

A woman with long blonde hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a light-colored winter jacket. She is looking down and slightly to the side. The background is a soft-focus winter scene with snow-covered ground, evergreen trees, and a pale blue sky with wispy clouds. The title "Winter Wishes" is written in a large, elegant, cursive script across the middle of the image, with the woman's hair and face partially visible behind the letters.

Winter Wishes

*Barbara Baldwin, Kendra Clark, Becca Furrow,
Tilly Greene, Jenna Howard, Peggy Hunter,
C'ann Inman, Karen Mandeville,
Emma Sinclair, Emma Wildes*

Winter Wishes Anthology
by Whiskey Creek Press Authors

Whiskey Creek Press

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WINTER WISHES ANTHOLOGY

by

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Credits

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Dedication

The Winter Wishes authors would like to dedicate this anthology to all our family members, support groups, caffeine suppliers, editors and fellow authors.

Hope you enjoy,

Winter Wishes Authors

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THE RESOLUTION SOLUTION by Peggy Hunter

* * * *

BABY, IT'S COLD OUTSIDE by Emma Sinclair

Abby stared out the window watching the snow fall. There must have been at least a foot already and the weatherman was calling for even more.

And she was alone.

Roger, the guy she'd been seeing for a few months and had every intention of sleeping with tonight, was stuck at the airport in Albany. Tonight was going to be the night she'd finally get over her one and only disastrous sexual experience with the opposite sex.

Instead, she was alone.

"I wish it'd stop snowing."

She turned away from the window, no use wishing for what wouldn't happen, and shuffled back to the living room. She'd ditched her new black lace up stilettos a few hours ago and went back to her ever-faithful pig slippers.

Her living room was fit for seduction. Candles abounded, a bottle of champagne—the expensive kind—waited in a chilled bucket and two flutes rested on the coffee table. The fire was blazing and sultry sounds drifted through the speakers.

I really can't stay—Baby, it's cold outside.

Ah, what she wouldn't do to have that give and take, that flirting, that ... wanting.

Instead, she sat alone with her pig slippers and a seventy-five dollar bottle of champagne that she didn't even like.

"This blows," she muttered to herself.

Thinking about a nice bowl of ice cream, and maybe making her emergency box of brownies that she always kept on hand, she was startled by a knock on the door.

Who in the hell would be out and about during a blizzard?

Shuffling to the door, no easy feat considering she hadn't yet changed out of her miniskirt, she spied a familiar black and red checkered coat standing outside.

Cold air rushed in as she opened the door.

Goosebumps skittered up and down her body and her nipples jutted to attention.

But whether it was from the cold or the man who stood on her front stoop, she didn't want to know.

"What are you doing out in this?"

Leave it to Zane to do things no other sane person would do.

"Oh, it's not like I had to come too far."

True, he did own the other unit in her duplex, but still, in this weather, fifteen feet from door to door was way too much.

He stepped inside and shook the snow from his coat before taking it off and hanging it up. He stomped his feet a few times, dislodging huge chunks of snow and ice off the massive snow boots.

She'd often made fun of his boots, Eskimo's didn't wear boots that thick, but it took really big feet to fill them and you know what they say about men with big feet...

And she had no doubts about him being a disappointment in that department.

She'd felt it against her body once.

Shortly after he moved in, she'd invited him over for chocolate fondue. She hadn't expected him to show up early to help her chop the fruit. As they were working side by side in the kitchen, he reached past her and brushed up against her.

He'd been rock hard, and it had felt so nice pressed against her backside.

But that was it.

A promising evening had turned into absolutely nothing.

Hell, wasn't she used to that?

"Are you going to invite me in?"

She looked up from where she'd been caught staring at his crotch. His brown eyes twinkled. Melting snowflakes caught on his eyelashes only intensified the effect.

His black hair was thick and wet with moisture.

Wow.

"Since when did you need an invitation?"

She shuffled back to the living room, but then decided that wasn't where she wanted to be.

"Do you want some brownies? I want some brownies."

She shuffled her way into the kitchen.

Zane followed only a few moments later. He was barefoot now.

How sexy was that?

"So, the scene is set for seduction. What happened to good old Rog?"

He made no effort to disguise the fact he didn't like Roger. Never had.

"He's stuck in Albany."

"Oh, too bad."

But his voice said that he was anything but.

Abby retrieved the brownie mix while Zane measured the oil and water.

Cracking some eggs into the bowl, they worked in silence until the brownies were set in the oven to bake.

Then they headed back to the living room.

"You look really great, you know?"

Zane was the sweetest guy she'd ever met, but he'd never actually come out and given her a compliment quite like that before. Not about how she looked anyway.

"Thanks," she said, but she knew he was wrong.

Her skirt was too short and too tight for her legs and the lacy shirt she wore showed a little bit too much of her pale, winter skin.

Maybe it was for the best that Roger wasn't coming. He'd probably make a crack about the way she was dressed.

"You're thinking of ways to disagree with me, aren't you?"

She shrugged her shoulders but didn't say anything. After two years as neighbors, they knew an awful lot about one another.

"You've been letting Roger get to you again, haven't you?"

"No, it's just..."

"Come here."

Zane pulled her down onto the couch before moving away and settling her feet on his lap. He pulled off her shoes and threw them across the room before gracing Abby with the most amazing foot massage.

"Oh, that feels good."

His fingers were perfection. Heat radiated from his fingers, through her foot and up her legs to settle in the juncture of her thighs.

"I don't know why you let Roger make you feel bad about yourself."

"I don't," she lied.

It was quite obvious he didn't believe her.

"So, tonight was supposed to be *the night*?"

It made her uncomfortable talking about sex with Zane, it always had. How could she talk sex with a walking god when he made her feel so inadequate?

She nodded.

"So, you've got some built-up sexual energy?"

She shrugged her shoulders and could feel herself warming. And she didn't think it was because of the fire.

His hands had moved up from her feet, caressing her ankles and calves through her silky stockings.

The temperature in the room kept skyrocketing.

"Why don't you, you know, take the edge off?"

"Myself?" she asked.

He nodded, and for a brief moment, moved his hands even higher, just above her knee, but soon they returned to her ankles, calves, and oh-so-turned-on feet.

"Are you cold?"

"No," she was practically on fire. "Why?"

"You shivered."

She had? She didn't notice. When she looked at him, his brown eyes were almost black. They bore into her own baby blues, feeling as though he could see all the way through her.

"It's cold outside."

Or at least that could be her excuse.

"But it's warm in front of the fire."

"Yeah."

Finally, she looked away, breaking eye contact.

They lapsed into silence for a moment, the intensity of their last exchange hanging heavily in the air between them.

Even with the tension in the air, it was a comfortable silence, only broken when Zane's fingers found a particularly sensitive spot or when a knot in the fire exploded.

She shifted on the couch slightly, causing her foot to come into contact with the hard shaft in Zane's pants.

Hard shaft?

For her?

She moved her foot again—just to make sure of what she really felt.

"That feels really good, Sugar, but unless you want to keep going all the way, I'm going to suggest that you stop."

She opened her eyes to once again see his almost black eyes staring at her. And if she wasn't mistaken, they took a quick trip south to her breasts before once again focusing on her face.

This was an interesting development.

She hadn't quite decided what to do next, when the buzzer in the kitchen sounded.

"Stay here," Zane said, his voice sounding much deeper than usual. "I'll take the brownies out."

Abby sat on the couch and watched that fine tush leave the living room.

She'd never thought of Zane *that* way before.

No, that wasn't true. She'd forced herself not to think of Zane *that* way two years ago.

What if she'd been wasting the past two years?

She needed something to keep her busy, so she got up and threw another log on the fire, poking and prodding until it was in the correct place and began to flame.

The door to the kitchen swung open and she could sense the increased testosterone in the air as Zane reentered the room.

"I like a woman who can fend for herself."

It'd been a long-standing joke between the two of them that Abby could lay a better fire than any man around. Zane considered it an accomplishment. Roger still found ways to criticize.

"This is a beautiful fire, if I do say so myself."

She stepped back to admire her handiwork. The room was awash in the orange glow of firelight. She turned her head to watch Zane come near her.

He was intense in any light, but in firelight, her knees went weak.

He was tall and big. Really big, all taut muscle. Walking up to Zane was a lot like marching up to a wall. She wasn't a small girl, but Zane made her feel petite. She had no trouble picturing him as an ex-Navy SEAL.

"You all right?"

She could see the concern in his eyes reflected in the firelight.

Yeah, sure, just fine, just lusting over you.

"I'm fine."

He pulled her back to the couch and this time, settled her next to him, her back to him.

"This time, I'll start at the top."

If his hands were magic on her feet, it was nothing compared to the heavenly way they felt on her shoulders. First of all, they were huge, practically covering her whole back and shoulder area at the same time. And his fingers were absolute perfection, kneading muscles she didn't even know existed.

"I wonder how those fingers would feel on other parts of my body."

His fingers stilled and she realized the mistake she'd made.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. I didn't say anything."

Oh good God, he'd had her so worked up, she didn't even notice she was thinking out loud.

"I'm pretty sure you did say something, Sugar."

"No. No I didn't."

He grabbed her by the shoulders and turned her so she faced him.

"Did you really mean what you said?"

His voice was deep, husky. With lust? The same lust that was coursing through Abby's body?

She took a deep breath, held it, and nodded.

Then the most amazing thing happened.

Zane's hot mouth lowered to hers. The zing that shot through her body at the contact of his lips on hers practically had steam blowing out her ears.

Oh God his mouth felt good.
Her mouth opened to his with no reservations whatsoever.
His tongue swept inside instantly, practically licking her tonsils.

She pulled back slightly.

"You tasted the brownies."

He smiled against her lips.

"They were good. But not as good as you."

She shifted around and threw herself into his arms. Her skirt rode up slightly, she could feel the air on her leg above her stockings.

She didn't care.

She just wanted his mouth on hers once again.

He eagerly complied.

Their tongues tangled while Zane's hands roamed over her body. Touching, stroking, feeling.

Every nerve ending in her body sizzled at every touch of his skin on hers.

Her panties were practically dripping. Oh, she wanted more.

As if Zane heard her silent plea, his hand slowed. Their mouths still fused together, his big hand reached down to once again massage her legs.

Slowly, he moved his hand up her leg until he came in contact with the top of her stockings.

Then he pulled his mouth away.

He looked down and Abby thought he might actually start drooling as he stared.

"Do you know that I think stockings are one of the sexiest things ever?"

Using his thick fingers, he pushed her skirt up even further until he could see the black lace of her garter.

"Just beautiful," he muttered.

He shifted on the couch and made her stand up between his legs.

"Zane," she begged.

"What?"

"I don't ... I don't know."

"Shhh," he whispered. "Do you ache?"

"Oh yes."

"I promise I'll take care of it for you. But you're going to let me have some fun first, right?"

How could she say no with those fingers, those magnificent fingers, stroking up and down the back of her thighs?

"Okay."

Reaching around her, Zane lowered the zipper of her skirt. It fell to the ground, pooling at her feet.

"Absolutely beautiful."

"You make me feel that way."

He lowered his head to the pale skin of her stomach, licking a path from her belly button to the top of her panties.

"These are pretty."

