



Christiane France

Blame It On  
**FATE**

## BLAME IT ON FATE

...There had been no need for words. Paul had locked the door, drawn the drapes, then led the way to his bedroom, where he'd kissed her deeply, then lifted her in his arms and placed her in the center of his bed. Lying down beside her, he'd held her and kissed her again, kissed her so deeply she could still feel the pressure of his mouth even now.

Her hand strayed to her breast. He'd been so gentle at first. Stroking, touching, giving her soft butterfly kisses that had whispered across her overheated skin like a summer breeze. But then suddenly, they hadn't been able to get enough of one another. Buttons popped and fabric was torn as they struggled to get out of their clothes. Later, when his exquisite lovemaking produced the most wonderful, fulfilling orgasm imaginable, she was positive the earth had moved. At least it had for her.

So where was Paul right now?

She closed her eyes, wishing he were here with her. Wished he were stroking her, touching her. Wished she could feel him parting her legs and guiding his hard shaft into her slit. Then he'd begin riding her. Slowly at first, with long, measured thrusts. He'd come all the way out, then slide all the way back in. She could still remember the feeling as the tension began to build, the satiny touch of his skin, the way he smelled, the taste of him when his tongue invaded her mouth and he kissed her so hard and so deeply it was like he wanted to absorb her into himself...

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# BLAME IT ON FATE

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BY

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BLAME IT ON FATE  
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*For Roy and The Boys,  
and thanks to Lady Fate for bringing  
them into my life.*

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He came into the restaurant on a Sunday evening, just as Kate Barton finished her shift and was preparing to leave. Sage green eyes, wind-ruffled hair, and the same confident air that seemed to tell the world all he had to do to get what he wanted was snap his fingers.

Recognition on Kate's part was instantaneous. Probably because all he'd ever needed to do to get her attention was to give her one, all-encompassing, come-hither look with those sexy green eyes, and she was willing to do anything...well, almost anything. But, for a moment, she was positive she was dreaming. Unless maybe she was still back in London and the past three months and the return flight home had been the

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dream.

But then he noticed her and hesitated, a look of surprised disbelief on his handsome face.

“Kate?”

“Paul? Where did you spring from?”

He took a step forward, and she caught a familiar whiff of something clean and fresh. She couldn’t remember if it was the aftershave or the soap Paul used, but it was all the confirmation she needed to know this was no dream.

“I was about to ask you the same thing.”

She wondered what he was doing here in River City. He couldn’t have followed her back to the States for the simple reason she’d never told him where she lived. And, even supposing he’d wanted to, he couldn’t have tracked her down because she hadn’t given him sufficient information about herself to enable him to do that. All she’d said was her name was Kate, that she came from a small town in the mid-west, and she was in England for a few days to attend a family funeral.

She sucked in a breath, not knowing what to say next. Paul was, without a doubt, the most attractive man she’d ever met—short, dark hair, high cheekbones and a body that spoke of rigorous exercise. He was also sophisticated, generous, sexy to a fault, and a great lover, but spending forever wrapped securely in his arms had never been an option. Brief, three-day affairs were all about instant attraction and satisfying lust. They didn’t include the exchange of intimate details such as life stories, phone numbers, and home addresses. It was



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nothing more than a wild fling with a stranger that was fun while it lasted and then you forgot about it. At least that's what she'd told herself, and also what she'd tried to do.

And maybe that-was-then-this-is-now had worked for Paul, but it hadn't worked for her. She hadn't forgotten. Couldn't forget. Every damn night Paul turned up in her dreams, and she'd wake up in a sweat and wish—

“So, what brings you to River City?” she asked, proud of the fact she was managing to hold it together, despite the fact her heart was beating to a demented rhythm all its own, and her legs felt a bit weak. She wanted Paul to give her a hug, to feel his arms around her, holding her tight, to smell his own special, unique scent. She wanted to hug him back and feel his tongue invading her mouth. From the pulse beating in his neck and the way he was looking at her, she had a feeling he wanted that, too.

But Paul, too, was keeping a firm hand on his emotions. He lifted a hand and smoothed down his dark hair, then he shrugged, looking as if he didn't quite know what to say or do next. “A job. A sudden, unexpected vacancy at RCU actually. You?”

She took a deep breath. She might be putting up a good front, but she was having trouble getting her thoughts under control and accepting the fact Paul was real and not a dream “Me? I live here. Lived here all my life, in fact.”

“And you work here in this restaurant?”

“Just part-time. Evenings and weekends.”

“I see. And what do you do with the—”

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“Want to do your socializing some other time, Kate? We’re busy trying to run a business here,” the restaurant owner’s son, Frank, suddenly interrupted from behind her. “Or is this gentleman a customer?” he added, placing a possessive hand on Kate’s shoulder.

*Busy?* She shook off Frank’s hand and glanced quickly around the small, family-style restaurant. It was still early for dinner and, apart from Paul, there wasn’t another customer in the place. She was used to Frank trying to play the big man when his dad wasn’t around and acting as if he was every woman’s dream of heaven. But since being given the official title of manager, he’d become a total pain, constantly finding excuses to touch her, which she knew was a form of payback because she wouldn’t go out with him. Except this time, Frank was really pushing the proverbial envelope. He not only wanted Paul to think he was a whiz at keeping the staff on their toes, but, by grabbing her shoulder like that, he’d given Paul the clear message to back off.

She turned her head and gave Frank a hostile glare, then she snatched a menu from the holder and indicated Paul should follow her. “He’s a customer. This way, sir.”

But instead of going about his business, Frank continued to hover, rearranging the menus in the holder at the front desk, flicking imaginary crumbs from immaculate tables, and all the while watching as Kate lead Paul over to a corner table.

With her shift officially over, and Frank hanging about like a bad smell, Kate decided to leave before she did something stupid—such as suggesting Frank get a life of his own. With

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Frank in his present mood, he was likely to interpret anything she said as insubordination, and she could find herself out of a job. And there was no way she could afford to have that happen.

After settling Paul at the table and telling him someone would be by shortly to take his order, she fetched her jacket and purse from the staff room and left the restaurant via the delivery door in back. She'd wanted to talk to Paul some more, ask him about his new job, and where he'd be staying. But Frank's silly antics had made that impossible.

There was no doubt Paul turning up out of the blue like this was the biggest and best surprise she'd had in a long time. And it would have been nice if Frank had given her a few minutes in which to enjoy it. Paul had mentioned something about a job, and she wondered where and who he'd be working for. Somewhere in the downtown area, or somewhere further out, on the outskirts?

After all, River City wasn't exactly a hive of industry. Apart from the university, which attracted students from all over the world, there were a couple of small manufacturing plants down by the wharf, a discount mall near the thruway, the usual professional offices, small shops and department stores, and one of the big, international insurance companies had a branch office in the downtown area. But that was about it. Not the kind of employment opportunities she'd have thought likely to encourage someone like Paul to move halfway round the world.

Although now that she thought about it, hadn't he said

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something about a vacancy at RCU? His sudden appearance had caught her so off balance, she'd been more interested in the fact he was here in River City than she was in his reason for being here. But he'd been wearing dress pants and a shirt and tie, so it could be an office job or something in the research lab. Or maybe he was a librarian. In fact, that was probably it. Paul was the librarian type—the serious, well-educated type who loved books, and the library at RCU was always under-staffed.

It might help if she knew more about Paul. She knew he was older than her by about ten years, and that he preferred Italian wines to French, liked his steak medium rare and his coffee black with one teaspoon of sugar, but that was about it. She had no idea what he did for a living.

When they'd first met, and she realized he was a fellow American, she'd asked if he was on vacation. But he'd said that he currently lived in England. Maybe he'd been working at a university library there.

At the end of the block she paused, her heart thumping against her ribs and her stomach in sudden turmoil as she remembered Paul's exact words—he'd said "a sudden, unexpected vacancy at RCU."

The notice board outside the registrar's office listed any and all vacant positions within the university, and it was always kept up to date. That's how she knew the lab and the library were constantly looking for qualified help. She'd even thought of applying for a part-time clerical job to help balance her budget. But "a sudden, unexpected vacancy" was exactly

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that. The result of something awful and unexpected happening—like one of her law professors being hospitalized last week with heart problems?

From what the dean had said, Professor Sand might not be back for several weeks, and maybe not until the next semester.

Was it possible Paul had taken over the professor's job temporarily? If she knew how to get in touch with Paul, she'd call and find out for sure. But how could she call a man she barely knew and ask a question like that? So what if they'd slept together? That had happened three months ago. And she doubted it entitled her to pick up the phone and start asking questions about his personal business.

As she continued along the street, the very real possibility Paul was taking over Professor Sand's position had her worried to the point she was starting to panic. What if Paul assumed they could pick up where they left off in London? Should she warn him now it wouldn't be possible because she was a student at RCU? That RCU frowned on any kind of socializing between the staff and the students. Actually, current policy went a lot further than frowning, but Paul would find that out for himself.

Or should she just wait and see? Deal with the situation when—and if—it arose.

By the time Kate reached her apartment a few blocks away, she was half-hoping she'd run into Paul again so she could tell him she was a student at RCU, and half-hoping he'd find out somehow without her having to explain. Most men had an easy-come, easy-go attitude toward sex, so it could be

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she was kidding herself if she thought their time together had meant anything to Paul. For all she knew, he hadn't given her another thought until he walked into the restaurant tonight and saw her there.

She sat down at the kitchen table and rested her chin on her clasped hands. Her affair with Paul had begun that Wednesday afternoon in London in the sure and absolute knowledge she would be returning to the States a few days later. That was one thing they had talked about. Within minutes of meeting, he'd asked how long she was staying in London, and she'd said she was flying home on Saturday, and they'd made a pact to forget the real world for a few days and enjoy the moment.

After that they'd talked about a million different things—art, music, movies, food, wine, and the state of the world, but no details such as work or careers, relationships past or present, or anything else of a personal nature.

