and licked her lips, she could taste his sexy male flavor. When she opened her eyes, she found him standing—hard, hot and handsome—right in front of her. “How many times did we have sex in this room?”

“You don’t remember?” he teased her quietly as he took a few steps to the left and leaned his shoulder on the closed door to the art room. “It will be four, counting this afternoon.”

“Counting this afternoon?”

“That’s right.” He glanced at the silver watch that wrapped his thick wrist. “Because there’s no way I’m leaving here without fucking you.”

Chapter Five

As she watched him, Vicky felt the anticipation thicken between them. Her gaze slid down his body, taking in the raw perfection of the man who stood in a casual pose, his broad shoulders resting against the wide door. But, despite his relaxed posture, there was a stiff tension coiled in his long frame and a carnal fire burning in his eyes as his gaze roved restlessly over her body.

Feeling breathless and flushed, Vicky watched him while a heavy, clenching need took hold in her belly. His mesmerizing stare, like a pure blue flame, raked down her length then returned to her eyes.

"You want to do it here?" she whispered, caught in the searing heat of his stare...unable to look away. Not even wanting to.

"I don't think I could get very far without it," he answered in a low, husky murmur. He pushed away from the door and moved toward her, stopping in front of her, his big hands warm as he placed them on her shoulders and slid them down over her upper arms. His long, lean body moved forward, pressing against her. The thick, rigid length of his erection pressed into her belly, and she almost stopped breathing at the thought of all that prime male flesh filling her empty pussy.

"What about you?" he rumbled as he lowered his dark head and nuzzled the side of her throat.

"I can't wait either," she gasped, turning her face and arching her neck to give him better access.

"Good," he breathed against the tender shell of her ear. Slowly he backed her into the door and lowered his mouth across hers in a burning pass of rough silk. His breath, hot and humid, dampened her lips before he took the lower pad between his teeth and

gave it a quick nip. The provocative love bite sent a sharp spike of hunger right from her tingling lips to the back of her aching pussy.

She moaned as his kiss turned hard and hungry. Moments later, he had her perched on the edge of the stainless steel sink, legs spread indecently wide, dress shoved up to her waist...panties tossed somewhere over his broad shoulder. He was rough in his desperation, all finesse ripped away beneath his raw, frantic hunger, and she reveled in the incredible feeling of knowing his need for her had pushed him to this.

Staring down at him as he went to his knees, Vicky pushed her fingers into the thick, lustrous mass of his warm hair, the coffee-colored strands like silk beneath her fingers, decadent to the touch. The soft threads of light from the adjoining room came to life in his hair, picking out the bronzed highlights in that dark silk and setting them afire. She blinked slowly, feeling heavy with sexual need, watching those big, masculine hands as they traveled behind her ass and yanked her forward. Her pussy lips bumped against his wide mouth and he moaned, holding her there, pressed hard against his face as he took in great, rushing bursts of air.

"You smell so good. I can't wait to get my tongue inside you," he grunted, nuzzling her with his nose, flicking his tongue against her fragile pink folds. Then again, as if he couldn't stop himself. "You always were the richest, sweetest thing I've ever known. I swear it feels like I've been waiting forever for this. Waiting a lifetime to get inside you again."

The words tumbled from his lips, urgent and needy, a clear statement of his desire. Her vision blurred and she blinked rapidly, working to keep him in focus as he rose to stand before her, her head tilting back as he straightened to every glorious inch of his six-foot-two height. His hands found her face, pulling her up to the kiss he was suddenly rubbing into her mouth, the feel and taste of him erotically addictive, drawing a low whimper from her throat.

"Torrie...I want to taste you everywhere," he growled, his deep voice crackling and hoarse, scraped raw with a rough edge of sexual craving. "But I *can't* wait—" he rasped,

the short, rough burst of words muttered into her mouth as his tongue dominated hers, running across her teeth, investigating every recess, eating into her. "Can't wait...to fuck you," he grunted, as if he had to work to get the guttural words past his lips.

"Next time," she breathed shakily, panting. "We'll do it all...next time."

"Yeah, next time," he muttered, reaching for the fly of his jeans at the same time she did, their eager fingers tangling together in their hurry to get him free. They laughed and kissed, breaths rough and hard with excitement, and finally managed to get the damn denim over his hips. Two seconds later he rubbed the thick, fat head against her wet, tender vulva, a dark, animal sound rumbling in his chest. The velvety skin of his cock was blisteringly hot against the slick, sensitive folds of her sex, the heavy shaft prodding the quivering opening of her body, nudging against her swollen flesh, and driving her out of her mind with need.

"Please," she cried out over their heavy, ragged breathing, the flavors and scents mingling until they could no longer be told apart. "Brady, now. Please!"