She'd purchased the lacy black panties especially for tonight. She didn't want to think about the fact she'd bought them for a different man.

"Thank you."

"But next time, you should buy a thong. You'd look so sexy with your ass showing."

She'd wanted a thong. But Roger had said that only cheap floozies wore thongs.

As he spoke, his fingers traced the outline of the bikini panties, getting ever so close, but never quite dipping into the crevice between her legs.

She stumbled when her knees gave out.

"Come here," he said, pulling her back down to the couch so she straddled his legs. As soon as she sat down, she could feel the hard ridge of his shaft against her pussy.

"I want to feel you."

"What do you want to feel?"

"All of you."

She reached down to the hem of his black pullover and pulled it over his head.

She'd seen him without a shirt on before, but never had she felt his smooth skin under her fingers.

His chest was hard, narrowing down to his waist and a nice six-pack of abs. Hell, his six-pack had a six-pack.

"Amazing," she said, running her fingers up and down his torso, occasionally with a light scrape of her fingernails.

The flat disks of his nipples pebbled as she continued her assault.

He laughed.

"You make me tingle."

He was so strong, it made her feel absolutely amazing that she could make him tingle. And that was absolutely nothing compared to how she felt.

Grasping her head in his hands, he brought her lips down to meet his.

This kiss was even more potent. It wasn't gentle at all as his tongue battled with hers.

His hand slid up her body to cup her breast. He squeezed and she made a small noise that even she couldn't identify.

"You like that?"

"Oh yeah."

She liked it so much, she reached up and wrenched the black silk top over her head.

"Fuck, yeah."

She laughed.

Perhaps it wasn't the most romantic thing she'd ever heard but it made her feel absolutely incredible. Wanted.

His head lowered to her breast, licking and suckling through the lace.

"Off," she said. "I want to feel you on my skin."

He complied, wrapping his arms around her and flicking her bra off with incredible ease. She didn't want to think about where he'd learned his technique.

The second her breasts were bared, he once again lowered his mouth to suckle. With the other hand, he kneaded the other breast until she whimpered and he slowly moved his hand downward.

This time, his fingers played around the elastic of her panties between her legs. He came so close to touching her the way her body craved to be touched, then he'd move away.

"Touch me."

"I can't," he said, pulling away from her breast, breathing hard. "Once I start to touch you, I don't think I'm ever going to be able to stop."

Another gush of moisture seeped into her panties.

"I don't care."

"Are you sure?"

Once again, his eyes bored into hers.

She lowered her mouth to his, and said, "Absolutely sure," before their lips touched.

Zane stood, picking her up at the same time, then tossing her down so she was lying on the couch.

She laughed and bounced a few times before Zane hooked his hands into her panties and slid them down her legs. Kneeling next to her stomach, he lowered his head to her pussy.

"Damn, your pussy smells amazing. I've imagined it for two years now."

She wanted to ask what he meant by that, but his finger traced the outline of her pussy, up one side of her labia and then down the other.

"Oh, God," she moaned, her back arching off the couch.

And he really hadn't even touched her yet!

"You're so damn responsive," he said, still staring at her pussy, outlined by the garter and stockings she still wore. Then he looked up at her and smiled broadly. "This is going to be a lot of fun."

The look in his eyes was one she'd never seen before. He was excited, yes, and most definitely turned-on, but if she wasn't mistaken, there was something else there also.

She couldn't put her finger on it though, and when Zane's tongue snaked out to flick her clit, she could no longer think at all.

He was a master with his tongue. Licking and sucking, varying his tempo just enough to drive her mad. Several times, he got her close to orgasm before backing off and starting the sexual torment all over again.

Well, two could play that game.

Reaching down to where he was kneeling, she felt the front of his pants for his stiff cock. She squeezed, and he delivered a light nip with his teeth to her clit.

Oh, baby.

Having difficulty with one hand, eventually, she got his button open and his zipper down. Reaching into his pants, she grasped his firm cock.

It was scorching hot.

She ran her fingers lightly down to the back and then up and over. Her fingers came away sticky with pre-cum.

She desperately wanted to taste him.

Rubbing her fingers around the head of his cock, milking as much of the sticky substance as she could, she brought her fingers to her mouth.

He tasted heavenly. Salty and male.

But apparently, he'd had enough teasing. She gasped when he slid one of his thick fingers into her pussy. He moved it in and out with the tempo of his licks and sucks, every so often, cricking his finger so he could make her scream by touching her g-spot.

Ever so slowly, he slid another thick finger inside her, sliding her cream out of her, down her slit to coat the fissure of her anus.

She'd never been touched there before.

Hell, she'd never been touched any of the places that Zane was touching her now. She didn't really understand people when they said sex was enjoyable.

In her experience, it wasn't. Until now.

Her breathing became shallow. Her heart pounded.

"I'm going to make you come now."

She had absolutely no freaking clue what he did, but oh God, did he make her come.

She practically hit the ceiling as every single nerve ending south of the border exploded in pleasure.

Screaming and moaning, she bucked against Zane's face. Anything. She'd do anything to continue feeling like this.

Eventually, her orgasm faded.

The small pulses running up and down her spine slowed, her breathing and heart rate returned to normal.

But she still felt amazing.

Especially with Zane's body draped across her midsection, holding her tight.

"How was that?" he asked once she'd been still for a minute.

"Amazing."

His face was still slick with her juices. He didn't even bother with wiping his face as he held her tight. Her heart did a little flip when she thought about that.

"So," he said, his voice a little bit unsteady. "How about those brownies now?"

She shook her head, still not trusting her voice.

"Well, then what do you want to do?"

Without answering in words, she pulled his mouth towards hers and kissed him. She could taste herself on him. She was ... sweet. An interesting flavor.

She didn't have much leverage, and she was still pretty weak from her orgasm, but she struggled with his pants enough for him to realize she wanted them off.

He stood and shucked the pants and briefs.

"You're huge. Are you sure that's going to fit?"

He chuckled.

"Sugar, you have no idea how wet you are down there. I'm going to slide into you with no problems."

Abby wasn't sure if she believed him, but she found herself trusting anything he said.

"Would ... would my saliva help it slide in any easier?"

"Oh, Sugar, you bet it would."

He moved to stand next to her head. She propped herself up on her elbow to meet him. His cock was gorgeous. She'd never been great at spatial dimension, but she guessed he was probably close to nine inches and a good couple inches around.

When she put her mouth around him, she could barely suck half his cock.

"I want more," she muttered trying for a better angle, but still, only half of his cock fit into her mouth.

"Don't worry about it, Sugar. We'll work up to more."

She didn't know what he meant by that, but he bent and put her hands on the base of his cock.

"Oh yeah, that's good. Now it feels like I'm sliding deep inside you."

She still desperately wished she could take him deeper into her mouth, but at least he seemed to be pleased.

Only a few strokes of her tongue and he was pulling away.

"I need to be inside you now, Abby."

He never called her Abby. For the past two years, she'd always been Sugar.

"Okay."

He started to situate himself on top of her, but paused.

"Good lord, woman, please tell me you have a condom around here somewhere."

She did, but she shook her head.

"No," she said. "You just had a physical, right?"

"Yeah, two months ago and I haven't been with anyone since, but..."

"No," she said. "I'm on the pill and I want to feel you inside me."

"But..."

"Zane," she begged as she pulled his ass closer to her waiting pussy.

She desperately needed something in there. Now.

"Fuck, Abby," he yelled as he plunged into her.

He was right. Between the two of them, she was so wet, he had no problems at all sliding in. And now that he was there, she felt amazingly full.

"Move. Move now."

He didn't have to be told twice.

He pulled out before slamming back into her. Already, she could feel the tiny pulses signaling the start of her orgasm.

"Fuck, Abby, you're so tight. I've waited so long. I'm not going to be able to last."

He was thrusting in earnest now and when he lowered his fingers to her clit, she came apart.

Stars sparkled in front of her eyes, only magnified by the snow falling outside and the raging fire inside.

"Yes, Zane. Yes!"

She felt his hot seed spurt inside her as his cock seemed to grow and pulse even larger. With one last groan, he collapsed on top of her.

"I love you, Sugar," he said before falling asleep. He was completely out cold.

He'd told her once that one of the greatest things about being in the military was that he'd learned to fall asleep just about anywhere and in any situation. Suddenly, that didn't seem like such a good thing.

And when someone started pounding on the door, it was an even worse thing.

"Zane. You've gotta get up."

"What? Huh?"

Somehow, he was even sexier what he was all rumped from good sex and sleep.

"You have to get up."

He didn't speak, just stared at her.

"There's someone at the door," she continued.

"Oh."

Along with the ability to sleep anywhere, he'd apparently also developed amazing recuperative powers.

"Why don't you go upstairs and put something more comfortable on and I'll get the door?"

Without giving her a chance to answer, he piled her clothes in her arms and swatted her on the tush. He quickly put on his jeans and pulled on his shirt, watching until her naked ass disappeared upstairs before he opened the door.

Rushing into her bedroom, Abby threw on her flying pig pajamas and rushed back downstairs in just enough time to hear Roger's voice.

"Zane. It was nice of you to keep watch over Abby for me. The storm broke a few hours ago and I was able to make it here after all."

A few hours ago?

Just how long had she and Zane been making love?

She walked downstairs.

It was uncomfortable knowing that both men were staring at her as she neared the bottom.

They both smiled up at her.

Oh God, and she was going to have to send one of them away.

"Here's your slippers."

Zane fished them out from under the couch and brought them her way.

"Really, Abby," Roger said as he came forward to kiss her. She dodged her head at the last second so he got her cheek instead. "You should invest in some nicer pajamas."

Zane laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"I like the flying pigs."

Abby thought she heard Roger mutter something like,
"Yeah, you would."

It was on the tip of her tongue to yell at Roger, but Zane spoke up first.

"Well, I should be going."

He walked back to the door and started lacing up his thick black boots. While Roger looked happy to see him go, she rushed to his side.

"You're leaving?"

He didn't say anything, just continued lacing the massive combat boots.

"But what about ... what about everything?" She couldn't keep the tears in her eyes, nor the accusation from her voice.
"You said you loved me."

He didn't meet her eyes.

"What? Abby, what is going on here?"

Roger stood in the middle of the living room, struggling to open the champagne bottle.

"Oh, get out, Roger."

"What?"

"And take the crappy expensive champagne with you."

She knew she owed him something. An explanation, an apology, something. But all her attention was focused on Zane at the moment.

The man still struggling to put on his snow boots.

"Zane, please."

The tears fell in earnest. She screamed when he stomped his boots on the floor a few times and then, with all his might, kicked a hole in the wall that separated their living rooms.

"What in the hell are you doing?"

Abby was actually on the verge of being scared.

Apparently satisfied with himself, he turned around with a big smile on his face.

"We're moving in together."

"What?"

She didn't know if she should be thrilled or astounded.

She went with thrilled.

"Well, since we technically already live in the same building, it's just going to take moving around a couple walls for us to live together." He pointed to the wall behind him that now sported a big hole. "I just gave us a head start."

Tear drops continued to fall, but now they were happy tears. She launched herself into Zane's arms, her legs wrapped around his waist.

"I love you, Abby. Pig pajamas and all."

She showered kisses all over his face.

"I love you, too. Oh, I do."