Without putting it into words, they'd both known those few days would never be anything more than a brief, sexual encounter—a time-out from their real lives. There had been no talk of love, no empty promises to keep in touch, and no tears or regrets when, after three nights of incredibly hot sex, they'd kissed goodbye on the Saturday morning, and she'd stepped into a taxi to take her to the airport.

Which would explain why Paul had seemed a little unsure of himself back at the restaurant. They were virtual strangers—strangers who'd slept together, but never expected to meet again. But then the unexpected had happened. Three

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months later, here they were face to face, and neither of them had quite known what to say.

She wondered what Paul had thought about Frank making like a jealous lover before she even realized he was standing behind her? Frank was neither slow nor subtle. Once he'd picked up on the fact she and Paul knew one another, giving Paul the evil eye was exactly the kind of juvenile thing Frank would do. Aimed, of course, at conveying the impression she and Frank were an item, and Paul should back off now.

If Paul did get that impression, Kate knew it was her own fault. She should have stayed long enough to disillusion him on that score. Then again, if Paul was Professor Sand's replacement, it didn't matter what Frank got up to, or what Paul thought.

Leaving her chair, Kate took the River City phone book from one of the dresser drawers. Instead of worrying herself into a nervous breakdown with what ifs, maybes, and wild assumptions, she needed to talk to Paul and find out exactly what his job was at RCU. If he was filling in for Professor Sand, she had to tell him she was one of his students, not leave him to find out the hard way.

The one personal detail she knew about Paul was his last name. He'd never asked what hers was, and she wouldn't have known his, except the doorman had called him Mr. Latham each and every time they went in and out of Paul's building.

"Good morning, Mr. Latham."

"Nice day, Mr. Latham."

"Goodnight, Mr. Latham."

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"I trust you and the lady had a very pleasant evening, Mr. Latham."

Under the heading "Hotels & Motels," she ran a finger down the various listings. In the downtown area, there were three hotels—the River City Inn with its four-star restaurant and luxurious rooms with whirlpool baths and all the amenities; a well-known chain establishment favored by businessmen and traveling salesmen; and finally the Chez Nous, a rundown fleabag that somehow managed to remain open despite the fact the police were there every couple of days, and the fire department at least once a week. Scattered around the city were half a dozen motels, ranging from economy to limited luxury, whatever that meant.

Picking up the phone, she pushed a loose strand of hair back from her face and dialed the number of the Inn. Paul should be finished dinner by now and, since he had to be staying somewhere, the Inn was as good a place to start as any.

"River City Inn. How may I direct your call?"

"I'm wondering if you have anyone staying there by the name of Latham. First name Paul."

"Sorry, madam. No Lathams. If you'd care to call back later..."

The same thing happened when she called the chain hotel, so she started on the motels. As far as she knew Paul wasn't married or involved. Nevertheless, if she managed to track him down and a woman answered his phone, well...she'd just apologize, say she'd dialed the wrong number, hang up, and



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get on with her life.

After striking out with the first three motels, she was ready to give up. But on the fourth call, to the new motel near RCU, a female clerk with a slightly husky and very sexy voice informed her that they did indeed have a guest by that name. If madam would care to hold for a moment, she'd check and see if Mr. Latham was in his room.

A moment later, the operator came back on the line. "Sorry, madam. Mr. Latham doesn't appear to be in at the moment. Do you wish to leave a message, or try back later?"

"Umm..." If she left a message, he might get the wrong idea. "No message. I'll try again in an hour or so."

After feeding her cat, an orange-and-white, long-haired stray she'd found foraging for food behind the restaurant and named Horatio because his tenacity for whatever he wanted reminded her of a favorite TV character, she poured herself a glass of wine and lay down on the living room sofa.

If it wasn't for Frank, she could have talked to Paul, found out about his new job and saved herself all this ridiculous angst. As it was, she'd been put in the embarrassing position of having to track Paul down like a wanted man. And she still had to talk to him, find out what she needed to know and, at the same time, convince him she was simply being considerate, not trying to resuscitate something from the past.

*Damn, Frank!*

She picked up one of the loose pillows from the sofa and threw it against the wall.

She'd worked on and off for Frank's father, Sam, since

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high school. But with Frank's decision to give up football and return home to learn the restaurant business, things had gotten way out of hand. She knew Frank had had a crush on her when they were kids, but that was years ago. She'd thought he was past all that, but apparently not.

He hadn't actually come out and said her job was in jeopardy if she didn't sleep with him, but he knew she needed the money to cover expenses until she got her degree, so the implication was there. Like the way he kept asking her out, then applying pressure when she refused. One time he'd said the River City Racers were playing out of town, so his Dad probably wouldn't need her to work that weekend because they wouldn't be very busy. Another time, he'd said she could have the weekend off because one of the full-time waitresses wanted extra shifts due to the facts she was behind on paying the dentist for her kid's braces or whatever.

If she'd been able to get an internship in the DA's office or one of the larger law offices in town, she wouldn't need to work at Sam's. But the few places available had gone to students with better connections than hers.

When she'd made the decision to follow in her late father's footsteps and study law, her stepfather had suggested she do so in Chicago. She could live with him and her Mom rent-free, and he'd pick up the tab for her schooling. Later, when the time came, he'd check with some of his lawyer friends from the golf club. There were always lots of opportunities if you knew the right people.

It would be a lie to say Kate hadn't been tempted by her

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stepfather's offer because she had. And tempted on more than one occasion. But her dream had always been to follow in her dad's footsteps, and she was determined to hold onto the dream. Like her dad, she wanted to get her law degree from RCU, and hang up her shingle at her dad's old address on Main Street. Since his death, the offices where he'd practiced law had been, in turn, a hair salon, a candy store, and most recently a gift shop. However, she'd found out the gift shop was moving to a mall on the outskirts of town about the time she'd be finished school, so she'd already made arrangements with the owner of the building to take over the space.

And she didn't *have* to put up with Frank and his childish games. She could quit and take a nighttime data-entry job at the insurance company for about half what she earned in tips alone. Or she could stock shelves at the supermarket, or work at a pizza joint. She could even use a little of the money left to her by her dad, the money she needed to open her own law office and help subsidize expenses for the first year. But with only a short time left until graduation, she didn't want to go job hunting, and she didn't want to spend money she couldn't replace. For now, she would stay put. If things got worse, she'd tell Frank to back off. And if he still didn't get the message, then she'd speak to his father. Sam Domenico would be furious if he found out the way Frank was abusing his position as manager, but hopefully, it wouldn't come to that.

She glanced through the living room doorway to the phone in the kitchen and wondered where Paul was right now. Had he gone to a gym or a movie? Alone? Or was he out on a date?

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She finished her wine and put down the glass. For those few days in London, the feelings that had existed between her and Paul had been truly amazing. They'd been so in sync, so tuned in to one another's thoughts. He'd start to say something and she'd finish it, or vice-versa. But everyone knew good stuff like that didn't last. The hotter the fire, the shorter it lasted. Or that's what her grandma had always said.

Grandma also used say a person couldn't change Fate. That nothing ever happened that wasn't meant to happen.

Kate hadn't paid much attention to half the wise sayings and old wives' tales her Grandma insisted on filling her head with while she was growing up. But she did believe in Fate. And she didn't need a degree in Fateology, or whatever the correct term was, to know there had been something preordained about the way Paul had shown up at exactly the right moment. Something more than simple coincidence.

After all, short of divine intervention, who else but Fate could have arranged the long, convoluted train of events that had conspired to bring her and Paul together in the first place?

It had started with her mom's sister, Amy, falling in love with a British guy and going to live with him in England. If Amy hadn't gone to England, she wouldn't have got a fantastic job working for a London stockbroker, she wouldn't have stayed with the job after Mr. Wonderful took off for parts unknown, and she wouldn't have been killed in that awful train accident.

If Kate's mom and her new husband hadn't taken up line dancing, her mom wouldn't have tripped and broken her

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ankle, and it wouldn't have been necessary for Kate to go to England and attend Amy's funeral in her mom's place.

And if Kate hadn't gone to England, she wouldn't have met Paul.

When Kate had agreed to go, it had sounded so simple—nothing complicated or difficult about it at all, just a few days' interruption in the smooth flow of her life. The funeral had been arranged for the Monday. So, she'd decided to fly over on Saturday night, spend Sunday resting up, attend Amy's funeral on Monday, and fly back home on Tuesday.

And it would have worked out perfectly if Fate hadn't decided to step in and rearrange the timetable to suit her own purposes. Fate had decreed she was to meet Paul on Wednesday, and that couldn't happen if Kate went home on Tuesday. So, rather than have her carefully laid plans disrupted, Fate had fixed things so Kate couldn't find a return flight on any airline at any price until the following Saturday.

Kate spared a smile for her fanciful thoughts and poured herself another glass of wine. If she had any sense, she'd write the whole thing off as a string of weird coincidences and let it go. Except she couldn't do that. Believing Fate could actually move people around like pieces on a chessboard sounded utterly ridiculous. But what other explanation could there be for the way the various pieces of the puzzle had come together so neatly?

Once the funeral was over, with time on her hands and a wad of cash slipped into her pocket by her stepfather when he saw her off at O'Hare, she'd decided to leave sightseeing until

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later in the week and spend Wednesday afternoon checking out Oxford Street, London's famous shopping district.

Like most women, Kate enjoyed shopping for clothes, and Oxford Street was the place to find the latest styles. She'd been so absorbed with the displays of trendy fashions every which way she looked, instead of paying attention to the fact the British drive on the right and not the left, she'd stepped off the sidewalk, straight into the path of a big, red, double-decker bus.

And that was when Fate's plan came full circle. Paul had appeared out of nowhere, swept her off her feet and into his arms, and saved her from certain death under the wheels of that oncoming bus.