A sharp, rough sound of hunger rumbled from his throat and then he was gripping his thick cock, settling it against the delicate mouth of her sex. His other hand fisted in her hair and tightened, shocking her eyes open, and their gazes instantly locked. "I've been waiting for this for too damn long," he gritted through his clenched teeth, and his muscles tensed as his hips punched forward, powerfully hard, cramming the massive length of his cock through the tight, tender sheath of her pussy in one forceful, hammering lunge.

"Brady!" she shouted, exquisitely aroused at the change that ten years of waiting had worked on him, shocked at the edgy male need oozing from every pore in his long, hard body. She bucked against him as he held her hips in a death grip and kept pushing, spreading her deep inside with the heavy thickness of his vein-ridged shaft. This wasn't a young man trying on his first girl. This was a strong, hard, powerful male in his prime taking what he felt was rightfully his. Sure and certain and steady.

“Victoria,” he snarled, twisting his damp fingers in her hair, holding her head as he crushed his mouth over hers, his tongue claiming the dark warmth of her mouth as savagely as he claimed her body, shoving into her...higher...and higher...pushing the pleasure up out of her until it broke from her throat in a keening, sobbing cry of ecstasy.

Brady stared down at Torrie as she cried out, all the lovely, unique details of the woman within quickening his pulse, reshaping his heart. All the sweetness of the girl he’d loved for ten years was still there, along with a sexy new confidence that suited her. But, then, that shouldn’t have surprised him. She’d never been one to hold back. She’d always gone after what she wanted, even at eighteen. She was the one who had pushed him over the edge that first time, when she’d brushed her lips over his chin, inviting his kiss when he was about to step away. She’d been shy, but she’d been provocative. And she’d known what she wanted, thank God. As he blinked the sweat from his eyes and lost himself in her warm brown gaze, he knew he must look awed, ripped open, but unable to hide it – not even wanting to.

“Oh fuck,” Brady groaned. “I’d forgotten it could feel like this. This raw and sweet all at the same time.” Her inner muscles clamped down around him so blissfully hard that he felt his eyes water with the intensity of the pleasure. Felt it roll up from the soles of his feet in a mystifying, undulating wave of jaw-grinding sensation.

She flicked her tongue against the plump cushion of her lower lip, her gaze hazy as she held his devouring stare. He could sense the excitement in her. There was no mistaking that telling flush on her smooth cheeks, or the smoldering flare of heat in those big brown eyes. “Don’t you dare come without me,” he warned her, muttering against her mouth, biting at her voluptuous lower lip as she cried out again.

Then there was no more talking as he let the hunger he’d carried for her for so long, the greed for this moment, break free. With his long fingers gripping her ass, he drove into her swollen, clenching channel, giving it to her harder and harder with each grinding thrust. She screamed as he rammed forward, plowing his thick length through

her sweet flesh, loving the way the perfect little mouth of her cunt worked to suck him tighter and tighter.

She was tight and wet and so incredibly perfect that he'd wanted to come the second he'd gotten his cock into her but he'd fought it – gritted his teeth and fought it – just for the sheer perfection of watching her beneath him, of seeing her face flush with color, her rosy mouth open and panting, pearly white teeth glimmering within the frame of those lush lips. Beneath the bodice of her thin cotton dress, he could see the hard points of her breasts jolting to his pounding strokes and down lower, the pretty patch of pale curls above the sexiest little cunt he'd ever seen.

Her fingers curled into fists, her beautiful pussy gripping his buried cock, soaking his dick in her rich spill of cream, and Brady ground his teeth to keep from coming. Not yet, damn it. He wanted to watch her coming apart around him first. Wanted to feel her coming *now*.

"Come, Torrie," he growled, shoving his cock in so hard and deep that it seemed to push the next scream up out of her throat. "I can't wait much longer and I want you coming with me, Vicky. *Right now!*"

"*Brady!*" she shouted, sinking her teeth into the dark passion-bruised color of her lower lip. Her head arched back on her neck, a hard, husky cry breaking past her lips as he felt the first contraction around his dick. Her tight flesh rippled around him, and the warm rush of her rich cum soaked the vein-bulged root of his cock. Brady closed his eyes, pulled back his hips and came on a hammering up-stroke.

The orgasm burned up from his balls so fiercely that it felt as if it were being ripped from his soul, and as he began shooting into her, flooding her womb with his hot, blistering cum, he finally experienced the perfect rush of pleasure that he'd waited ten years for.

He threw back his head, trying to smother the sob of emotion that tightened his throat, finally giving up and covering the sound instead with a rough shout. It was

every bit as good as he'd remembered. *She* was every bit as good. It confirmed what he'd always suspected about this woman.