When their mouths met, the kiss was magic. Their tongues danced with one another, knowing there was a lifetime of kisses to come.

"You people are crazy. Abigail, if you ever grow up, give me a call."

Roger stormed out of the house, but neither Zane nor Abby gave him a second glance.

Zane reached behind them to slam the door closed.

"Come on, baby, it's cold outside, and we've got a wonderful fire and some brownies."

He plopped them down on the couch, Abby still wrapped around his waist.

"I can't think of anything better," she said.

"Well," Zane said, a mischievous grin on his face, his hands already working their way underneath her pig pajamas.

"I can."

The brownies waited until later. Much later.

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FAUNICATION by Becca Furrow

It had been a long day, her feet hurt, it had started raining while she was waiting for the bus, and the only empty seat was next to Mr. Wicked. Chloe sat down next to him with a sigh. Just my luck.

Sinfully handsome with natural golden hair streaked with wheat, thin and wiry with the square shoulders and narrow hips of a gymnast, Mr. Wicked had a gold hoop in one ear and wore t-shirts with the names of cool bands splashed across his chest.

She knew him from her job at the *Purple Door*, a metaphysical coffee bar and bookstore. His eyes, brilliant blue, long lashed and incredibly sexy, slid over her in a mocking way whenever she took his money. Dark winged brows, like an evil elf's, arched in amusement when she fumbled his change. He was around her age, mid-twenties, but somehow, he seemed much older. *Dangerous*, Chloe thought, with his knowing smile for many of the girls.

Once he purchased a bunch of black candles. Up to some black magic, she was sure.

Now she was sitting an inch away from him. He was even more handsome up close, with flawless skin, high cheekbones, full pink lips and a square jaw. Quickly, she looked away before he could catch her looking at him. She wished she was pretty and exotic, wearing a floaty black gauze top and leather pants. The type of girl he would look at. However, she was just plain old Chloe in tan slacks and a

neat blue blouse, with her ordinary light brown hair pulled back into a scrunchy, and no makeup.

Maybe I should start ... The thought of self-improvement was not completed. Thunder roared. There was a flash of lightening, a jerk, and everything went black.

* * * *

"Fluffy, time to wake up," a male voice said in a mocking tone into her ear. She twitched. In fact, someone was holding her ear. She fluttered her heavy eyelids open.

Sapphire blue eyes, long black lashes, black winged brows—Mr Wicked!

She must have said the name out loud.

His grin was just evil.

She blinked. Where was the bus? They were under some type of tree and the sun was morning bright.

She sat up quickly and her head began to spin. She was now in a meadow with long brown and yellow grasses, and beyond it, a forest of trees, many with no leaves, but a few bright yellow and orange ones standing out—

"—What happened?" she screeched.

Then she looked at Mr. Wicked. He was nude and had a brown sculpted chest and stomach, glossy golden brown hair below, lots of it, and—she felt her face flame—naked man parts. There was hair covering muscular legs which ended in shiny cloven hooves.

He caught the direction of her glance. "Goat's feet, I suspect. I think I'm a faun. And look, I'm growing horny, and not in the usual way." He touched the top of his forehead,

where there were two brown bumps growing out of his golden hair, but his eyes stared suggestively at her chest.

She glanced down. Her very naked chest. Hers? Her breasts seemed rounder, and whiter, her nipples pinker. She yelped and threw her arms over her chest, and then wailed again when she saw her lower parts were covered in white fluff, ending in—

"—I'm a rabbit?" she hollered.

"No, not really." He stood back a bit and perused her form. "You're kind of half a rabbit. All girly above—well, except for the ears—and bunny below. Like a faun, only rabbit where I'm goat."

She abandoned her breasts to feel her face. Same face, no big teeth, her old hair. She checked a long strand of her hair, it was still light brown.

"My eyes aren't pink, are they?"

He peered into her eyes. "Nope, a nice, smokey blue."

"Oh my god, floppy ears," she groaned. Then she saw where his eyes were roving, and clapped her hands back over her chest.

He grinned. "Can't cover them all day. Plus, I've been seeing them since sunrise. They are very pretty. But what I really want to know is if that little puff of fluff hides regular girl parts."

"What?" she yelped.

His glance slid down to her crotch, and hers followed, horrified. Yes, there was a triangle of extra fluffy white hair between her rabbit legs.

"Well, I don't know, do I?" she grumbled.

"Well, check it out. I promise, I'll close my eyes." His long lashes fluttered down, and she grudgingly checked her self. All seemed normal.

"Well?" he asked in an impatient voice. "Regular girl parts?"

"Why should I tell you?" she grumbled.

"Cuz. A guy's got to know. How frustrated do you think I'll be if I have all these fantasies about you, only to find out our parts don't mesh?"

"Mesh?" she squeaked. "There will be no meshing. No parts touching."

He stuck out his lower lip in a pout, and it was the cutest thing she'd ever seen a guy do. It sent warm tingles down her spine, and between her legs.

"Tell me."

"All right. Everything appears normal. But no fantasizing, you got it?" she snapped.

He grinned, and his eyes twinkled with amusement. "Don't think I can help that. I think I'm even more oversexed now than when I was a human. But I promise I won't, uh, mesh parts unless you want to."

"Like that'll ever happen."

His grin broadened. "Oh, I'm pretty confident. You know how horny rabbits are. You're probably even more oversexed than I am." He smiled, sweetly.

She turned her back on him and ignored him for a moment, looking over the meadow. It was fall, obviously, and the air was crisp. She strained her eyes to see a building but

only saw the meadow, a gently sloping hill behind them, and the forest.

"What's your name?" she asked after a while, since she obviously couldn't continue calling him Mr. Wicked.

"Max," he said. "Yours?"

"Chloe."

He grinned. "I like Fluffy better."

"How do you think we got here?"

He shrugged.

"Some type of magic?"

"Maybe. But not like any I've ever head of, outside of a fantasy novel."

She nodded. There was a delicious scent coming to her. Spotting a bush with dark berries, she hopped over, followed by Max.

"You think these are safe to eat?" she asked.

"They smell good."

"Our sense of smell must be better than human," she said.

The berries were all overhead, hanging on branches nearly bare of leaves.

"I'm guessing we're not very tall here," Chloe said.

"I'll bet you can jump two feet off the ground," Max said.

"You're a hopper."

She jumped with ease and grabbed a handful, which they shared. The texture was dry, with tiny seeds, but the flavor was sweet.

"More," said Max.

She leaped and grabbed two bunches, then looked at Max to see if that was enough.

Max's eyes were fastened on her chest with a glazed expression.

He was gawking at her! "Oh!" She stomped a foot in frustration.

Max just gave a dreamy smile. "If we were at *Teasers* right now, I'd be tucking a wad into your g string..."

She growled, but it sounded funny. He gave her another teasing smile.

"And if you would hop a little tiny bit higher, and spread your legs just a little, I could see—"

"Don't say it! Don't even say it!" She poked at his bare chest with the stem of a bunch of berries.

He shut up and took the berries, eating them with relish, all the while looking at her with raised eyebrows. She blushed and turned her back on him once again.

They sat for quite a while eating their fill, though Chloe was careful to jump with her back to him, and sat hunched over so her breasts were hidden from view.

Max seemed amused.

"So, how long have you been awake?" She finally broke the silence.

"I woke up when it was still dark. As soon as the sun started to rise, I realized we were out in the middle of a meadow, so I moved us under a bush for cover, just in case."

"Oh. Thanks. Maybe we have, like, head injuries or something, and we're just dreaming this," Chloe said.

"Remember that lightening bolt?"

"Yes, then a crash. Do you think we're in heaven?"

He snorted. "No. We're in the middle of a wilderness with one bush of berries. Can't be heaven."

Suddenly, he jumped up, grabbed her shoulders, and flattened her to the ground.

She yelped in shock. "No meshing! I sai—"

Her words were cut off by his hand.

"Be quiet and look up," he breathed in her ear.

She glanced up and saw a hawk, floating above them on large, dark wings.

She sucked in a breath, but didn't make a sound.

The hawk circled away, but they remained squashed together under the bush.

"I'm pretty sure I'm tough and stringy, but I have the feeling you'd be juicy and tasty. It's favorite meal." He grinned. "Mine, too."

Chloe rolled her eyes and shoved him off, but not before she noticed the rigid rod of flesh poking against her thigh.

The hawk returned, and they froze.

"We need to run for those trees the next time it flies away," Max whispered, almost silently. Her hearing was so good, she could hear both their heartbeats, and the cry of the hawk in the sky.

It flew away, and they ran for the trees.

"Go, go!" Max cried as she glimpsed the dark shape out of the corner of her eyes.

They ran into the trees, and heard the flap of wings and the cry of the predator behind them. Running blindly into the forest, she saw a fallen tree ahead.

"Dive!" Chloe shouted.

Chloe could feel the quick pounding of his heart as they curled together under the log for a long moment.

"I don't hear it anymore," Chloe said after a while.

"I'm gonna go see if it's still out there," Max said, and slithered to the edge.

"Be careful."

He nodded, then poked his head out.

"It's not here." He helped her out of the pile of brush. They collapsed against the log.

"We need to make some sort of shelter. If we pull some branches and logs over to this trunk, we can make a type of wall, and you can do some digging to make a little den. Rabbits are good at digging, right?"

"I'm not a rabbit! I don't know what I am, but I am not a rabbit." But she agreed it was a good idea, so they began hauling branches and fallen trees—small ones—to the log. They stuck together for a while, but later, decided to split up just a little, to locate good wood.

"Hey, Fluffy, come here!"

They were about fifty feet apart, deep into the forest. Chloe was getting tired of hunting and dragging suitable branches, so she hoped he'd found a nice pile.

"Look at that."

Max was standing in front of a very large tree. Set low into the trunk was a small arched door painted a shiny rose red.

"Maybe it's a Hobbit kind of house." Max knocked. There was no reply.

"Let me listen. Maybe I can hear something." Chloe placed one of her long, sensitive ears to the door, and knocked again.

Nothing.

She pulled the latch, which went down. The door swung open, showing a dark hole. Max grabbed a chunk of bark off the forest floor and jammed the door open. "We'll need the light."

He entered the doorway, with Chloe right behind him.

"There's some light," Chloe said, surprised.

They entered a dimly lit room. Above and all around were tree roots, thick and gnarled. Small thick glass blocks were set into the roots overhead and held in place by clay or plaster, providing some light.

White walls were decorated with small painted borders, and the wood floor was glossy. A small table and two benches were painted rose red, some cupboards were green and others were gold. Small hearts, geese, trees and birds decorated all the painted surfaces. There were two more arched doors, one purple, one sky blue, and a narrow set of stairs going down into darkness.

"Anyone home?" Max's shout made her jump. The roots where she was standing were low, so she bumped her head. She scowled at him.

"This is a stove," Max said, placing his hand on a large, beehive-shaped object made of plaster or clay, painted white. There was a red painted woodbox, with blue and yellow flowers, full of kindling. "Look, flint. It won't be very hard to get a fire started."

Still, it took a little while. Chloe explored the room, opening cupboards to reveal thick ceramic dishes and copper pots. She found a hook holding a flowered apron and gratefully tied it around her waist, glad to have something to cover her chest. There was a half apron, made of soft brown leather and covered with narrow pockets. She tossed it at Max. "Now we can be decent."