For what had seemed like a very long time, she'd clung to him, terrified out of her wits. But then, as he gently pried her fingers loose, their eyes met, the world around them disappeared, and her mind filled with weird, off-the-wall emotions that were stronger than anything she'd ever experienced. The need to couple and bond with the man who'd rescued her was so intense it had hit her like a physical pain. She didn't care she was in a public place, surrounded by a crowd of avid onlookers. She needed to feel him inside her...now. She wanted to feel him riding her like a wild thing that needed taming, ride her until she was out of breath and begged him to stop, and then keep riding her some more.

How long those strange and scary feelings had lasted, she was never able to figure out. But it couldn't have been more than a few seconds because she vaguely remembered Paul

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taking her to a nearby pub and buying her a brandy to help her settle down. Between the strong liquor and Paul's insistence on remaining with her, rubbing her back and talking to her quietly, she'd soon pulled herself together. But when the moment came for her to thank him for coming to her rescue and take her leave, her mouth had refused to form the words. She hadn't wanted to say goodbye to Paul, and he'd showed no indication of wanting to take his leave of her either.

Instead, he'd invited her to have dinner with him in Soho at what he said was his favorite Italian restaurant.

The combination of the food, the wine, the music, and the sexual chemistry that existed between them had made the evening magical—unlike anything she'd experienced before. They'd held hands while they ate, and she'd felt the evidence of his arousal when he molded her body to his and they'd slow-danced on the tiny dance floor, totally oblivious to the world around them. Paul had wanted her as much as she wanted him and, after leaving the restaurant, they'd gone to his apartment, just a short walk away.

There had been no need for words. Paul had locked the door, drawn the drapes, then led the way to his bedroom, where he'd kissed her deeply, then lifted her in his arms and placed her in the center of his bed. Lying down beside her, he'd held her and kissed her again, kissed her so deeply she could still feel the pressure of his mouth even now.

Her hand strayed to her breast. He'd been so gentle at first. Stroking, touching, giving her soft butterfly kisses that had whispered across her overheated skin like a summer breeze.

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But then suddenly, they hadn't been able to get enough of one another. Buttons popped and fabric was torn as they struggled to get out of their clothes. Later, when his exquisite lovemaking produced the most wonderful, fulfilling orgasm imaginable, she was positive the earth had moved. At least it had for her.

So where was Paul right now?

She closed her eyes, wishing he were here with her. Wished he were stroking her, touching her. Wished she could feel him parting her legs and guiding his hard shaft into her slit. Then he'd begin riding her. Slowly at first, with long, measured thrusts. He'd come all the way out, then slide all the way back in. She could still remember the feeling as the tension began to build, the satiny touch of his skin, the way he smelled, the taste of him when his tongue invaded her mouth and he kissed her so hard and so deeply it was like he wanted to absorb her into himself.

Pushing away the memories, she went back to the kitchen, pressed the redial button on the phone and asked for Paul's room. It wasn't quite an hour since she'd last called, but hopefully—

"Hello?"

"It's me, Kate."

"Kate? How did you find me?"

"A process of elimination. I called all the hotels and motels." She hesitated, wondering if he was pleased to hear from her or not. "I hope you don't mind me tracking you down like this?"



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He gave a soft, sexy chuckle. “Mind? No way! I’ve been sitting here wishing I knew how to contact you. I was beginning to think my only option was to go back to the restaurant and convince your boss to take mercy on me.”

“If you mean Frank, he’s not my boss. He’s the owner’s son.”

“And?”

“If you’re asking if something is going on between us, the answer’s no. Never has been, never will be.”

“But he likes to make out that there is?”

“Yes. And the only reason he gets away with it is because I need the job.”

“You can’t get a job somewhere else?”

“I could. But not one that pays as well. Anyway, that’s not why I called. I umm...” *To tell you I want you? That just thinking about you makes me horny as hell, and I’d like you to do something about it?*

“You want to meet somewhere?”

“Yes. I mean no. I don’t know. You showing up like that was such a surprise, I don’t know what I want.” *Liar!*

She hesitated, her stomach doing flip-flops and her face hot with embarrassment. “Part of the reason I’m calling is because I want to apologize for the way I blew you off when you came into the restaurant. I hope you didn’t think I was being rude, but with Frank there, behaving like a fool... What can I say?”

“Forget about it. The world is full of people trying to rain on other people’s parades. What was the other reason?”

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“We need to talk.”

“We do? What about?”

“It’s...I could tell you over the phone, but I’d rather do it in person.”

“You’re married? Engaged?”

“No. Nothing like that.”

“So, why don’t we meet for a coffee or a drink or something?”

“Tonight?”

“Sure. I’m about ready for a break. Taking over a professorship this late in the year promises to be quite a challenge. I’ve spent the past couple of days playing catch-up and still have a pile of stuff to read.”

Kate sucked in a breath and let it out slowly. So she was right. Paul was taking over Sand’s job. Maybe she should forget the explanations and just avoid him. She could always sit at the back of his lectures or cut them completely and borrow another student’s notes. And if he came into the restaurant, she could always send another server over.

“Hey! You still there?”

“Yes. But it sounds like you’re pretty busy. We can talk some other time. My main reason for calling was to apologize. This is a small town, and I wouldn’t want either of us to feel awkward or embarrassed if we happen to meet again.”

“I see. You *are* blowing me off.”

“No, I’m not.” What she wanted was to see Paul and have him hold her and kiss her one last time...and then explain the situation. Maybe he didn’t care, but she did. “I’m also not

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taking anything for granted.”

“Such as?”

“I’m not assuming anything, or trying to pick up where we left off, so please don’t think I am. If you want to say ‘Thanks for calling,’ and hang up that’s fine. I’ll understand.”

When Paul didn’t reply right away, Kate held her breath. Sometimes, when she really wanted something, experience had shown her it paid to be a little standoffish—to show a little bit of the I-don’t-care-either-way attitude. If he did say thanks and hung up...she’d try to understand, she really would.

“But I do want to see you.” He laughed softly, and Kate relaxed. “I think you know damn well I want to do a whole lot more than just see you. Where do want to meet?”

“Somewhere quiet where we can talk.”

“Sounds good.” He laughed again. “I seem to recall we didn’t waste much time talking in London.”

“No, I guess we didn’t.” In fact, what she recalled made Kate’s face feel very hot.

“There’s a coffee shop here at the motel, but it’s not the place I’d choose for a cozy chat. Any suggestions?”

She wished she could invite Paul to her home, but she didn’t dare do that. If anyone saw them—and she could almost guarantee someone would—Paul could lose his job before he even started, and she’d get suspended for sure. But meeting in a public place should be okay. They’d have coffee, she’d explain the situation, and they’d go their separate ways. If anyone told the dean, and there was no reason why they

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should, she would simply tell him the truth.

“What about The Orange Blossom? If you don’t know it, it’s a new coffee and dessert café a couple of blocks west of the restaurant where I work. Corner of Main and Orchid. I can be there in about twenty minutes, if that’s okay?”

“I’m on my way.”

\* \* \*

The Orange Blossom was River City’s latest alternative to the bar scene. Soft music and a choice of seating that ranged from sofas to easy chairs to bar stools were scattered around high, café-style, round tables. The menu featured an assortment of coffees and teas, and an array of homemade desserts that could only be described as decadent. On previous visits, Kate had tried several of the high calorie offerings, and so far her favorites were the orange mousse with white chocolate drizzle, and the chocolate and raspberry torte.

It was just a short walk to the café from Kate’s apartment, but with each step she took, she became more undecided as to exactly when she should tell Paul how things stood. Right away, as soon as she sat down? Or should she wait a bit?

She was flattered Paul was still interested, but the situation would be so much easier if he wasn’t. Especially since she had to tell him from here on their contact would be severely limited, and she couldn’t ever see him again outside of school.

She hated having to do this, but RCU’s ridiculous rules left her no choice.

Maybe she should try and soften the blow a little. Suggest

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they find a secluded spot where they could make love, then afterwards she'd tell him. In a way it was cruel, but again, what choice did she have? She wanted him, and he wanted her. And after tonight there was absolutely no way.

Before she'd covered even half the distance to the café, her legs felt weak, her panties were soaked from just thinking about Paul, and her thoughts were in total chaos. *Maybe Grandma had been right about fires this hot burning out fast.* If so, meeting Paul again could be all wrong, simply asking for trouble. Maybe she should just turn around and run, while she still had the chance.

When she reached the block where the café was located, she saw Paul, casually attired in khakis, a navy sweatshirt, and an old sheepskin jacket pacing back and forth on the corner. Her heart skipped a beat as she watched him take three steps forward, turn, take three steps back, and check his watch on each turn. His behavior was a mirror image of how she felt. How she'd been feeling since he reappeared in her life a few hours ago—eager but nervous, and her mind desperately trying to deal with a few thousand second thoughts.

Before she could cross the street, he saw her and held up a hand, indicating she should stay where she was. A moment later, he joined her.

"We can't go in there. Your friend Frank and one of his buddies just went in," he said by way of explanation as he grabbed her hand and hustled her around the corner, into a narrow alleyway between two of the buildings.

"I wonder if they saw me?"

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“Who cares? I’m just interested in you.” He wrapped his arms around her, holding her close, his breathing ragged and his emotional state as obvious in the half-light as it would have been in a brightly lit room.

As her hands slipped under his shirt, his slid down her back to her butt, squeezing, stroking, then pulling her hard against his aroused cock. She knew she had to tell him, and tell him soon, before things got too far out of hand. But they were already out of hand. For one wild moment, she thought he intended to take her here and now in the alley, almost in full public view.

The idea excited her, and she held her breath, mentally daring him to do it. She didn’t care the temperature was below freezing, or that on her way over she’d noticed a few snowflakes dancing in the frosty air. At this hour the downtown area was pretty much deserted, but even so it wasn’t so late everyone was at home and in bed. There was always the odd shift worker coming or going from the job, or a cop car patrolling the area.