She was more than his first girl.

More than his first fuck.

She was his first love.

Victoria sobbed, clinging to Brady's shoulders—slick with sweat and lust—as he thrust into her. As his lean hips hammered his powerful cock into her with intense, shattering skill, she couldn't stop the violent rush of her climax. Her pussy walls tightened around him in a brutal hold before the orgasm crashed over her, spilling through her body as she screamed and jerked and went wild on him, her cunt clutching greedily at his cock in firm, gripping pulls that rode the tender edge of pain.

And somewhere through the thick haze of mind-shattering pleasure, Vicky was deliciously aware that Brady had thrown back his dark head. His lips pulled back over his teeth and a masculine roar filled the room as he plowed into her, slamming into her cervix with breathtaking force as he erupted into her over...and over...and over again.

As her pulling contractions came to a long, shuddering close, Brady stroked his warm palm over her hip, his touch firm and bold...full of quietly stated possession. "It really was as good as I remembered," she whispered, nuzzling her nose into the strong curve of his throat, chuckling with a warm surge of happiness. "For years, I've told myself it couldn't possibly have been that wonderful."

"It really was that good," he confirmed in a soft burr. "I never doubted it. But...why didn't we do this before?" he asked with a rough laugh. "If we had, I'd have known you and we could have avoided all this shit."

"Because I knew you'd recognize me," she answered, shyly. "And I didn't want you to. I thought it would mean the end of us. Not the beginning."

He rubbed circles into the flesh covering her hip. "You knew I'd recognize you?"

"Oh. Not the way *you* described. I just assumed you'd know my...tattoo, when you saw it."

"Your tattoo!" He pressed a kiss behind her ear. "You have a tattoo?"

"You never noticed it?"

"Hey," he said, chuckling quietly. "I keep trying to tell you. It was dark in here."

"Well," she answered with a wry smile. "I wish I'd known! If I had, these last six months would have gone a lot quicker!"

"Yes, they would have," he agreed, whispering into her ear. "Because I'd have been fucking you every single night."

"Mmm," she hummed as a shiver of excitement streaked up her spine.

"So where is the tattoo?" he asked, leaning back far enough to look down on her.

"Under your hand," she murmured.

He lifted an eyebrow, then lifted his hand and tilted his head sideways to take a look. "Is that...a Playboy bunny?"

"You're not going to believe this," she mumbled, feeling like a silly schoolgirl, "but I always wanted to be a centerfold model."

"Oh I believe it, you provocative little handful! But you might as well know right now that, from here on out, the only person you'll be taking your clothes off for is me."

"No centerfold model?" she asked in a small voice, winding one of his chest hairs around her forefinger.

"You can be *my* centerfold model," he said softly. "You can be my Miss March, now and forever, sweetheart."

Epilogue

"So contrary to popular belief, you *can*, after all, find true love twice in a lifetime. Although it helps if you find it with the same woman." As Rob wound up his speech and raised his glass, the crowd's pleasant laughter filled the patio. Fairy lights twinkled in trees and along railings, brightening the California evening that covered the coast like a soft, dark blanket. "To Victoria and Brady, who found each other *twice* and fell in love both times. Fortunately for Brady, when it came time to ask for Vicky's hand in marriage, he didn't have to *ask* her twice. I wish them *twice* their share of happiness. It's no less than they deserve."

For the wedding reception, Brady's father had managed to reserve the large tiled patio behind the country club where he worked as a day manager. The evening was warm and sultry. A sudden gust of wind rustled the dark leaves of an avocado tree that hung out over the patio's flagstone tiles. The warm breath of air lifted Brady's thick mane, tossing it around his face before he shook the dark strands out of his eyes. As Vicky scanned the crowd she found her mother, with lifted glass, standing on the other side of the patio beside Brady's mom. From her place at the cloth-covered table Vicky shared with her new husband, she caught her mother's eye and gave her a cheerful thumbs-up.

As Rob finished off his toast to the clinking of long, fluted champagne glasses, Victoria smiled at the marks Brady had just penned on her hand—M-I-S-S M-A-R-C-H. "That's your to-do list for the rest of the day," he told her in a low voice, laying the ballpoint pen on the white tablecloth when he was finished.

"There's more than one M here," she pointed out in a whispery giggle. "How many times are you going to marry me?"

"As many times as I have to," he answered, nibbling on her ear as he added, "though the second M isn't for marrying. It's for making out."

"Oh," she chuckled. "I might have known. Then you have S here twice. I assume that's for sex and more sex. And let me guess. The I is for you and I having...intercourse?"

He just grinned in answer.

"And the C is for copulating?"