Max smirked. "I thought we were pretty decent the way we were." But he put it on.

She rolled her eyes and continued her search. There were blocks of a hard yellow soap and a pile of rags inside a bucket, and one cupboard was full of candles and two round copper candleholders with small handles. She fitted a candle into one of the holders and handed it to Max to light.

"It looks dark down those stairs," she said.

When the fire was burning brightly and Max had determined the chimney was in good working order, they headed down the stairs. They were so narrow, their shoulders touched the walls on either side as they went down a dozen steps to a small landing. It held a shelf, small table, and a painted cupboard that opened to reveal a very puffy bed, covered in a lovely blue and rose quilt. Pillows were stacked high at one end, and also along the outside wall. It was so pretty, Chloe almost drooled at the sight.

"Feather beds, six deep. And down inside the quilt cover." Chloe was a little in awe of the gorgeous, soft bed. She sat on it and sighed with pleasure as she was cushioned in softness.

They looked for another bed, but there was only the one.

"Well, we can take turns. The other can have a feather bed and the quilt on the floor by the fire," Chloe said.

Max snorted. "I suspect the reason that bed is so warm and cozy is because the winters here are fierce. We may have to learn how to share."

Chloe noticed something out of the corner of her eye—he was getting hard at the thought of sleeping with her in the bed. His leather apron was tenting out.

It was suddenly hard to breathe normally as awareness of his warm, sculpted body shot through her. They were standing so close on the tiny landing, that any movement caused them to brush against each other. Chloe shut the thoughts of hot sex down. She hoped he couldn't hear her faster breathing.

Maybe he's right about rabbit people being more horny. Oh god.

He whirled around. "Come on, let's check out the doors upstairs." He pushed quickly past her and bounded up the stairs, his hoofs clicking on the wood floor. He had the cutest little tail, she noticed. And a really cute—*no sex thoughts!*

The light blue door led to a small room full of food. Pumpkins, squash, cabbages, carrots, baskets of apples and onions, and many coarse burlap bags of oats and nuts, both shelled and unshelled, took up all the floor space. A shelf held jars and pots of syrup, honey and spices. Ropes of garlic and small bouquets of herbs hung from the tree roots overhead. There was a large crock of cooking grease.

"I guess we won't have to pick berries for supper," Chloe said. They both grabbed a couple apples and a handful of shelled almonds to stave off hunger pangs.

"This is a good thing. Berries aren't very filling."

Chloe agreed.

"Okay, let's see what's behind door number two," Max said, when they were finished eating. The second door led to a small, dirt floored room filled with buckets, axes, and hatchets on hooks. Another door opened onto a small outdoor enclosure, with a high log fence and a lean-to half full of firewood. An enormous kettle with legs rested over a fire pit. There was a large gate with two stout boards to keep it latched. At the far end of the yard was a privy.

There was also a hand pump and a large water trough. Max vigorously primed the pump, and Chloe noticed that his back and arms were as well muscled as his abs. Water soon poured into the trough, and Chloe quickly grabbed and filled the buckets. As they worked, a strong, cold wind rustled through the trees, showering autumn leaves down on them.

"Looks like a storm is blowing in," Max remarked. Large grey clouds were scurrying in the wind. "Let's drag in more wood. It could rain for days, for all we know."

"Or snow." Chloe shivered in the wind since she had splashed water onto her legs and feet. Hopping didn't work well with full buckets. But she helped haul wood into the small room.

"I think we should haul that wood we dragged to the log up here. I have a feeling this place is going to be wood intensive," Max said.

Chloe agreed. After she dried off a little, they hauled wood to the large gate for the rest of the afternoon, and then collapsed on the rocking chairs in front of the fire as the sun set.

"We should probably haul some more wood close to the house while the weather is good," Max said. "We'll have a hard time finding any if the snow gets deep."

"Do you think we'll be here for long?"

"I don't know. But we should be prepared."

"You think it's going to snow soon?"

"I think it's late in the fall. Did you notice how many trees have no leaves at all? I think snow could come at any time."

"So we'll do that tomorrow. It's already getting dark. What should we cook for dinner?" Chloe hopped to the pantry.

Supper was a bit of a challenge, since neither of them was a cook. They ended up with lumpy oatmeal with honey and raisins, and fried squash.

"So, is your family back home going nuts?" she asked.

"Nah. I haven't talked to my dad in years, not since I left home. He drinks. Mom died six years ago. I have friends, but they'll just think I moved or something."

"What about your job?"

"Bouncing at *Teasers*? No one will be surprised if I don't show up. It's that kind of place. I'm in grad school, computer stuff, but took this semester off. How about you? Will your parents be frantic?"

She shook her head. "I was in foster homes from the time I turned twelve. When I was eighteen, I got a scholarship and

went to college. I've been on my own since then. I just moved to Peoria, so I don't have any friends there yet."

"So, both of us are alone in the world." He sat back, a serious expression on his face. "Maybe there's a reason we're here."

"You would think someone would be here to meet us, or leave us a note or something."

"Yeah. Doesn't look like we have any big world saving to do here."

"We could learn how to cook," Chloe scooped up a lump of cold oatmeal and let it plop back into the bowl, and then yawned hugely.

"Yeah. There's flour and syrup, maybe we can figure out how to make biscuits or something."

An awkward silence followed while they cleaned up. Chloe felt like asking him to sleep with her in the bed, but then he would think she wanted sex—not that she did! Well, maybe just a little, because he was really handsome, and had been pretty decent, considering everything—

"I'll take the floor tonight," Max said. "It shouldn't be too bad, anyway, with a featherbed and pillows."

* * * *

"The wood pile's coming along," Max said, many days later. "We've made better progress than I expected."

Since it looked like she and Max were stuck here indefinitely, they decided to get ready for a long, cold winter. Max had estimated how much wood they would need—even though neither one of them had an idea how long winters

were in the Magic Forest. They spent their days hauling and chopping wood.

One day, they found a nice pile of fallen wood, and spent the day dragging it to the fence. The wind was fierce, which made the task difficult. In the afternoon, a couple hours after their noon meal, it began to rain. Icy, cold drops driven by the wind, soon turned into hard, stinging sleet.

Chloe found her thick, fluffy fur seemed to attract the water, and she soon started to shiver.

"I'll finish this," Max said. "Why don't you go dry off by the fire? I'll haul a bucket of water inside when I come."

"Th-thanks."

His eyes, she noticed, slid down to her pebbled nipples, clearly visible under her wet apron, but he quickly looked back up and shrugged. "Sorry. I get distracted."

"It's okay." Really, he'd been very decent all this while. She had seen him glance now and then, but what else could she expect? She was nearly naked with a sex loving guy. The apron barely covered her nipples, and depending on how she moved, things were always falling out. She didn't even want to know what he might see when she leaned over with her bunny tail in the air.

It made her hot, just knowing he liked looking at her breasts. He was, she decided, even more handsome as a faun, because his movements were so swift and graceful, like the deer they often saw in the forest.

Okay, I admit it, I'm really attracted to him. I know I'm not his type back in the real world, but here in the Magic Forest ... Of course, he'll dump me like a hot rock if we ever

get back to Peoria. No way a guy who looks like Max would stick with me. Ben dumped me for a prettier girl, and he wasn't even close to Max in the looks category.

Chloe shook off the thought of her former fiancé. Max was nothing like Ben, that cheater.

Now she was even less attractive with her big bunny feet. That thought caused her to feel a little depressed. Max often seemed interested, but it would only be temporary.

So what? We're all alone here. What if it is just temporary? I can handle it. It's not like Max is making promises he doesn't plan to keep. Not like Ben.

* * * *

Max filled a bucket with water but hesitated before going inside the house.

Wood hauling days were always tough on his self-control. All that bending over, and her round breasts would fall out of the apron. Even worse, sometimes, her bunny tail would be up in the air, and he couldn't stop himself from staring.

Maybe I should stay out here and take care of business. Then I can act halfway sane with her.

It was freezing cold, though, so the idea of staying outside to relieve the aching pressure in his groin was not at all appealing.

She was a nice girl, hard-working, pleasant-tempered, intelligent. He wasn't her type, he got that. She went for someone steadier, some white bread guy who wore a suit and had a retirement plan. Not a guy who had to take a semester off from grad school to make money.

Knowing that didn't stop him from wanting her, though. Alone out here in the forest, he was afraid he was becoming obsessed with her.

If he showed her how much he wanted her, she'd probably be terrified.

By the time Max got into the house, it was snowing in earnest. Many of the small windows were already covered with white. Icy flakes covered his hair and skin. "The temperature has gone down like ten degrees since you came in," he said. "The wind is making the visibility really low. I think we're in for a huge blizzard."

Chloe ladled some hot water from the large kettle they kept filled near the fire into a mug and handed him a cloth. "Here, dry off. Sit in front of the fire with this tea, and I'll go grab the quilt."

She brought up the rose and blue quilt and moved to wrap it around him, just as he moved to set the tea on the table. In the awkwardness, his chin brushed her chest.

They both froze. He sucked in a breath and tried to calm down. His arousal was so strong and immediate, all he could do was stare into her eyes, frozen. She stared back down at him, her smokey eyes darkening. Not taking his eyes from hers, he deliberately rubbed his chin against her breast.

The quilt fell to the floor and she clutched his shoulders, slumping against him. She swallowed, hard.

Still looking at her face, he moved and nuzzled his lips between her breasts. Slowly, to give her time to shove him away, he moved his open mouth to her apron-covered nipple.

She didn't move. With a whispered moan, he circled her nipple with his hungry mouth.

His hands reached around to the tie at her neck. "Your apron is damp from the snow. You should take it off." His voice was husky.

She nodded, just barely.

Then it was untied and she was bare to the waist. His hot, wet mouth engulfed her nipple while his fingers, still cold from the outdoors, clutched into the soft fur covering her buttocks, kneading, rubbing. Soon, the other apron tie was undone and she was naked.

* * * *

Chloe trembled, though she didn't feel cold at all. Her legs, which were all springy muscle, felt so weak, she slumped against him, leaning heavily.

Every tug of his lips went straight between her legs, and she could feel a throb and sudden wetness.

He stopped licking her nipple and looked up at her. His eyes were dark with desire, his carved lips parted to breathe. He leaned back to look at her while one hand reached behind and untied his leather apron, which he tossed across the room.

He was beautiful in the firelight, with his skin glowing golden. The light was picking up the gold glints in his fur. Shadows were playing across his abdomen, highlighting his carved muscles. His penis was thick and proud, standing nearly straight up near his stomach, glistening at the tip.

I want him. I don't care if it is just temporary, or a part of this whole Magic Forest thing.

"Do you want to go down to the bed?" she asked.

With dizzying speed, she found herself on the floor, being kissed with a savagery she never imagined. She couldn't get enough of him and pulled him tight. While they kissed, he moved over her, strong legs pressed between hers. She gasped as his lips found her neck, followed by gentle nipping as he went back down to her breasts.

"Been driving me crazy, seeing you half-naked all the time." He spoke in a husky near whisper, the tone sending a shiver through her whole body.

"I ... I don't look ... bizarre? With the rabbit legs?" she had to ask.