Releasing her butt, he cupped her face in his hands, sending waves of desire rocketing through her body as he took a deep, shuddering breath and brushed his mouth lightly against hers. He tasted and smelled the way she remembered—of toothpaste and coffee and something that was uniquely his own special scent.

“God! You have no idea how much I want you.” He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her close again. “How much I’ve wanted to just hold you, to feel you close like this. I

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thought what we had in London was just a one off thing. Something I'd forget after a few days."

"I thought that, too."

"And?"

"Didn't happen."

He urged her deeper into the alleyway. "I want you, baby. I want you so damn bad I can't even think straight."

"I know the feeling." She quickly unzipped his pants and touched his cock. It was hot, it was hard, but before she could crouch down and take him into her mouth, his hands were pushing up her skirt and pulling down her panties.

As her panties fell to her ankles, she took them off and shoved them in her pocket along with her shoes.

He slipped a finger between her legs and began to slowly move it back and forth. "How's that?"

She groaned. She didn't care that the temperature was way below zero and there was nothing between her bare feet and the icy ground but a pair of old socks. She was shaking with need and excitement, and if he didn't stop what he was doing, she was liable to come before he was inside her. "Better than great." She opened her legs a little wider. "But, please, don't make me wait."

He kissed her neck and laughed softly. "Tell me what you want."

"You know damn well what I want. I want to feel your lovely big dick inside me. So hurry up and do it before we both freeze to death out here."

He quickly dropped his pants and as he lifted her up and

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wrapped his jacket around her for warmth, she locked her legs around his waist.

“I can’t believe I’ve found you again.”

“Neither can I.”

For a moment they held on to one another, then he lowered her down over his hard cock. She closed her eyes, loving the sensation of him pushing inside her until he filled her completely and they were skin against skin.

As he began to fuck her, he slid his tongue along her lips, then it was in her mouth tangling with her tongue and doing a pale imitation of what his dick was doing to her pussy.

They were both over-stimulated, desperate for release, and within seconds, the tension began to build. Then, as he began to pump harder, stars began exploding in her head, and the next thing she knew it was over, and there they were half-dressed, standing in a dark alleyway, gasping for breath as if they’d just run a marathon.

“I don’t think I’ve done it that fast before,” she said, swallowing a bubble of laughter before it could escape. “Think anyone saw us?”

“I don’t know, and I don’t care. I wasn’t looking.”

“Me neither.”

“You okay?” he asked as he pulled up his pants.

“I’m good. Really good.” She retrieved her panties and shoes from her pocket and quickly put them back on. She waited until he’d zipped up his pants, then she wrapped her arms around him and laid her head against his chest. “We still need to talk.”



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“Okay. Here? Where?”

A bitter, gale-force wind had picked up and was now whistling through the alley. “It’s too cold here. Where’s your car?”

“Not far.” As they exited the alleyway, he pointed to a dark-colored sedan a little further along the street. “Right there.”

She thought again about asking him back to her place. But it was too dangerous. And not just because it was against RCU’s rules. She had a couple of nosy neighbors, regulars at the restaurant, who’d probably consider it their duty to go tittle-tattling to Frank about Kate’s handsome new beau. And right now, she didn’t need anyone—and that included her—doing anything that might get back to Frank and cause problems with her job.

Every hotel, motel, restaurant and bar in the area was also out of bounds for the exact same reasons.

She tried to think of places where she’d gone as a teenager. Places that hadn’t either been torn down or turned into something else...

“Come on. There’s a place I used to go with one of my high school boyfriends. It’s not too far, and I know no one goes there any more. We’ll be able to talk without being disturbed.”

“You sure about that?”

“I’m sure. I was born and brought up here. I know about these things.”

The place where she took Paul was only a few blocks

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away, a boarded-up, falling down warehouse surrounded by a variety of trash and overgrown bushes, by the river. The warehouse had been abandoned before Kate was born and, at one time, it had been the place where all the kids went to make out—until one of the girls decided the place was haunted and insisted they find somewhere else.

By the time they reached the warehouse, Paul had to use his headlights to negotiate the piles of old stoves, refrigerators and other unwanted items, but after finding a spot to park behind a tangle of overgrown bushes at the rear of the building, he turned them off. The only light now was from the street lamps on the other side of the narrow stretch of river, reflecting off the water and creating what Kate had once thought of as romantic semi-darkness.

As Paul reached for her, Kate resisted the temptation to continue what they'd started in the alley, and held him off.

"What's the matter, babe? Something wrong?"

"Like I said, we need to talk."

"About?"

"The fact that you're a professor at RCU, and I'm a student there."

He drew his breath in sharply. "You're what?"

"You heard. I'm a student at RCU."

"What are you studying?"

"I'm in my final year of law."

He didn't say anything for a few seconds, but then he sighed and said quietly, "Jeez! I don't believe this. I know we agreed not to talk about anything personal during those few

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days we spent together in London. It made sense at the time, but now... I guess it was bad idea, huh?"

"Not at the time. We never expected to meet again. What was the point of talking about stuff that didn't matter?"

"Because sometimes it does matter. One of the first tenets of law is to always expect the unexpected."

"I know. Which is why some very wise people invented insurance companies." She sighed as she found his hand in the darkness and linked their fingers together. "What are we going to do, Paul? I know some universities turn a blind eye, but RCU has zero tolerance when it comes to hanky panky between their professors and the students. The professor can get anything from a stiff reprimand to being fired, depending on the seriousness of the situation. But nine times out of ten, the student is suspended. Why the student gets the harshest treatment when it's usually the professor who can't keep his dick in his pants, is beyond me."

"Probably because a professor has more to lose in the long run. And it's not always down to the professor. Some female students won't take no for an answer."

She laughed and released his hand. "Oh, really? So who was it who dragged me into that alleyway tonight?"

"I didn't know you were one of my students."

"And if you *had* known?"

He joined in her laughter. "You've got me there. But I swear it's the first time I've been the aggressor."

"Have you ever had any problems with female students?"

"A couple. It goes with the job"

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Releasing the catch on her seatbelt, Kate moved a little closer. “I can understand that. I’ll even admit to being a tad interested in you myself.”

“That’s only because you and I have a little history.”

“You think? Maybe I can use that in my defense if we’re caught making out and get hauled up before the dean. I’ll tell him we have a history, and that I just couldn’t help myself because I had knowledge aforethought. Think he’ll understand?”

He laughed and kissed her fingers. “No. He’ll say that makes it even worse. That I should have had the sense to step away before it got that far. And then I’ll say, ‘I didn’t stand a chance, dean. She maybe small, but she’s very strong, and I’m afraid she overpowered me.’”

“You wouldn’t dare say that.” She hesitated, then chuckled as she walked her fingers down his chest, stopping just below his waist. “Would you?”

“That depends.”

“On what?”

“Like I said, I’ve tried to convince myself London meant nothing. I was away from home, feeling a little lonely, and you came along at just the right moment.”

“And?”

He squeezed her hand. “I think we both know what we feel for one another is one helluva lot more than nothing. I don’t want to lose you, Kate.”

“I feel the same way. But we don’t dare be seen together outside school.”

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"I know that. Any suggestions?"

"Not really. I can't transfer this close to getting my degree. And you can't quit a temporary position without looking like an idiot. It wouldn't look good on your resumé."

"It wouldn't if I wanted to be taken on by another law school, but I don't."

"Why's that?"

"I want to go back to being a lawyer."

"You don't like teaching?"

"I thought I would, but...I was with a big law firm on the east coast, specializing in corporate and contract law, and I taught a few classes on the side. I enjoyed teaching, and the idea of educating young minds appealed to me. So, when the opportunity to teach law fulltime came up, I grabbed it. But there's a huge difference between doing something part-time, and doing it full-time. After a couple of years, I knew I'd made a mistake. The academic life isn't for me. I need more of a challenge—so I quit."

"Just like that?"

"I saw no point in delaying the inevitable."

"I suppose. But if you don't like teaching, why take this job at RCU?"

"Favor for a friend. Professor Sands's nephew is married to my sister, Ann. She told Dean Marcotte if he asked me nicely, I might be willing to fill in for Roger, and so Marcotte called me. I didn't want to do it, but he said he was in a bind. Apparently the law department was already short-staffed before this happened, so I've agreed to take over temporarily,

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until Roger is able to return.”

“Any idea how long that might be?”

“Not really. Could be only a couple of weeks. Could even be for the rest of this semester. I don’t know, and Roger doesn’t know either at this point. He didn’t have a heart attack. But he had been experiencing unusual chest pains. And since he’s close to fifty and has a few other minor health issues, his doctors felt the pains warranted further investigation. Once they figure out the problem and get him on the right meds, he’ll be back.”

“And then you’ll be looking for something else?”

“Yes. But I’m in no rush. I want to take my time and find a good fit. Something smaller than the firm I was with back east. Somewhere I can enjoy what I’m doing. And with a firm where I’ll have a voice in how things are run.”

“What were you doing in London?”

“I needed time to step back and consider my options. I had a standing invitation to visit a friend over there, so it seemed like the perfect place for me to do it and, at the same time, check out a couple of job opportunities I’d heard about.”

“In England?”

“A number of American law firms have offices in London. American lawyers can’t practice law over there without a license, but I thought whatever they were offering might prove interesting. A change of pace so to speak. But the man who interviewed me said their clients were mostly American, and the clients needed to feel the American presence. In other words, they were looking for an office manager with a law

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degree to use as window-dressing. I'm afraid I passed."

"And where was your friend while I was staying with you?"

He gave a soft laugh as he pushed his seat back as far as it would go and pulled her over the console and onto his lap. "Away on business in Spain for a few days. Convenient, huh?"

"Very." Kate wondered if Fate had arranged that, too. If so, perhaps Fate could come up with a way for her and Paul to meet without getting caught. Or was that something they had to figure out for themselves? "What are we going to do, Paul? Grit our teeth for the next two weeks or two months and pretend we don't know one another?"