"Cunnilingus," he corrected her, as the corner of his mouth twitched upward into an endearingly lopsided smirk.

"What about the R?"

"That's for 'really raunchy'," he told her, his smirk turning positively wicked.

"Really raunchy what?"

"What do you think?" he asked, leaning forward again and rubbing his lips beneath her ear.

Vicky decided to leave that one alone. "And what about the A? Dare I ask?"

Repositioning his lips a bit higher, he whispered a few words into her ear. When he was finished, she turned toward him, emboldened by his provocative words and the lusty gaze he slanted at her from beneath lowered eyelids. She parted her lips and slowly ran her tongue around her open mouth while he watched.

He groaned in spite of himself.

"That leaves H," she continued, lifting her eyebrows suggestively. "Is that for...humping?"

This time, he reached in with his tongue and licked the corner of her mouth. "Humping! I wouldn't use that word! What kind of man do you think I am?" he growled.

"A very horny one?" she suggested.

"Lucky guess," he responded, chuckling. "But you're wrong about the H."

"Am I?"

"Yes, you are, Little Miss Smart Ass. Because the H is *not* for humping."

"No?"

"No," he said, looking pretty damn pleased with himself for stumping her. "It's for 'happily ever after'."

At that point, Rob interrupted them, excited as hell, dragging Shelley along behind him. "You guys need to come see the wedding gift that was just delivered out front."

"I'm busy with my *wife*, right now," Brady growled, sending his brother a look that said "later".

"Well, after you see your gift," Shelley said, giggling, "you're going to want to take your *wife* for a *ride*."

That got Brady's attention. He pushed back his chair and pulled Vicky to her feet. "Okay. I'm curious. Lead on, big brother."

With boyish enthusiasm and a firm grip on Shelley's hand, Rob led the newlyweds into the country club and across the main floor to the wide double doors and the shallow steps descending to the front drive. There on the gleaming blacktop, beneath the lighted Grecian portico, sat a beautifully restored white Corvair convertible—just like the one that had been stolen the summer before Brady had gone to college, though in much better condition. Brady halted at the bottom of the steps and gave his brother a stunned look. "What the hell! Where on earth did this come from?"

He'd never seen Rob look so pleased with himself. His blue eyes just about blazed with excitement. "Remember the nerdy kid that Goodrich used to push around?"

Brady just stared. "*Iverson*?"

"Well, he started up an online investment company."

Brady hesitated. He couldn't believe it! "Do you mean *Iverson Investments*? The investment *giant*?"

There was a pleased and proud look on Rob's face as he pulled Shelley into his side and gave his chin an upward jerk. "It's a wedding gift from your old pal, Nate Iverson."

In a sudden explosion of joy, Brady grabbed Vicky and lifted her from her feet. She squealed as he spun her around in a circle then threw her over the passenger side door onto the convertible's red leather upholstery. "So...wanna go for a ride?" he asked her.

Floundering in a sea of beaded brocade, her satin heels in the air, Vicky stopped long enough to ask him, "Can you drive this thing?"

He gave her an insulted look.

"More importantly, can you *park* this thing?"

He shook a finger at her, a warning light dancing in his dark blue eyes. "I can park *and* ride *and* drive. And in that order, too."

"In that case," she told him, "you don't have to ask me twice."

About the Author

I slung the heavy battery pack around my hips and cinched it tight – or tried to.

“Damn.” Brian grabbed an awl. Leaning over me, he forged a new hole in the loose belt looped around my waist.

“Any advice?” I asked him as I pulled the belt tight.

“Yeah. Don’t reach for the ore cart until it starts moving, then jump on the back and immediately duck your head. The voltage in the overhead cable won’t just kill you. It’ll blow you apart.”

That was my first day on my first job. Employed as an engineer, I’ve worked in an underground mine that went up—inside a mountain. I’ve swung over the Ohio River in a tiny cage suspended from a crane in the middle of an electrical storm. I’ve hung 30 feet in the air over the Hudson River at midnight in an aluminum boat—suspended from a floating barge at the height of a blizzard, while snowplows on the bridge overhead rained slush and salt down on my shoulders. You can’t do this sort of work without developing a sense of humor, and a sense of adventure.

New to publishing, both my reading and writing habits are subject to mood and I usually have several stories going at once. When I need a really good idea for a story, I clean toilets. Now *there’s* an activity that engenders escapism.

I was surveying when I met my husband. He was my ‘rod man’. While I was trying to get my crosshairs on his stadia rod, he dropped his pants and mooned me. Next thing I know, I’ve got the backside of paradise in my viewfinder. So I grabbed the walkie-talkie. “That’s real nice,” I told him, “but would you please turn around? I’d rather see the other side.”

...it was love at first sight.

Madison welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

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