"No." There was breathy chuckle in his voice. "You're so pretty—your tits bounce with every step you take, your bare little ass is always showing in that damn apron. Trust me, your fur is nothing like clothing."

His lips encircled a stiff nipple. Soon, his hands cupped her breasts together, and he rubbed his tongue across both nipples.

He slid a hand down to her curls, glided it down her thigh and back up, ruffling her fur.

"Soft, like cashmere," he whispered, and moved his hand between her legs. His legs prodded hers to open further.

She was so wet, the fur on her inner thighs was soaked, and she blushed a little in embarrassment.

"Lovely," he groaned. "I want to feel it on my dick."

She sucked in a breath.

He shifted just enough, pushed her legs apart, and slid his cock through her wet curls.

"No condom," he groaned.

"Don't think it's needed," she whispered back. "No condoms in the Magic Forest."

"Right." He swallowed, hard. She could see his throat move. She kissed and sucked it. Everything about him was so ... edible.

"Feels good, so slick," he said, and pushed his cock hard against her clit, then slid it downward.

"Oh," she whispered. Hot pleasure swept through her. She wanted him to continue, and he did, gliding over and over, his lips back on hers.

She slid her arms from his neck down to his buttocks, wanting to feel more of him, and found them to be firm, muscular, the fur covering him plush and thick, not at all coarse. She drew a finger along his crack and he groaned into her mouth.

"Want in," he said in a thick voice that sent shivers through her. "Will you let me in, Chloe?"

She answered by spreading and raising her legs.

Then he was deep within her.

Chloe felt so full, almost too much so. He was so big, and pressed so deep. She clutched his shoulders to keep him from moving too hard or too fast.

He raised up and looked at her again. "Am I hurting you?"

"No, but if you move too fast..."

He smiled crookedly and stroked her hair. "If I go much faster, we'll be done right now."

"Ohh," Chloe breathed. She slid her hands from his shoulders to his hair, then they were kissing again, Max buried deep inside her, but not moving.

His first thrusts were slow, sensual. Chloe began meeting them. He snaked a hand down between them, one long finger on either side of her clit, another on top of it. He moved his fingers in rhythm to their joining and soon, slow and gentle wasn't enough. Wrapping her strong legs around him, she pushed hard against his cock, moaning with each downstroke.

"Lord," he gasped.

Her pussy begin to tighten around him, she drew in a deep breath of anticipation and was lost in waves of pleasure. As her pleasure waned, her legs dropped limply to the floor. Pulling him down on top of her, she sucked on the satin skin of his neck. Max pounded into her, finally spurting his release, while she continued to spasm in delight around him.

* * * *

Normally, he fell asleep right after sex, but tonight, he watched the woman next to him sleep in the candlelight. They had made their way to the bed, and were snuggled deep under the covers.

What if she thinks this was a big mistake? Max sighed. *Now that I've had her, it's going to be really hard to leave her alone. Not after sex as good as it was. She wanted it, and me. So maybe it is what she wants, too, but only while we're stuck here in the Magic Forest.*

He snuggled against her and looped an arm over her abdomen, pulling her back against him. She nestled into him

and he rested his head on the pillow so his chin was on her hair.

I guess we'll talk about this in the morning. It was along time before he slept.

* * * *

Far away in a fortress carved into the rock face of a mountain, many miles from the small home in the roots of the great tree, three old men watched a crystal sphere floating in a pool in a cavern. Three large torches lit the cavern, pouring light onto the pool.

They weren't precisely men. One had a narrow, lined face, nut brown skin, and impressive horns jutting out of his thick white hair. He was wrapped in a thick quilted robe that gave him a little bulk, but his legs beneath the hem were spindly and frail, and ended in small hoofs, yellow with age.

Next to him was a small round fellow, with long white ears that fell to his shoulders, which emphasized the drooping jowls on his chin. His eyes were puffy with age, and the bags under them echoed the droop of his jowls.

The third was a centaur, taller than the other two, with a strongly carved chest and arms and gleaming chestnut haunches, though his white hair and beard marked him as old as the other two.

"It's not even been more than a handful of days," the old one with the rabbit ears said, in a peevish tone. "Why, that's almost obscene! A girl buntaur from my village would hold out longer than that."

"Right, because buntaurs are known throughout the Three Realms for their disinterest in the pleasures of the flesh." The faun spoke in a sarcastic tone.

"Your people have long been known for their excesses—" The old buntaur's face turned bright red.

"Silence!" roared the centaur, his command echoing throughout the cavern. "This is precisely what we wanted, why we moved two worlds to bring them here! Have you forgotten what the oracle told us?"

The other two hushed and sat, watching the crystal.

"Woodberry, we chose the girl to be buntaur because in the past, the females of your race became pregnant very quickly," the centaur continued.

"And we chose the lad to be a faun because a centaur boy would have tossed the girl on his back and cantered out of the forest, instead of wintering with her in that tiny root home. Plus your people, Tamus, are not seasonal in their reproduction as the centaur are."

"As distasteful as this is," Thonar continued, "and as questionable as the morality of stealing two young people from the Land of Men for our purposes, let us not forget what is at stake in our Realms."

The other two nodded.

"If it works," said Woodberry. "Then I might live to dandle grandchildren upon my knee."

"Only forty children were born to my generation in the Realm of Fauns, and none have been born to my only child. She is yet young enough to bear a child. I, too, could be a grandfather," said Tamus the faun.

"Of course, it might not be a faun you dandle on your knee," Woodberry said.

"That is true. Before we separated into three Realms, there were mixed families with siblings both buntaur and faun. Or centaur. We will see families like this again," Tamus said.

"And it is going to change the entire order of the Three Realms." He wagged his white head. "But having no children, seeing the fauns die out ... I would dandle a dozen buntaur or centaur grandchildren on my knees. Well, maybe not centaur—how does a buntaur or faun woman have a baby centaur, anyway?"

Thonar chuckled. "They are born just the right size for their mothers. Nature has wisdom we have forgotten."

"To our detriment," Woodberry said.

"I agree. We must change or die out, we must convince the Elders of this at the Great Council. The Purity Laws must be revoked and the Purity Force disbanded. When the common people see this couple, and their healthy child ... change will occur quickly. Our people so greatly desire young ones..." Thonar said. "Plus, there is the evidence of history, of life before the Three Realms were formed, before the Purity Laws were enforced."

"If they agree to help us at the Council..." said Tamus

"If she does become pregnant..." Woodberry said.

"If the Oracle was right..." Thonar whispered.

The three old wizards looked into the pool, deep in their thoughts.

Tamus the faun suddenly sat straight up. "Oh my," he said, his old eyes round.

Woodberry chuckled. "Buntaur women ovulate after a satisfying encounter. Their ... needs ... are such that a second encounter is imperative to them."

"There is no arguing with her," Tamus said.

"Not in her present frame of mind," Woodberry chuckled.

Thonar wagged his head, but there was a hint of a smile below his thick white mustache. He threw an embroidered cloth over the crystal. "Well, let us give the young ones their privacy. We have plans to make to journey to them before she knows she's pregnant. We must help them understand the situation."

"Yes. Let us head directly to the Old Woods. We have no time to dally."

Thonar led the wizards away. Woodberry snickered as they left the cavern. "I wonder how old Gunus and his wife are faring in the Land of Men from whence these two came?"

"They now have the energy of renewed youth. And those two were always wily," Tamus answered. The old wizards carried the torches away, leaving the pool in darkness.

* * * *

"Omf," Max groaned as a weight pounced on his stomach. He struggled to open his eyes, heavy with lack of sleep. Worry about Chloe's reaction had weighed on him for a long time.

Small, surprisingly strong hands grabbed his wrists and held them above his head.

He pried his eyes open. "Chloe?" She was straddling him, holding his hands in a firm grip.

She looked at him through her lashes, let go of one of his hands and reached down and gripped his already hard penis. Then her lips and her pussy claimed him at the same time.

"I g-guess you're not angry," he managed to gasp when she lifted her mouth from his.

"Harder," she grunted. He complied, shoving his hips up as she pushed down, and bone-melting pleasure erased everything else from his mind. He was dimly aware she moved his hand to her clit, to provide herself with more slick friction. He couldn't form actual thoughts, but he felt a warm gratefulness well up in him at her having taken charge.

When he felt her come, he was again grateful. He had his other hand fisted in the fine linen bedding as he tried to hold out just a little longer. He exploded, emitting a rough groan.

She fell over on top of him, and he ran his hands gently up her sweat-slick back.

"You need to get under the covers, you're going to get cold," he said, finally able to think.

As if on cue, she shivered. He pulled her to his side and arranged the quilt up to her chin.

"You thought I was mad?" she asked.

"I thought maybe you'd have regrets this morning."

She was quiet for a moment. "If we were back home, and had just met, then I might feel bad. I'm not really into casual sex. But here, in this little house, with our different bodies ... I think you were right, about rabbits being, well, more interested in sex. I seem to be, um, unusually interested."

He raised his eyebrows and grinned, a weight lifted from him and suddenly, he felt giddy. "So, you want to continue

this?" He pulled her close, half on top of him. "I've been wanting to be with you like this very much."

"Yes, I want to continue this."

Max snuggled her closer. "I'm actually pretty content at the moment."

"Me, too. Well, maybe not completely content." Her lips found his once more.

* * * *

It's just sex, Chloe reminded herself as she mixed biscuits. We're having an affair, a thing because of these crazy circumstances.

She reminded herself of this fact several times a day, because she was pretty sure she was completely in love with Max. When he came into the house, or looked up from the wood pile and smiled at her, the warm thrill that ran through her was so intense, it was scary.

Sure, an average woman—rabbit woman—like her would fall for a guy as gorgeous and nice as Max. And what they did in bed...

I'm never going to get over him. Ben was a tiny blip compared to Max.

Her sensitive ears could hear Max at the door. He'd spent the morning shoveling snow out of the small yard so they could get around the enclosure without difficulty.

"Hey, Fluffy. Come out here. I want to show you something."

She hopped to the doorway, curious.

He grinned. "You know that funny wooden stool thing in the lean-to?"

She nodded. Neither of them had been able to figure out what it was.

"I figured it out."

She stepped outside and looked around at the trees with appreciation. Every branch and twig was coated in white. Thick snow softened the lines of the fence and lean-to and made the utilitarian yard look soft, magical.

The enormous brass kettle they thought was for laundry was steaming.

"I filled it up last night and started a fire." Max came close, his eyes had a fiery glint. "That wooden thing fits in the bottom, so we can get in without touching the hot metal." He grabbed her close, his nostrils flared slightly as he breathed hard. "I'm gonna give you a bath, Fluffy."

Her apron was off in a flash, and his, too. Then he practically dragged her to a stump placed next to the cauldron and urged her in, his hands clutching her buttocks.

With a squeal, she splashed into the hot water. She slid down onto the wooden platform until she was covered up to her shoulders.

Max settled behind her, arms and legs around her. "Tight fit," he murmured. "Just the way I like it."

She could feel his rigid cock pressed against her backside. His hands cupped her breasts and pulled her back tight to his chest. Shifting around a little, they were able to kiss while his fingers pulled and squeezed her nipples.

"Are we going to do something naughty in the bath?" She turned around on his lap so they were face to face.