He slipped a hand under Kate's skirt and rested it on her thigh. "You mean look, but don't touch? I don't know if I can. What about you?"

"If it were summertime, there are plenty of secluded spots where we could go, even an abandoned farm building or two that I know of. But at this time of year it's not only too cold, there's the very real risk of being caught in a snowstorm."

His hand moved higher as he nuzzled her lips. "There has to be somewhere we can go without anyone knowing."

He moved his fingers under the edge of her panties, and her muscles clenched in anticipation. "We can come here the odd time, but we can't make it into a regular thing. If we do, someone's bound to notice."

"Can you lift your butt a little?"

Kate did as he asked, and he quickly removed her panties.

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“That’s much better,” he whispered against her mouth. “Now if you could just open your legs a little.”

She teased him by only opening them a tiny fraction. “This enough?”

“Maybe a little more.”

“How about this?”

His hands felt like ice as he caressed her inner thighs, urging her legs further apart, but the cold only added to the excitement. Then his hands were stroking her belly and everywhere except where she wanted them to be. “Touch me, why don’t you?”

He traced the outline of her mouth with the tip of his tongue. “You mean something like this?”

“We don’t have enough room in here to do that.”

“No. We’ll have to improvise.”

As he spoke, Paul opened the lips of her pussy with one hand, then teased her with one finger of the other—tiny, light touches that skimmed her clit and drove her crazy with need. After a moment, he relented and began to give her what she thought she wanted, his finger sliding urgently back and forth in her wetness. But it wasn’t enough for Kate. She didn’t want to come like this. She wanted more than a finger, or a quick two-minute fuck in a cold alleyway, no matter how incredible the orgasm that had accompanied it.

She wanted what she’d been dreaming of for the past three months. She wanted to be naked and lying on her back with Paul on top. She wanted to feel the exhilaration and anticipation of those first few seconds when his stiff cock



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nudged impatiently at her slit, demanding to be let in. And when she opened her folds and he pushed, the glorious feeling of that first thrust, of being impaled on his stiff, magnificent shaft, and the delicious sensation of her muscles squeezing his hardness, as if they never wanted to let him go.

If anyone asked her what the fuss was all about, she'd probably say for her, that was it. That first incredible moment when two became one and everything else ceased to exist. And if what she was sitting on right now was any indication, she suspected Paul would agree.

"You're driving me nuts," she said with a chuckle, pulling out of his embrace and doing her best to change position in what little space there was available.

"Want to try the back seat? If I pull my seat forward as far as it'll go, we'll have room to spare and no gear shift to worry about."

In a matter of seconds, the moment she'd been dreaming about was happening. First she was going down on Paul, sucking his cock until he begged her to stop. Then, she was on her back with her legs spread wide, and Paul's tongue was licking her nipples while his cock pressed hard against her pussy.

"You going to let me in?" he asked.

This was a game they'd played in London. Paul would keep asking, and she'd keep saying he had to wait until he was desperate enough to resort to begging. But this time, she was the one who was desperate, and she was in no mood to play games.

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Reaching down, she stroked his dick and guided him into her slit. He hesitated for moment, then she felt the glorious rush of sensation as he cupped her bottom with both hands and pushed forward until he'd buried himself all the way inside her. He pulled out slowly, then he thrust forward again, and as he captured her mouth with his, she wrapped her legs around his waist.

At first, he began to ride her the way she loved most, in slow, measured strokes, while his tongue tangled with hers. But then he added a little spice to the mix by rubbing her nub until she was on the verge of coming. As she started to groan, he backed off, holding her on the brink.

He started to ride her faster, and she grasped his butt, urging him on. But then he slowed again, and she felt his hands spreading her butt cheeks a moment before he slid a finger into her anus. The moment his cock and his finger began to move in tandem, she felt the world spinning out of control. Her muscles tightened, and she dug her fingers into his back as he began to pump harder. She knew he was close and so was she, and she wanted them to come together.

She held her breath, and suddenly she was there, flying through a shower of shooting stars and multi-colored rainbows and hoping the journey would last forever.

But like all wonderful journeys, it did end and, as the steam went out of Paul, he collapsed against her, wrapping his arms around her and holding her close. "That was amazing. I know abstinence is supposed to be good for the soul, but it ought to carry a warning it can make a guy desperate."

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Kate frowned. "Abstinence? You saying you haven't had sex in a while?"

"Not for a while. Why?"

"Just wondered." She felt a tiny flutter in the region of her heart. "How long is a while?"

"A few months. What about you? You seemed pretty desperate yourself."

"Me...well, umm...I don't know. I've been busy, studying for final exams, and figuring out what I'm going to do with my life after school. No time for socializing. What's your excuse? You didn't feel like it? You got sick? What?"

His hold tightened. "Well, to tell the truth, when I was in London, I saved this girl from being killed by a bus, and we ended up spending a few days together. It was supposed to be just sex. Something to enjoy while it lasted and then forget about once it was over."

"But?"

"I guess I screwed up."

"In what way?"

"There's a saying that if you save a life, you become responsible for the life you've saved. I forgot about that. I also forgot falling in love wasn't part of the deal either. By the time I realized I didn't want to lose her, she'd already gone."

"She didn't tell you her name or address?"

"Like I said, it wasn't supposed to be serious. No names, no addresses, no guilt, and no promises. We agreed."

"So we did. Lucky for us Fate stepped in and straightened things out."

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“You believe in Fate?” He sat up and began fumbling around on the floor.

“You have some other explanation?” She hesitated. “What are you looking for?”

“I can’t find my belt.”

“Here,” she said, handing him the long strip of leather she’d just found wedged between her leg and the back of the seat. “This it?”

“Thanks. As for explaining how I found you again, except for citing a series of weird coincidences, such as Roger’s chest pains and my interfering sister, I can’t. I’m still having trouble believing you’re real and not a dream. Maybe Fate did have a hand in things. I don’t know.”

In Kate’s opinion, there was no other explanation. The chances of her and Paul meeting again without help were too slim to even consider. But instead of telling Paul that, she refastened her bra, smoothed down her sweater, and began searching for her panties, only to remember leaving them in the front of the car. “So, how are we going to handle things in public? Do we admit we’ve met somewhere before, or do we make like strangers?”

“We try to behave as normally as possible, I guess. You don’t admit a damn thing unless you’re forced to and then you say we’ve met before, but make it sound really casual.”

She gave a soft hoot of laughter. “Like, ‘I vaguely recall meeting you when I was in England, professor. Now, was it at Lady Fandango’s cocktail party? Or was it Sir Rupert’s *soirée* at the Ritz?’ Think that might work?”

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“Very funny, but no. I’d suggest keeping as close to the truth as possible. Just act all surprised and say, ‘Aren’t you the guy who saved me from being run over by that bus?’ and leave it at that. As long as we keep our distance and avoid too much eye contact, we should be fine.”

“What’s wrong with looking?”

“Eyes tend to reflect what a person’s thinking. So we need to be careful.”

“Don’t worry, I will. But give me your cell phone number. If we can’t figure out a safe place to meet, we may have to spend our nights talking dirty.”

“You ever done that?”

She laughed. “There was this time when I was in desperate need of extra money—I forget what for now—so I interviewed for what I thought was a telemarketing job. It turned out that they needed people to do phone-sex.”

He slipped his jacket back on and pulled her close. “Did you take the job?”

She hesitated, then, making her voice very deep and husky and tinged with a phony foreign accent, she said, “Close your eyes and imagine I’m there with you, my sweet. That we’re both naked, lying on your bed. You’ve had a fight with your girlfriend, and she’s asleep in the next room. If she wakes up and finds out what you’re doing... Well, let’s not think about that. Just think about my hand stroking your dick. Long, slow strokes, just the way you like it. Then I’m petting your balls and touching your ass. Are you hard yet? Not quite? Never mind, we’ll get there.

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“Now, imagine me licking you. My tongue is hot and wet and it’s curling around your cock. I know, you just love the feeling of me touching you. You’re even beginning to get a little excited as I take you into my mouth. Imagine the feeling as my lips hold it in place, and I suck you in one tiny bit at a time. Suck, suck, suck. Ooh...isn’t that marvelous. I know you want to come, but—”

“Stop it.” Paul groaned and covered her mouth with his hand. “You really said stuff like that?”

“Hey, phone sex is expensive. The people who operate the service have to deliver what the customers pay for. They can’t just hope the person they’re interviewing can do the job. They make them audition.”

“In person?”

“Over the phone. They put me in another room and gave me a script and a number to call. After I finished the call, the woman who interviewed me said I was good, and that I could make myself a lot of money.”

He moved restlessly in his seat, as if trying to find a more comfortable position. “So you err...umm...You took the job?”

“Did what I just say bother you?”

He wriggled a bit more. “What do you mean by bother?”

She moved her hand under his jacket and stroked his cock through his pants, not surprised to find it was already hard. “I guess it did. Bother you, that is. Here, try to lean back and stretch out a bit.”

Once she had him in a better position, she unbuttoned his pants and opened the zipper. Then, as his erect shaft escaped

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the restraining fabric, she pulled his pants down a tad so she could stroke him. "That better?"

He drew in his breath, then groaned. "You know damned well it isn't. You're making it worse."

As she slipped off the seat and maneuvered herself between his legs, his fingers threaded through her hair, pressing her mouth against his crotch. "Suck me, baby. And do it now. Do it before you drive me crazy."

Taking him in both hands, she swept her tongue over the tip, loving the taste of him and the way he bucked in anticipation. She waited, then did it again. "How's that?"

"Not nearly enough. I want to feel you suck me, babe. I want you to suck me hard. Remember the way you did it when we were in London? That felt so damn good."

Kate remembered all too well. The way his body had reacted when she took him into her mouth, and the look of ecstasy on his face when he came. She wrapped her mouth around his cock and began to slowly suck him inside, but a sound interrupted her concentration.

Something outside the car. *A footstep? The rustle of loose stones?* She hesitated, peering through the window in the hope she could find the cause.

"Hey, don't stop."

"Shush. Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

A dark shadow passed in front of the bushes and moved around the corner of the warehouse. Or was it only the wind, pushing the branches around? "I think someone is out there."

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His erection died instantly. “Jeez! You mean watching us?”

“Could be. But I’m not sure. Could’ve been an animal, although it sounded too loud for that. And animals don’t throw shadows that size.”

“If it was a cop, he’d have been banging on the window by now.”

“True. It’s probably kids or someone living on the streets. It’s a cold night, so it could even be someone staying in the warehouse.”

“It could also be a weirdo, looking for trouble.” Paul finished zipping his pants and got out of the car. “Let’s get out of here.”

\* \* \*

The following morning, Kate showed up for class, found herself a seat at the back of the room, and listened while Mrs. Williams, one of the department heads, introduced Paul as Professor Sand’s temporary replacement.

“Taking over this late in the year is a huge challenge for anyone. I’m sure you all appreciate that. And I know I speak for the dean and the entire staff at RCU when I say how grateful we are for Mr. Latham consenting to assist us in what could otherwise have been a very difficult situation.” Professor Williams smiled as her gaze swept the room. “I trust I can count on the cooperation of everyone here not to cause him any unnecessary problems.”

“What does that stupid cow think? That one of us will try



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and jump his bones the moment she turns her back?"

Recognizing the whisper, Kate turned toward the speaker. "Hi, Liza."

"Hi yourself." Liza drew in a breath and pursed her lips. "I mean, Latham's cute. Really cute. But I, for one, am not that stupid. After what happened with Lola Yang, I'd have to be suicidal to even contemplate getting cozy with one of the professors. Even one like Latham who's only here for a few weeks."

Kate knew who Lola Yang was. Lola was in the graduating class, along with herself and Liza. And she'd heard the rumors about Lola having an affair with one of the professors. Rumors that had been making the rounds for months and most people said they were true.

A tiny shiver of apprehension slid down Kate's back. "What happened to Lola?"

"The way I heard it, a staff member caught Lola and Professor Duval coming out of a motel over by the freeway at six in the morning. Totally obvious what they'd been up to, of course."

"And?"

"I guess Duval can forget about tenure. And Lola can definitely forget about buying a graduation dress. She won't be graduating this year here at RCU like she was supposed to, 'cos they've bounced her cute little ass right out the door."

Kate stared at Liza in shock. "Lola's gone? I didn't hear anything. When did this happen?"

"Friday. The dean doesn't play around when it comes to

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breaking that particular rule.”

“You mean this past Friday?”

“That’s when it happened. Where were you? Everyone in the school was talking about it.”

Kate swallowed hard, wondering about that shadow she’d thought she’d seen last night when she and Paul were making out in his car. It couldn’t have been anyone who knew her, but even so... “I didn’t have any classes last Friday, so I stayed home to study. You’re saying it just happened, boom, like that?”

Liza shrugged. “No. I heard they’d been warned, and I’m sure they were given ample opportunity to explain before it became general gossip. And it wasn’t like the two of them didn’t know about the strict ‘no touch’ policy we have here. I shared an apartment with Lola last semester, and the reason I moved out was because of Duval. I told her a thousand times what would happen if she didn’t smarten up and dump him, but she said she didn’t care, that the rule was only there as a deterrent. She and Duval were both single and over the age of consent, so they could do whatever they wanted.”

“Not your fault if she wouldn’t listen.”

“True. Her life. If she wants to toss it away, who are we complain?”

“I wonder if she used the age thing as her explanation?”

Liza gave Kate a wry smile. “You think the dean would’ve listened? When you’re caught dead to rights, what’s there to explain?”

Just then, someone rapped on a desk for attention and

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silence settled over the room.

“Good morning, everyone. As Professor Williams has just told you, my name is Paul Latham, and I’ll be filling in while Professor Sand is away.” He picked up a folder from the desk and opened it. “I understand when Professor Sand was taken ill, you were exploring some of the more difficult areas of contract law. As you know, the purpose of a contract is to set forth in writing what the parties to the contract have already agreed to verbally. For this reason, it’s extremely important to cover all areas of that verbal agreement, whether they are express or implied.

“This is an opportunity to put in writing what the parties actually intend, not what one or both of them may have ‘thought’ or ‘believed.’ Always bear in mind when it comes to contracts that a badly drawn contract, one where important items are left to the interpretation of the parties, almost always results in a lawsuit.”

As Paul continued speaking, Kate’s thoughts turned inward. Paul’s lecture wasn’t on her list of classes for today. But after last night, she’d wanted to see him, even if it did have to be from a distance. And thank God she had come. If she hadn’t, she wouldn’t have known about Lola, and she wouldn’t have stopped to really consider the severity of what could happen if she took any more stupid chances herself.

She shoved her hands in the pockets of her cords to stop them from shaking. She had to graduate. She had too much to lose to mess up now. Everything required or made necessary by federal, state or local law for to hang up her shingle and

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begin practicing as a lawyer had either been completed or were in process. There was the lease she'd signed for her dad's old office, the back-up financing she'd arranged with her bank to get through the first year, the new computer and office furniture. The list went on and on. And then there were the people who'd promised to support her by becoming clients. Screw up now and life as she knew it would be over.

But where did that leave Paul? She didn't want to lose Paul. Couldn't lose him. There had to be a way to make everything work out the way they both wanted.

She'd have to call him later and see if they could figure something out.

As the lecture ended and some of the students crowded around Paul, Kate slipped her notebook into her backpack and left the room.

\* \* \*

She waited until the lunch break to call Paul, then she took a walk around the campus and called him on her cell phone.

As she started to explain about Lola, Paul said, "I know. I just overheard someone talking about it."

"I knew we'd have to be careful. But now...I don't know what to say. What are we going to do?"

"The only person who knows we've met before is that guy where you work. Right? Think he'll mention it to anyone?"

"I don't see why he would. But then, with Frank you never know."

"I think we need something, just in case anyone asks."

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"I thought we were going to go with you snatching me from the jaws of death. No?"

"Too dramatic. We need something simple. Do you ever go to Chicago?"

"Usually about once a month. My mom and step-dad live there. Why?"

"Perfect. So does my sister, Ann. If anyone asks, we'll say we met at a party in Chicago, and leave it at that. We don't need to go into details."

"Provided we're not seen together outside school, there's no reason for anyone to ask."

Paul didn't say anything, and she wondered what he was thinking.

But then he gave a soft sigh and said, "You're due to graduate a couple of months from now. You need to forget everything else and concentrate on that. Two months is the worst it can be, and even that's not forever."

"Sounds like a couple of centuries to me."

"I'm not suggesting it'll be easy for either of us." He paused. "By the way, you never said if you took that job with the telemarketers."

"You mean the one where they wanted me to talk dirty to the desperate?"

"That's the one."

She gave a hoot of laughter. "What do you want to know for?"

"Because unless one of us can come up with a safe place to meet, we're going to need it. Two months could be a very long

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time.”

\* \* \*

During her shift at the restaurant that evening, Kate noticed Frank keep shooting her funny looks.

She waited until the last customers had left and the two of them were doing the final clean-up, then she said, “What’s with the looks? You have a problem?”

Frank leaned against the counter and folded his arms, a sly, supercilious grin on his fleshy face. “I think you’re the one with the problem. Not me.”

“Me? What I have done?”

“I saw you last night.”

Her nerves tightened. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Saw me where?”

“Across the street from The Orange Blossom.”

“Couldn’t have been me. I was home all night.”

“Sure it was you. When I went in, I saw that guy who was in here yesterday evening, the one you seemed to know, waiting on the corner. I wondered what he was doing there. But then I saw you on the other side of the street.”

She picked up a cloth and started cleaning the dessert display case. Fortunately for her, Frank’s short-sightedness was well known and something of a joke. “I think it’s way past time you got those glasses, Frank. The last time you had your eyes checked, the doctor said you needed them, and he gave you a prescription. Remember?”

“I don’t need glasses, except for reading fine print. And I

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didn't need them to see it was you across the street last night."

"Last night, after I left here, I went home, fed my cat, and went to bed. Whoever you saw, it wasn't me."

"Oh, really?"

"Really."

"Stop lying, Kate. I know damn well it was you. I saw the guy wave at you, telling you to stay put. But when I saw the way he hustled you up that side street, I got worried. I thought he was attacking you, so I decided to investigate. And guess what I saw?"

Kate rubbed the glass of the display case a little harder. "Since I wasn't there, maybe you'd better tell me. The suspense is killing me."

"I thought you'd gone, but then I saw the two of you fucking like a pair of bunnies in the alleyway behind the buildings. And from what I could see, you weren't objecting one bit. "

She finished with the display case and turned her attention to the nearest table, while her stomach tied itself into knots. "Nice. And I suppose you took pictures on your lovely new phone."

"It was much too dark for that. Anyway, the phone's broken."

"Already? That's too bad," she murmured, feeling a quick surge of relief. "And then what did you do, go home and jerk off?"

"That's disgusting, Kate. Don't talk to me like that. You wouldn't talk that way in front of my dad."

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“That’s because your dad is a gentleman.”

“I see. And I suppose I’m not?” He came over to the table Kate was cleaning, sat down in one of the chairs and grabbed her hand. “Want to know what else I saw?”

She snatched her hand free and moved on to the next table. “No. But I’m sure you’re dying to tell me.”

“When you came out of that alley, I followed the two of you all the way down to the river. I knew you were going to hang out behind the old warehouse ’cos I’ve been down there a time or two myself. Anyway, I parked out of sight and went back on foot, just in time to listen to all your moaning and groaning. And I saw the two of you get out of the front and go into the back seat. Needed more room, did we?”

Kate threw down the cloth she was using, returned to the table where Frank was still sitting, and stared him straight in the eye. “I presume you have a witness to what you say you saw. A witness who’ll swear in court that the people you saw last night were me and Paul.”