He grinned and waggled his eyebrows at her. "Not too naughty. I don't know that having sex in the water would be very comfortable for you. But we can kiss."

The kiss was deep and long. He suckled her tongue, and when she drew away for a breath, he pulled her head quickly back in place so they could kiss some more. Long fingers found her nipples again, rolling and tugging until she was squirming with pleasure against him.

She slid a hand down to his arousal and played with the tip until he groaned into her mouth.

"Ahh, I love this," he whispered into her hair. "In a few minutes, we're going to run into the house and dive under the covers. Then I'm going to make love to you for the rest of the day. In the bed ... in front of the fire..."

She almost said it as they snuggled there in the steaming water, lacy snowflakes enclosing them in a private, magical world. *I love you...*

Instead, she whispered, "Yes, make love to me all day..."

* * * *

Some weeks later...

"Chloe. Chloe!" Max's hooves clattered as he ran into the house.

"What's wrong?" She dropped the wooden spoon she was using to stir the soup and hopped to him.

"We have company coming through the meadow. I was on top of the woodpile and could see them over the fence."

She nodded. "What will we do? Do they look like robbers or something?"

"There are quite a few of them, but they don't look like robbers to me. Let's see what they want."

They rushed out to the wood pile, excited and nervous at the same time, and watched the odd group approach. They were moving slowly through the deep snow coming up the hill from the meadow. Centaurs were clearly visible, their human half wearing cloaks in rich colors. Smaller people were on their backs, and it wasn't long before they could tell that some had goat feet and others, rabbit.

"What if they want to move us somewhere?" Chloe clutched tight to his arm. He slid his arm around her and held her to him.

"We stick together. Period."

"Yes. I agree." She took a calming breath.

Then Chloe had another thought.

"Max, what if they can send us back home?"

He looked at her, his face as serious as her own. "I have a hot tub. We could order Chinese."

"You mean, be together? Stay together?"

Now he looked confused. "Of course. Unless you don't want to."

She smiled, just a little, in relief. "Of course I want that."

"Well, then, why did you look so worried, you crazy wabbit?" His grin was huge.

The centaurs approached the fence, a quite elderly male and female. Upon their backs were a faun and a rabbit person, also elderly.

"Ho!" The male centaur's voice rang out. "We come in peace and goodwill."

"You have nothing to fear from us," said the female centaur. "We've come to explain your presence here in the Old Wood."

"This we would be interested in hearing," Max replied.

* * * *

Much later, as they snuggled together in the feather bed in the dying light of the fire, Chloe spoke. "So, now we know."

"Yeah. I could never have figured this one out." Max stroked a hand through her soft hair. "Do you mind? Are you upset about the baby?"

"It's a surprise. But I want it. After all, it's ours." She hesitated for a moment. "Do you want it?"

"Yes." His voice was firm. "I just don't want you or the baby to be in danger."

"Thonar insists they can keep us safe. And I find him ... believable." She rested her head on his chest and began drawing small circles on his bare abdomen.

He took a deep breath. "I don't like how circumstances were manipulated. I wish we had a choice. But I'm not unhappy about the baby. Like you, I want us all to be safe."

"I love the baby already," she said in a small voice. "Because it's yours, and I love you." She held her breath, wondering how he would react to her declaration.

He raised up over her so she could see his face, handsome and serious. "I love you, too, Chloe. I didn't really know it

until today, though, when I thought about how important it was for us to stay together. I guess I'm a little slow."

She giggled. "Not about some things." She wiggled her hips against him suggestively. He kissed her, hard.

"Looks like we won't be going home," Chloe said when she could finally speak again.

"I think we are home."

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FOR HIS DELIGHT by Karen Mandeville

Trent knew something was in store for him. He wasn't sure if it was a good or a bad thing. Things had been tense between him and his partner Lilly for a couple days now. He'd always wanted to give anal sex a try but he didn't expect her to freak out the way she did. Trent thought he'd just raise the question while they snuggled one night and that was the last time Lilly had let him hold her. *Just another fantasy that will stay in my head*, he told himself as he made his way to the front door. A purple piece of paper was stuck to the door handle as he pawed in his pocket for his keys.

Follow the rules and you'll be rewarded.

Trent swallowed over the hard lump in his throat as he slowly opened the front door. He placed his briefcase next to a discarded shoe and saw another note.

For every piece of clothing you find, you have to remove a piece.

Trent walked slowly through along the hallway before stopping next to the staircase. One of Lilly's skirts hung over the decorative end of the railing.

He tugged at his tie and removed it with great ease. His palms were starting to sweat with anticipation. He ripped at his shirt sending white buttons in all directions. He scanned the stairway and the lounge room for another piece of clothing. Lilly was known for her ideas of spicing things up in the bedroom but there were certain limits that even she had.

Trent forced himself to slow his breathing, he was getting too excited too quickly. He wanted whatever his "reward" was to last. As he searched through the kitchen for another clue, he could feel himself becoming lost in the moment. His balls were starting to tingle as his penis started to swell. Panic forced its way into his chest as he continued his search.

Anticipating what might be in store for him but concerned for what he might not get if he failed to follow the rules, he found another note precariously situated on the chair in the dining room.

Make your way up the stairs and come into the cinema room. Don't touch the light. Everything is set up the way it is supposed to be.

His heart was racing as he took the first stair. It changed to pounding by the time he reached the top. Trent stopped and assessed himself.

"Just be calm, all right," he said aloud. His heart was racing like it had never done before. If he didn't know any better, he would have thought he was having a heart attack. "You can do this."

He turned the stairs and reached out for the doorknob. He took a deep breath as it turned.

Walking into the darkened room, his heart seemed to skip a beat when he found a black lacy bra thrown over a swivel chair. He could barely make out another note waiting on the seat.

He took a few moments to catch his breath and savor the moment. His cock now stood at attention and swayed with him as he reached down to collect the note.

"Are you there?" Trent asked, trying to get his eyes to adjust.

"Good boy. First things first, you have to take off your pants." Trent obeyed her. "Now take a seat and keep your hands on your knees." Only then did he notice another chair in the room. He was only able to make out large objects and the shadows messed with his mind. Lilly called for Trent to close his eyes. The smell of sweet vanilla filled his nostrils. Vanilla was her favorite scent.

He flinched slightly when Lilly placed her hands on his knees. "You can open your eyes now," she said. She sat before him. Even in the barest of lighting, he could see her naked body sitting cross-legged opposite him. He noticed a small table to her left. It was covered with an array of toys. "How has your day been, baby?"

"It's getting much better now," he said while his gaze trawled over her body.

"Hmm, it is?" She uncrossed her legs and spread them wide. She flicked a switch and a soft warm glow filled the room. He could finally see her. She smiled at the sight of his wide eyes. She leant back into her chair to bring her pussy into just enough light for him to get a good look. She was bare. And she was shiny. She had never been bare for him. He slowly licked his lips causing her to laugh. "I'm glad you like what you see, honey," she said, placing her hand on her stomach. "I wasn't sure if you wanted it all gonem or not." She walked her fingers down to her smooth wet part before turning her stare to his growing lap.

"I like it ... very much," Trent said. It took all his willpower not to move his hands to his cock. He shifted uneasily in his chair. His cock was pointing directly where her fingers were starting to roam.

Holding his breath, he had to stay in control. His cock has started to dribble a little as she opened the lips of her pussy.

"Now, keep those hands on your knees and you'll be well looked after. Which one would you like me to use?" She let her fingers dance over the collection of toys, waiting for his response.

Without diverting his eyes to the table, he told her to use her favorite one. She wasted no time on selecting her purple vibrator. She leant forward and kissed him hard and long. Her kiss pushed him into his own chair.

Trent ate at her tongue, desperate to taste her again. He moaned as she pulled away from him and sat back in her seat.

"You did very well to keep your hands on your knees," she praised as she gazed at his cock with a huge grin on her face. "Don't worry, baby. This is going to be so worth it."

She raised one leg over the arm of the chair while she ran the vibrator head over her pussy lips. He could hear her pussy squishing with wetness as she moved the vibrator between her lips. She sank further into the chair with delight as it tunnelled into her with ease.

His hands fidgeted as she worked her purple glory in and out.

"Fuck, it feels so good, baby," she said before leaning forward to sit down hard on it, grinding herself on it. She swirled her hips as she leant forward to kiss him again.

She sucked along his neck before telling him again he was doing a good job by not moving his hands while she twisted on her vibrator. She glanced down and could see his cock glistening with pre-cum before nibbling on his neck again. "I wanna take your cock in my mouth as I grind this fake one into me," she said as she raked her nails over his chest and moved down to his cock. "Hmm, fuck, you smell good, baby," was the last thing she said before licking the head of his cock.

His fingers splayed as he let out a heavy sigh when she enveloped the head of his cock in her mouth. The moisture of her full lips mixed easily with his pre-cum and allowed his cock to slip easily over her tongue. She tongued feverishly at the head as she squirmed on the buzzing vibrator. Trent let his head fall back till it rested on the top of the chair. He was only ever full of praise for the way she sucked cock. He gasped for air as she took just a little more into her mouth.

The sweet smell of vanilla was now swirling with the scent of sex. His fingers pressed into his thighs as she pulled back and moved to suckle along the vein on the underside of his cock. She trailed her tongue from the head all the way down to his balls. Lilly rested her tongue there and sucked on both his hairless balls. She kneaded them by pressing her lips together ever so gently before increasing the tempo. He was resisting the urge to face fuck her with all his might.

More pre-cum oozed slowly from the proud tip of his pink cock and made its way down to her waiting mouth. She

shifted her head back only centimeters away from his wet balls and blew a whisper of air. He sighed as she again took them in her warm mouth and tickled them with her tongue. She let them drop from her mouth as she began to follow the vein to the head while she continued to flex her hips as she moved up and down on his cock.

She moved forward off the chair and sank to her knees. Trent could see her looking up at him as she devoured his cock. Lilly reached down as she felt the fake cock slipping free of her hungry pussy. When he smiled at her, Lilly took more of him down her throat.

She smiled as she pulled back and lowered her eyes to watch it disappear back into her mouth. She snaked her hands up over his chest and raked her nails gently back down to his balls and rolled them over her fingers as she sucked first hard, then softly.

She looked at his glorious cock. It was shining from the mixture of juices. She leaned forward again and sucked the head way past her lips. She wanted his cock to tickle her throat for as long as possible.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" The thing he liked most after getting head, was giving it.

Letting his cock pop out of her mouth, she said, "There sure is, but I haven't finished here yet. There's plenty of time, my sweet."

Lilly got to her feet and pushed her hips back. She squirmed as she felt the purple cock slip out of her. She pressed her breasts against the backs of his hands as they

fidgeted on his thighs. Her whole body seemed to slither like a snake as she pressed herself onto him.

She took a breath through her nose and then as she breathed out, she sucked him in further. As he moaned, she was driven to take more. Lilly tilted her head back to accommodate him. His cock felt warm and full at the back of her mouth. Her nipples poked into the back of his hands as she writhed forward.

She felt juices trickle across her clit. Her whole opening felt wet and sticky.

Her mouth, tongue and throat all sealed around his meat as she began to pull back. She worked his cock over like it was the last she'd ever get to taste and have. She could feel his balls flexing as they rested on her chin and the sound of his quick breath told her that she was doing the job correctly. She pulled back and let his cock fall into her hand and stroked it without missing a beat. "Hmmm, God you taste so good."