“No. I have something better.”

Kate’s nerves began to tighten anew. Just from the satisfied grin Frank was giving her, she knew this was going to be bad. “And what, pray tell, is that?”

“A group of students from RCU came in for lunch today.”

“So? RCU students eat here all the time because the food’s cheap.”

“I overheard them talking about another student who got thrown out last week for sleeping with one of her professors. I also heard them say how that kind of thing is a super big no-no



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at RCU, and they couldn't understand why she took the risk when she knew what would happen if she got caught."

"Great! You're not only a peeping tom, now you're an eavesdropper, too. What does this have to do with me?"

"One of them had this picture of a guy on her phone, and she passed the phone around the table. She said the risk would be worth it she could share his bed for a few hours."

She felt hot, flustered, and her heart rate was way too high. "Get to the point, Frank. I want to finish up here and go home. I'm beat."

"It was a photo of the guy who came in here last night. The same guy I saw you with in the alley. The woman who had his photo said his name's Paul Latham, and he's a professor out at RCU."

Frank's behavior was becoming more arrogant and cocky by the second, and he was starting to seriously piss Kate off. If he thought he had her cornered, he was dead wrong. And she needed to make that clear before he got totally carried away. "Yes, I know. Paul is filling in temporarily while one of the other professors has to deal with some serious health issues. As to how I know Paul...we met at a party in Chicago several months ago when I was up there visiting my mom. I happened to mention I lived in River City, and he said something like, 'Really? Small world. My sister's brother-in-law works at RCU.' And that was it until he walked in here last night. I was as surprised to see him as he was to see me. End of story."

"Or so you say."

"I do say."

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He shrugged, giving her a smile as wide as the whole outdoors. "What do you really think about him, Kate? You think this Paul Latham is worth screwing up your life for?"

"Don't be ridiculous. No one is worth that."

As Kate continued cleaning the tables, Frank came over and wrapped his arms around her from behind.

"Come into the back with me and give me some head, babe, and we'll say no more about it. You know I've always had the hots for you. Few wet dreams as well, if I'm honest."

She stiffened as his hold tightened, and he began rubbing himself against her butt. A moment later, one of his hands slipped down to the area of her crotch, and he began hitching up her skirt.

"Cut it out, Frank."

"Aw, come on, baby. You know you want to."

"No, Frankie, baby, I don't want to. And if you don't let go of me this instant, I'll scream."

"It's just you and me, babe. Who d'you think's gonna hear you?"

"Your mom. She just stopped out front. At least, it looks like her car."

"Omigod!" Frank let Kate go and took off in the direction of the kitchen. But not before she caught a quick glimpse of his erect penis tenting the front of his pants.

Kate knew exactly how terrified Frank was of his pint-sized mother and her hot, Sicilian temper, and she'd had no compunction using that knowledge to her advantage.

As she finished cleaning the last table, Frank poked his

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head back out of the kitchen door. "Where she is?"

"Where's who?"

"My mom, of course."

"At home with your dad, I imagine."

"But you said you saw her outside, parking her car."

"I thought I saw her. Guess I was wrong. Like you were wrong about seeing me last night."

"But I did see you. I know it was you."

"Come on, Frank. Tell the truth. You only thought it was me. You have trouble seeing in daylight, so how could you possibly recognize anyone in the dark? Truth is you don't know for sure who was making out in that alley, do you?"

"It was you and that guy, Paul. I saw you when the two of you came out and went up the street to where he'd left his car."

"Exactly how close were you?"

"Not very."

"A hundred feet? More? Less?"

"More than a hundred feet. Otherwise you'd have seen me."

She relaxed slightly. "So all you really saw was Paul meet a woman and disappear up a side street. By the time you left The Orange Blossom and crossed the street, they had to have been long gone. You must have realized that."

"I know what I saw."

"You know what you *think* you saw. Fact is it was too dark, and you were too far away to be sure of anything. Even with glasses you'd have had a hard time recognizing who it

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was. And where was your car? How did you manage to go back to wherever you'd left it and still keep up with them?"

"I guessed where they were going."

"In other words, you drove around for a bit, found someone parked behind the old warehouse and decided it was the same couple you'd seen in the alley? It could've been anyone. I bet you could go down there any night of the week and find someone making out." She hesitated for a moment, then said, "Saying stuff that isn't true can cause a lot of trouble. I hope you know that."

"I guess." The cocky arrogance had disappeared, leaving him looking like a pricked balloon as he slumped down in the nearest chair. "Don't be mad at me. I won't tell anyone."

"There's nothing for you to tell, Frank."

Kate went into the staff room for her coat and purse. When she came out, Frank was still sitting in the same chair. "You mad at me?"

"No, I'm not mad. You made a mistake, that's all."

\* \* \*

By the time she got home, Kate had a thumping headache. And despite what she'd told Frank, she was furious with him. She didn't like what she'd had to do. She hated telling lies, but she didn't regret a single one of them because she hated being blackmailed even more. And she knew that's what Frank had had in mind. He thought he had proof there was something going on between her and Paul, and he wanted her to confirm it. But she knew Frank too well to do anything that foolish, so

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she'd done what she had to do, and that was blow him out of the water and make him doubt himself.

Frank wouldn't have stopped at promising not to say anything if she'd given in to his sexual demands. He'd have expected it to become a regular thing, and if she refused, he'd have taken her and Paul down just for the hell of it by saying and doing whatever it took to convince the dean they were breaking the rules. She couldn't imagine having sex with Frank even one time. More than once was out of the question. She'd give up her dream of following in her dad's footsteps before she allowed that to happen.

After a quick shower, she put on pajamas and had just finished putting food down for Horatio when her cell phone rang. The caller ID showed it to be Paul, and she picked up. "Hi, there."

"Hi, yourself. How was your day?"

She wandered into the living room and sat down on the couch. "Interesting. I found out who was spying on us last night."

"You did?"

"It was Frank." She gave Paul an edited version of her conversation with Frank. "I'd like to think he'll stay out of my business after this, but I wouldn't put money on it. He's likely to have one of his friends keep an eye on us, or buy those glasses his optometrist prescribed, and do it himself."

"With Frank watching out for us, we won't be breaking any rules. Sounds like he'll be doing us a favor."

"Some favor." Horatio jumped onto Kate's lap and began

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kneading her thighs. With his eyes half-closed and his purr at full volume, he looked to be in feline heaven. “Thanks to Frank, I’m here all by myself, in my new silk pajamas, with only my cat for company.”

“Frank didn’t make RCU’s rules.”

“Maybe not, but he’s having the time of his life enforcing them.”

“You have some studying you can do to take your mind off all this?”

“I’m studying law, and I have the bar exams to think about. My life is one long study session. You’re right. I need to forget about you and Frank, and hit the books.”

After saying goodnight to Paul, Kate made a pot of coffee, and sat down at the kitchen table. As her mind started to wander back to Paul, she grabbed the first book off the pile at her elbow, a dry tome on patent law, and kept reading until all thought of Paul disappeared and the printed words made sense. Most of the stuff she had to read would have no place in her real life as a small town attorney. She wouldn’t be going to Washington or to the Supreme Court. She wouldn’t be trying to appeal anything, be it a constitutional amendment or a death sentence. And she wouldn’t be representing megamillionaires, or jetting around the world, putting together huge corporate mergers that would allow the eventual multinational owners to operate in a global environment.

Kate would do as her father had done before her. She’d draw wills, notarize documents, attend to the work involved in settling estates and selling real estate, along with all the other

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things small town attorneys were needed to look after. And occasionally she'd go to court to settle her clients' disputes, or get them out of whatever minor problems they'd managed to get themselves into. If anything she was called on to do escalated out of her comfort range, then she'd do what her father had done and what any other attorney practicing alone did, and that was pick up the phone and call in the big guys.

Her dad had never had a law partner. His life might have been easier, even less stressful, if he had. But he hadn't wanted a partner. He'd said never met anyone he trusted well enough.

*But...* As the glimmering of an idea began to form in Kate's mind, the phone rang again. This time it was the land line, not the cell phone. Kate didn't recognize the number, but answered anyway. She could always hang up. "Hello?"

"Hi, Kate. This is Rosa at Chesney Realty. I apologize for calling you so late, but I just got the call, and I couldn't wait to tell you. It's so exciting, I knew you'd want to know right away."

"Know what, Rosa?"

"It's about the old house on Main Street. The one where you signed the lease for office space."

Kate felt her anxiety level take an upward leap. "What's happened? Don't tell me it's burned down. Or the owner wants to—"

"No, no," Rosa interrupted. "Nothing like that. It's good news. Remember you told me you weren't that crazy about your apartment? That you'd eventually be looking for

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something else?”

“I will. Once I graduate and get settled.”

“Well, look no further. The upstairs tenant vacated this morning, and I’ve put a twenty-four hour hold on the apartment for you. The owner needs a few days to repaint and fix a few things, but he says you can come and look at it tomorrow. And you can choose your own paint colors. Isn’t that wonderful?”

“It’s...it’s...fantastic!” Kate’s mind was in a whirl. Not in a million years had she expected to hear that apartment was available. She’d always wanted it, but the guy living there seemed to have taken root, renewing his lease year after year. But now it was going to be hers!

What to do first, and who to call. She’d need more furniture. And what about a stove and refrigerator? Were they included? “I can come over tomorrow and take a look, so that’s not a problem. I can’t move in right a way, of course. I’m on a month-to-month, but I still have to give a month’s notice. And...”

“There’s a problem?” Rosa asked.

“No. Not a problem exactly. It’s just that I have a friend working here in town temporarily. I’m wondering, assuming I take the apartment, if he could live there until I’m ready to move in?”

“Once you sign the lease and pay the deposit and the first month’s rent, it’s up to you who you have there.” Rosa gave a tinkling burst of laughter. “Within reason, of course. Like, I hope you’re not planning to move in a herd of cows, or sublet



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it to some heavy metal rockers. The owner might have a problem with that.”

“No worries there,” Kate said, glancing at the clock above the refrigerator and wondering if it was too late to call Paul. “No cows, and I’m not into loud music. What time should I come over tomorrow to check it out?”

“I’ve promised to show an out-of-town property first thing in the morning, but I can be back around lunchtime. I could meet you there, say twelve-thirty.”

“Twelve-thirty’s perfect. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

After completing the call, Kate picked up Horatio and danced gleefully around the kitchen with him in her arms. She didn’t really need to check out the apartment. When her dad was alive and her grandma lived upstairs in that apartment, it had been Kate’s second home. “Guess what, big boy? You and your mama are gonna have a nice new home. It’s big, it’s got a sundeck out back where you can have your afternoon nap, and we might even find you a friend to keep you company while I’m working. What do you think of that?”

The cat pushed his head hard against Kate’s chin. “Mreooow.”

“Good. Glad you approve.” She put Horatio back in his basket and glanced again at the clock.

At this hour, Paul was bound to be asleep. Even so...

She found her cell phone and dialed Paul’s number.

He picked up on the third ring. “This better be good.”

“It is. I know it’s late, but something great just happened.”

“Frank’s been run out of town on a rail?”

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She swallowed the desire to laugh hysterically at the thought of Frank being run out of town, with a group of angry citizens and a pack of barking dogs there to see him on his way. "It's better than that. I know you're only here temporarily. No more than a couple of months max. But have you thought about finding an apartment? Or do you prefer staying at that motel?"

"Do you know what time it is?"

"Almost midnight. Please, answer the question."

"I thought I'd stay here. Partly because I don't know how long I'll be filling in for Roger. But mostly because furnished apartments with short-term leases are difficult to find. Please, babe, can't this wait until tomorrow?"

"No. This is a one-time offer. The offer of a lifetime, in fact."

"You want to audition as telemarketer of the year, and you need me to test your skills?"

"Sounds like fun, but no."

"Okay. So what're you offering?"

Kate drew in a deep breath. She was going on instinct here. If it turned out to be a mistake, or if anything went wrong, or even if, God forbid, Paul said no, she'd hunt down Lady Fate, wrap a rope around her skinny neck, and hang her from the nearest tree.

"You said you wanted to find a job with a smaller law firm. Somewhere you could practice the kind of law you'd enjoy, and where you'd have a say in how the operation was run."

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“You offering me a job?”

“Would you take it if I did? My dad was a lawyer, and I have a signed lease on what used to be his office. It’s one of those old houses on Main Street. And a couple of minutes ago, my real estate agent called and said the upstairs apartment has just become available. It’s huge. Three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and lots of cupboard space, plus a sundeck out back. More than enough room for you, me and Horatio.”

“Who in hell is Horatio?”

“My cat.”

“Oh! I thought for a minute there I was being invited to participate in a *ménage à trois*.”

She laughed. “Disappointed?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll get over it. But let me get this straight. You’re offering me a law partnership and a place to live?”

“Interested?”

“I have a little over ten years combined practicing law and teaching it, and I can make whatever financial contribution you want. But I don’t have any clients to bring.”

“I understand that. I realize I’m dumping this on you out of the blue, so it’s fine if you need time to think it over. And I’ll try to understand if you say no.”

“I don’t need time. Setting up in business with you feels right to me. I’m in. Okay?”

“Even though we scarcely know one another?”

“So what? We know all the really important stuff. We’re reasonably compatible, and I even like cats. But that’s not to say we’re going to agree on every last thing.”

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"I know that. The apartment will be available in a few days. I have to give a month's notice where I'm currently living, plus I'll need time to pack and change the phone and stuff like that. So, if you want to make use of the new place rather than stay on at the motel, that's fine. It's the answer to our prayers. We'll have the whole place to ourselves."

"Provided we don't tell anyone. We don't need Frank or his buds snooping around." He hesitated, and she could hear him breathing. "Before you go..."

"Yes?"

"Maybe tomorrow night we can do your telemarketer thing?"

"You mean the dialogue for the desperately horny?"

He laughed, a low, sexy chuckle that made her close her eyes and try to imagine he was here with her now, holding her close, his hands moving over body, seeking out the most sensitive spots.

"That's the one."

After saying goodnight to Paul, although Kate went to bed, she was too excited to sleep properly. She was excited they now had a place where they could meet without anyone knowing, and also at the prospect of Paul being her new law partner. By five in the morning, she was out of bed, dressed, and trying to cram for what another student had warned her the previous day was supposed to be an unscheduled test on general law.

Kate hated unscheduled anything. She was too organized to deal with spur-of-the-moment great ideas...unless, of

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course, Paul happened to drop by unannounced. She smiled inwardly and reached for another textbook. She'd always have time for Paul in her schedule, no matter what.

At twelve-thirty, she met Rosa at the house on Main Street. Once she'd checked the place over, she added a couple of items to the owner's "things to be fixed" list, negotiated a price she could live with, and told the man she'd have to get back to him on paint colors. She then promised to drop into Rosa's office in a day or two to sign the lease, and somehow managed to make it back to school in time for the dreaded test.

As it turned out, the test was a breeze, but by the time she'd finished classes for the day, her sleepless night was starting to catch up. All she wanted to do was go home and climb into bed. But first, she had her regular shift at the restaurant to get through. She could call in sick, except, with the new apartment, she needed extra money for furniture.

In any event, she couldn't chicken out and not show up. Do that and Frank would figure he had her on the run. Show up and perhaps he'd get the message he couldn't intimidate her the way he'd tried to last night.

However, when she arrived at the restaurant, only his dad was there. Frank was nowhere in sight.

"Hi, Sam," she said, giving the older man a friendly smile. "Where's Frank this evening?"

"Chicago. He'll be working at my brother's restaurant for a while. Joe's getting older and needs the extra help, so I sent Frank up there to give him a hand." He opened the cash register and tossed in a handful of loose change. "Joe has a

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much bigger place than what I have here. It's a lot busier, too, and that's good. Frank's the kind who needs to be kept busy. If he's not, no telling what kind of trouble that boy'll get himself into, if you catch my drift," he said, giving her a knowing glance.

Sam didn't have to spell it out...that one glance had told Kate Sam knew it all. Either he'd overheard Frank bragging to a friend about getting her thrown out of school, or Frank had been foolish enough to shoot his mouth off at home. However it had happened, the good part was Sam had found out and dealt with the problem

She felt as if the weight of the world had been lifted from her shoulders. She could hardly wait for her shift to be over so she could call Paul and tell him Frank was out of their lives. But, of course, the minutes dragged like hours, and she thought closing time would never come. When it finally it did, she grabbed her things and ran most of the way home.

Without bothering to take off her coat or even feed Horatio, she dialed Paul's number.

"Guess what?" she said the instant he picked up. "I have the absolute best news."

"Bet mine's better. But you go first."

"Frank's gone to Chicago to work in his uncle's restaurant. Isn't that great?"

"After Friday, it won't matter where Frank is."

"How's that?"

"Roger will be back to work on Monday. His test results are clear, and there's nothing wrong with his heart. The

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doctors figure the chest pains he was having were a rare side-effect to a muscle relaxant he'd been given for an injury he got playing racquetball. Once they took him off the meds, the pain went away."

"This is great! Frank's gone, Professor Sand's fine, and you're out of a job. I love it! I wish..."

"What's left to wish for? Sounds to me like we've got it all."

"Not quite. Maybe you'll think I'm crazy, but I didn't like lying to Frank. I know it was the right thing to do. If I hadn't, he would have caused us serious trouble. The kind that's not easy to get out of. And if his dad hadn't found out what he was up to and sent him out of town, I guarantee he'd have figured out a way to tell the dean what he saw. But that doesn't make me feel good about what I did, so I'm thinking—"

"We shouldn't get together until after I finish working at RCU?"

"At least then we can celebrate with a clear conscience and without breaking any rules." She crossed the fingers of her free hand. "Would you mind?"

"No. But you have nothing to feel bad or guilty about. Given the chance, Frank would've destroyed us."

"I guess. I just don't want you to think I'm in the habit of lying my way out of trouble."

"If you were, you'd be bragging about it, but you're not. I love you, Kate. I'm hoping we're going to be life partners as well law partners, so I understand where you're coming from. We need to know we can trust each other to be honorable and

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to do the right thing.”

“Even if doing the *right thing* has to be accomplished by unorthodox means?”

Paul laughed softly. “I once had a very wise teacher who said there are times when the spirit of the law can be even more important than the letter of the law. I think the situation you found yourself in with Frank was one of those times.”



## CHRISTIANE FRANCE

Christiane truly believes that love makes the world go round, so she likes stories with both happy and bittersweet endings. Christiane has been writing romance for the past twenty years and lives near Niagara Falls with her husband and The Boys—two black and white Persian cats.

\* \* \*

***Don't miss Just One Look, by Christiane France,  
available at [AmberHeat.com](http://AmberHeat.com)!***

*Toni Peters rarely takes chances or tries new things, always sticking close to home and going along with the tried and the true—until her old schoolfriend, Jane Doyle, working at a hotel in Paris, France, calls and suggests they take a month-long tour of Europe, the vacation of shopping, sightseeing, and sunbathing they've always talked about but never got around to taking.*

*When Toni arrives in Paris, however, she discovers Jane has quit her job and moved south to another hotel in Marseille. Toni goes to Marseille and checks all the hotels, but to no avail. Jane seems to have mysteriously disappeared off the*

*planet—that is, until Toni receives an unsigned note telling her to be at Les Arbres in Cassis at noon the next day.*

*Figuring the note is from Jane, Toni hops the bus to Cassis, but instead of finding her friend at Les Arbres, she finds ultra-sexy British cop Neil Trenton...and ends up getting kidnapped...*

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