"I bet you do, too." She could tell he was desperate to replace the vibrator.

"You wanna taste, do you, baby?" She took one last long, deep suck of his cock before letting it go. She placed her hands on his hands and pushed herself up. He grabbed her, pulled her in close and kissed her hard on the lips. He could taste a bit of himself, but he didn't mind. He wanted to taste her. He rammed his tongue into her mouth while she delicately rolled her tongue over his. He put his hands on her thighs and pushed her back on the chair. He was silently glad the vibrator had fallen out. It was making him jealous. He slid one hand to her neck and held her in place for his feverish

kiss. More pre-cum oozed from his cock as he worked along her neck and pushed her back in her chair to expose her to his view. She held him so tight, the only thing he could do was suck on her neck.

Normally, she hated being marked but he needed to make her feel what she had done to him. He grabbed both her breasts and tweaked the rock-hard nipples between his fingers. He took one in his mouth before moving his free hand to her pussy. He pawed at the table, reaching for anything. He felt a long, soft but firm penis. He grabbed it. He let his fingers graze over her clit slowly pushing the vibrator inside her. Within seconds, his fingers were covered in pussy juice and he was challenged to get a decent grip on the fake cock.

She raked her fingernails through his hair and held his face to her breast as her other hand clamped his to her other breast. The only way he was going to get a good grip was to find a bit more of the vibrator to grasp. Trent spread his fingers around the top and bottom of the vibrator and pushed his two fingers into her wet hole.

She squealed with delight and shifted her hips forward as her hole stretched to accommodate both his fingers and the vibrator.

Under what seemed to be an endless stream of pussy juice, his fingers clamped around the vibrator and he slowly eased it out.

"Do that again!" she begged as she splayed her legs apart further waiting for him to take charge. He pulled his head away from her breast and looked down. As he lined his hand up, he looked at her. He had introduced another finger at the

bottom and guided the tip of the vibrator back into her. Her eyes opened wide as she felt his fingers stretch her more. "Again," was the only word she could utter. He did as she commanded until he decided to change matters slightly.

Trent lowered his hand as she arched her back and pushed her sopping pussy in his direction. He took the vibrator and placed the tip of it so it just touched her clit.

Using his free hand, he fucked her with two fingers. After a few thrusts, he inserted three. Then four. She squirmed with delight as the juices dribbled down her ass crack. He pressed the vibrator hard against her clit and could feel soft vibrations through his fingertips. His fingers searched her insides, working her quickly and then slowly. He knew she was about to come when she spread her legs as far as she could and opened her pussy as much as possible. He could feel her inner walls swell around his fingers.

He felt her muscles pulse and try to lock onto his fingers as she came in waves. She trapped the vibrator against her clit as his fingers danced inside her. Pulling his fingers away, he replaced them with his face.

He couldn't get his tongue inside her far enough as he savored the fresh flow of juice that ran out of her. She screamed with delight as he drank. Lilly begged for him to keep going, but he needed his cock in her pussy now. She screamed one last time before begging him to fuck her.

"So now I wanna hear you beg me to fuck you," Trent said as he lined up the tip of his cock to her slick lips.

"Please, fuck me. And fuck me hard," Lilly panted. He pinned her thighs down to stop her from thrusting forward

and taking him before he was ready. "Please fuck me now. I want your cock inside me. I need it. I want all of you."

"Tell me how much you want it." He continued to circle her lips with his cock.

"I want it so fucking bad. But this isn't where it ends, baby. I have more plans for you and your cock, so please fuck me, baby."

His mind was swirling as pussy juice covered the head of his cock. It was warm. Just as Lilly was about to open her mouth and beg again, he leaned forward and pushed his cock against her opening. Although dripping wet, his cock wouldn't enter her.

Her hands flew to her lips and eased them open and urged him forward again. Without missing a beat, he pushed forward again. Lilly locked her legs around his hips trapping him. The sweet smell of hot sex had filled the room as his cock drove to the bottom of her pussy. She held him tight as his cock plunged in and out of her.

They were beyond gentle loving now. They both wanted raw, animalistic, heated sex.

Lilly clawed at his back and reached down to dig her nails into his ass as he flexed his hips and thrust into her over and over again. Both their minds were clouded with desire as she pushed herself off the chair to take all of him. He panted and moaned. His balls felt like they were going to explode. Her warm pussy was too inviting and hot. Lilly was close again. She released him from her grip as her pussy twitched around his cock. This wave of sensation made its way through his cock and into his balls.

"Oh fuck yeah," he hissed as she again clawed at his back. He buried his head in her neck and clamped his lips down hard to savor the ecstasy of blowing in her pussy. They screamed in unison as his cock started to spew into Lilly's gushing pussy.

Her rapture continued as he thrust into her, despite starting to go limp. She wriggled her hips to savor every last twitch that made their hearts beat as one. Her hands went to her sides as she remained spread-eagled and allowed him to pull out of her. He, too, wanted to savor the feeling. As he moved back from her, she reached forward and ran her hand over his face.

"You think that's good? Wait till your strength comes back, baby," she said with a cheeky grin.

"God damn, what else can you do to top that?" A thousand thoughts ran through his mind as he tried to compose himself. It felt like only five seconds, but he couldn't wait for his surprise. "I have followed the rules so far. I don't want to push, but I'm dying to find out what's going through your mind." He stood shakily on his feet. His cock was still covered in her pussy juice. She smiled and slowly closed her legs carefully before leaning forward and taking a long, slow lick of his cock. His knees knocked as she took him unsteadily on his feet. He winced as she tongued his cock gently. It was supersensitive.

"I know you're keen but I need you to keep your strength up, so just lie here with me for a little while. I need you to be up for what I have in store for you," she said, after she moved to a soft blanket and patted it. Trent got to his knees

gingerly and lay beside her. With her head on his shoulder, she traced her fingers gently over his torso. It was the first time in about a week she had cuddled him. "I know we have our differences in what we want from each other, both personally and sexually. I'm trying to understand what your fascination is, but I'm at a loss."

"We don't have to talk about this now, you know." Trent didn't want to talk about anything. Lilly rolled onto her back and away from him. "Hey, sorry. That came out wrong. That's not what I meant."

"I know," she said quietly. "But this is what I meant." She reached under the coffee table close to them and pulled out a set of elastic cables.

"And what are those used for?" Trent said, leaning on his elbows.

His hand moved over her buttocks as she rolled onto her knees and moved to the coffee table. She turned and smirked at him as she moved to sit on the coffee table's edge.

"Now, here's your surprise," she said as she lay flat on the table and brought her legs up to her chest, leaving her round ass exposed to him. "This is where I need your help."

She flicked the cords so they rested on her soles. "I need you to secure that under the coffee table." Trent rolled to his knees and tied the cords before moving to her side. "I think you might want to be down at that end." She couldn't help but smirk at him as he moved to the end of the table and knelt before her. He stared at her pussy and pink button as she moved her legs into position. Wide and up high. "Now, you're always going on about how you want to fuck my ass ...

well, guess what? I don't think I need to spell it out for you, do I? But let me show you how I want you to do it." She wrapped her arms around her legs and tickled her fingers over her pussy and asshole. "I want my vibe on my clit. I want your fingers in my pussy and I want your cock in my ass."

With a crooked finger, Lilly motioned him to move closer. As soon as the words escaped her mouth, his cock sprang up and was ready for action. He crawled up onto the coffee table and leant over her.

"Are you sure about this? I don't want to make you do something you would prefer not to."

Lilly reached up and pushed his long fringe off his face. "Honey, you know what I'm like, if I don't want to do something, you know I'm not going to be doing it."

"I know. But I don't want you to feel pressured," he started before she interrupted him.

"I'm not feeling pressured." Her legs pushed against the cord and she reached up to kiss him. "Now fuck me." Trent returned her passionate kisses. He could feel the heat coming from her holes and desperately wanted to be inside. "Now slow and steady, okay. I want us both to enjoy this." Lilly moved her hand down and took the vibrator out of Trent's hand. Her clit was still tender and she shivered as she ran the toy over it.

"Of course," he said as he grabbed the container of lube. Trent stared at her waiting asshole as he squeezed the lube onto his cock. His tongue flicked out and licked his lips as he looked at her waiting asshole. He inched closer and continued

to look. "Your pussy juice is dribbling down your ass crack. Makes me want to lick it again." Without stopping, he pushed the vibrator off her clit and pressed his mouth against her pussy opening. His tongue roamed inside her pussy before he pulled back and let his tongue descend to the part he had craved and been denied for so long. He smiled when he felt it pucker under the touch of his wet tongue. His hand continued to work the lube over his cock before he pulled his head back and smeared his fingers where his mouth had just been.

Lilly laughed. "That tickles a bit. It's kinda warm and very slippery. Not used to feeling that kind of sensation there."

"Well just you wait, I think you'll be feeling a whole different kind of sensation in a few minutes." He joined in her laugh. "Why don't you put that vibrator back where you want it and let's do this right." Leaning onto the table, Trent lined up his cock to her sweet asshole and tried to feed it in. He pushed against her softly but her butt button refused to let him enter. "Come on, baby. Let me in. Just relax," he said as he plunged his cock into her pussy for more lubrication. He pulled his cock out as she dropped her vibe and spread her ass cheeks for him. He held the tip of his cock against her asshole and gently but firmly pushed it in. This time, she let out a long, low breath and the head of his cock was accepted.

He continued to push into her. They both realized they were holding their breath as, little by little, the virgin passage became more accommodating.

"How you doing, baby?" he asked. "Are you okay?"

She nodded but was focused on getting all of his cock inside her again. As more of him moved inside her, she began to relax and the easier it became.

She breathed out as his cock spread her ass. The feeling was unusual, but not all the unpleasant. Lilly secretly kicked herself for waiting this long to try it.

Each ripple of his cock felt divine as he continued to push his way in right up to his balls. She attempted to steady her breath as her clit started to dance. He slowly pulled back and thrust forward again till his balls rested against her warm skin.

"Hmm, fuck, you feel so good. I thought your pussy was tight, but your ass is hotter than you could ever imagine," he said as he found a tempo that suited them both. Lilly pushed against the cords to make her asshole tighter as he pulled out and relaxed when he pushed in. His rhythm was perfect for her.

Lilly started to moan before asking to suck on his fingers. Small beads of sweat collected on his forehead as he watched his cock plug her over and over. He thrust all the way in as he reached forward to her mouth. Trent balanced on one hand as he continued to push while she rolled her tongue over his index and pointer fingers. Her mouth was as wet as her pussy and his fingers slipped in without hesitation or resistance. He didn't think it was possible but she arched her back to take even more of him.

She grabbed hold of his wrist and pulled his hand down to her waiting pussy and pushed his fingers deep inside her. She squealed in delight as he thrust both his cock and fingers into

her at the same time. Lilly slid back on the coffee table as he pushed into her. He watched her face as she searched for her vibrator.

Knowing she couldn't reach it, he pushed inside her and moved to pick up the rogue vibe while she grabbed the back of her calf. Pulling his cock out, Trent positioned the vibrator over her clit and pressed down. He could feel his balls start to tighten as he pushed his cock in as far as he could.

"Oh fuck," was all she could utter as she shook under him. Trent kept his fingers moving in time with his thrusts. His cock felt divine in her virgin hole. More sweat ran down his face and a perfect droplet fell from his chin and mixed with the sweat on her body. Lilly cried out. It felt like a small volt of electricity was running through his cock, her pussy, ass and clit, and they were all connected. All working in time. The more she rocked and arched her body, the more her orgasm crashed over her.

Lilly's clit shuddered under her vibe and she thought if she moved it, her orgasm would die. At the same time, her clit was begging for her to relieve the pressure. Her whimper had turned into a loud call as her body shook in ecstasy.

"Fuck, you're hot," he panted as he watched her body shake with bliss. He could feel his balls getting heavy and full.

"Come in my ass. I want you to blow in my ass. I can't stop coming," she said breathlessly as she grabbed at her breasts to squeeze them. His fingers and hand were coated in her pussy juice. Her legs shook as she threw the vibrator from her hands and grabbed hold of his wrist again. She pulled his hand out and brought his fingers back to her

mouth. She wanted to taste herself. The sight was too much for him to bear. Hot cum gushed along the vein on the underside of his cock and spewed into her waiting asshole. Trent grabbed hold of her ankles to steady and empty himself into her. His cum provided extra lubrication so his cock slipped in and out of her with ease.

"I wanna stay in you for as long as possible ... is that okay?"

"Sure, baby ... I think you deserve it," she said, trying to calm her breath as her mind drifted off into bliss.

He nuzzled her neck and gave it a long, slow kiss as he went limp. He could feel her asshole shrinking around his cock. He eased his hips away from her while reaching under the table to release the cords. He helped her lower her legs slowly. The pressure helped build the last of the shudders escaping her genitals.

Holding her close, he said, "You have no idea what this means to me..."

"That was great, I loved it too, but you know what?" she said with the last of her energy.

"What's that?"

She didn't try to hide her giggle. "Next time ... it's your turn."

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HOT WINTER NIGHTS by Kendra Clark

"Tell me no. All you have to do is say the word." Bryce Cameron leaned seductively from the custom Italian leather chair and brushed an unruly curl from her eye.

"Don't think you know me," Winter warned, inching away from the one man determined to prove her wrong.

"Oh, but I do, Winter. Just not in the biblical sense, and that's about to change."

The blue eyes of the man she answered to day in and day out were no longer recognizable. There wasn't the usual soft hue of kindness. These eyes were hungry, predator like, searing her to the very core.

Who did he think he was? Demanding sex in exchange for a promotion? It was sexual harassment in the worst form.

Immoral, illegal, and downright degrading!

So why did it make her hot and tingle in all the right places?

You know why, Winter. This is what you've wanted for over two years. And it was, but that didn't change the fact in less than an hour, two tops, she'd have the job she'd worked for her entire life, but with a price. And she would lose the respect of the only man she cared for.

All she had to do was...

"Do you honestly think we could work with one another after having sex? It'd just be too—*weird*."

He strolled around the rectangular, cherry desk and pushed up a pair of rimless eyeglasses. She couldn't help but

watch. Bryce wore his usual khaki slacks, with his anal retentive crease down the legs and an indigo button-up shirt secured by a Ralph Lauren leather belt.

Hell, he was the last person she'd ever expected to try and seduce her. But here he was, the brains behind *Dazzle*. Mister Straight-and-Narrow and he had offered her what she'd always wanted in exchange for sex.

"I'm not going to just have sex with you, Winter. I'm going to fuck you so hard, you're going to beg me to never stop." There was an edge to his voice she'd never heard before and she thought he actually meant it.

Her eyes widened, and honestly, she couldn't believe what he'd said. No one in the office had ever heard him even mutter the word hell, much less this.

Bryce moved closer.

A shudder ran down her spine. Tingles crawled over her shoulders. Did he mean right now?

Winter's nipples tightened against her white cotton shirt at the thought. She stood motionless, not believing what was happening.

Here she was, about to piss away nine years of hard work and do the shallow thing. Become Senior Editor of *Dazzle* by using the 'get the promotion fuck.'

All the college, hard work, extra hours meant nothing. What it boiled down to is the boss man wanted all her qualifications with fringe benefits.

Cut and dry.

And she couldn't help but wonder if he'd slept with the entire staff at *Dazzle* in the 'late nights' he'd worked.

He took off his glasses and laid them down on the bookshelf. For the first time, she truly saw his eyes. Beautiful, the deepest shade of aqua-blue, they reminded her of the sea. His eyelashes were too pretty to be a man's and dimples cut into his cheeks when he smiled.

Bryce Cameron was extremely handsome.

"First, I'm gonna let you suck my cock," he smirked.

And surprisingly bold.

"Then, I'm going to throw you on the desk and have my wicked way with you." His voice deepened, commanding, and she'd be damned if this new side of him hadn't made her clit throb.

What happened to the wimpy Bryce Cameron who'd always opened the door for her? Who had always cowered behind a desk or a book instead of attending company parties?

He sure as hell wasn't here now!

"What if I don't want you to have your wicked way with me?" she asked, not really knowing the answer to that one.

Did she?

She'd always been attracted to him. But what he offered her now...

"You do and you will," he said, closing the gap between them.

The air popped and sizzled around them in the twenty-fourth floor corporate office. The slow burn of the fireplace went from warm to sizzling in three seconds flat as embers crackled and popped in the air, the flames reflecting from the depths of his eyes.

Bryce's office was bigger than Winter's entire living room—make that house—the man had money, more than he would be able to spend in his lifetime. He had everything financially any woman could want. But that's not why she liked him. She liked his soft, caring, sensitive side: the friendly smile that met her every day. The way he always exhibited the utmost professionalism in the office—well, until today.

And honestly, today, she'd been so stunned. *And so turned on*, she thought, as she gazed into desire-clouded eyes.

He didn't give her time to think about it. He stalked toward her and in an instant, he was there, grabbing her waist and pulling her hard against him. His already hardened cock pressed into her stomach and she knew just how much he wanted her.

The crook of a finger tipped her chin and Bryce smiled down at her like a Cheshire cat. "I've always wanted to do this," he admitted, holding his mouth torturously close to hers.

Warm breath fanned her ready-to-be-taken lips and his nose brushed hers with sweet Eskimo kisses. *Kiss me*, she thought, as he continued to tease.

"Last chance," he warned, "speak now, or forever hold your peace."

She just stood there, still in utter shock and disbelief this was actually happening, but one thing she knew was she wanted this man to kiss her senseless.

By the time his mouth crushed hers, she'd been more than ready. And Bryce hadn't disappointed her, drinking in her essence until she felt drained. Their tongues met and swirled

and Winter's defenses flitted away like a snowflake in the wind.

Then hard kisses melted into slow, passionate ones. He had strong lips and she felt them everywhere. His warm mouth tasted of fresh breath mints and lattes. Still, as inviting as all this was, would she be able to take the position of Senior Editor knowing she'd earned it this way?

No, she couldn't. Mustering up as much resolve as she possibly could, Winter pulled away. "Bryce, we shouldn't."

"No?"

"W-what if—"

"What if what, Winter?" he asked, running his hand through his hair in frustration. "What if you like it? I've been watching the way you look at me. Every time I pass your office, you strain your neck to see if I've noticed you. There's heat there."

Had she done that? The truth was it was impossible *not* to notice Bryce. Although she'd never thought him wild, he was extremely handsome in a businessman manner.

She'd just never believed he'd cross the line. Sleep with an employee. Truthfully, she'd fantasized about having Bryce many times, but never like this. The fantasies had always been sweet and tender and loving. With feelings behind every touch, every caress.

There were feelings tonight all right, but they were lopsided and Winter didn't know if she could stand it. She wanted him to offer her a relationship, his feelings.

Far from what he offered her today...

"I don't want to be used," she admitted, her lips still throbbing from his powerful, devouring mouth. She didn't want him seeing the resignation behind her eyes, but she knew it was there.

"Who's doing the using? You want the promotion and I want you." His words flattened her.

He wanted her?

Could that mean...

Bryce didn't give her a chance to ask as he crushed his mouth to hers once more in a passionate frenzy. The scent of citrus and musk from his cologne tantalized her nostrils and made her lose her senses.

Tortuously, his warm palm crept to her breast, rolling and plucking her nipple through her silken bra. Fingers kneaded the peaks sending awareness straight between her legs, dampening her pussy instantly. Then Bryce kissed her so hard again, she thought she might pass out.

God, she did want Bryce. However she could have him, and with everything in her, she wanted Bryce.

"I'll tell you what, I'll give you a tongue bath first," he coaxed; a wicked smile crept to the corners of his mouth.

This man kissed by the book! And even though she'd never heard him utter an obscenity before now, she'd wager he could talk dirty with the best of them.

Winter's body shivered as she thought of Bryce Cameron's mouth kissing every part of her body.

It'd been her secret fantasy, her wish, from the moment she'd laid eyes on him. And it was all about to come true.

Looping her arms behind his neck, she pulled him harder onto her lips, and delved her tongue into the velvety warmth of his mouth.

"Mmm..." she moaned into his mouth.

And he did it all over again. Strong arms banded around her back and magical fingers massaged in all the right places. *Don't stop*, she thought as she kissed him back.

Their tongues tangled and Winter pressed herself into his arms and against his rock-hard body. She drank him in with all the passion and longing she'd had in her heart for two years. If she couldn't have him any other way, this would do. Hell, it wasn't like it felt bad, every time he touched her, she felt her pussy weep for more.

Slowly, Bryce pulled away and dipped his head low, so she felt the importance of his words. Warm breath tickled her ear. "You are at my mercy, Winter. This is your last chance to leave."

Anticipation filled her intermixed with fear, a coupling she didn't understand. But she understood this much, promotion or not, she'd wanted Bryce everyday for so long, she'd be damned if anything would stop her. Maybe if she had him once, she'd get him out of her system once and for all.

"I'll do it," she said, feigning resignation in her voice.

"I've locked the door," he said, tracing her jaw with the pad of his thumb, "and you're gonna show me what a bad little employee you are." He continued tracing a line under her chin and stopped just shy of her breast. "Otherwise, I'll have to reprimand you."

Good Lord! Suddenly, the promotion was the farthest thing from her mind. Winter knew he'd let her walk away at any moment, he'd never force her to do anything. *Fuck!* She didn't want to leave.

This new side of Bryce had her so hot and curious, it'd take a bulldozer to shove her out of his private office.

In one fell swoop of his arm, he knocked everything from the top of his desk and it clattered to the floor. Strewn pencils, paper, and the name plate that read Bryce McCain, President laid face up.

Winter just looked at him, eyes wide, mouth agape.

"Where's this Bryce been hiding?" she managed to say as excitement pumped through her at record speed.

Cupping her buttocks hard beneath her knee-length skirt, he lifted her and plopped her down on the cool, hard desk with ease. "I've been here the whole time, baby. Now let me see you." His command should've appalled her, but it didn't. Instead, it made her pussy cream for what a demanding lover he would be.

Gooseflesh lined her arms as she allowed him to inch her knees apart with the tip of a finger.

He didn't stop there.

Lightly, Bryce caressed the inner part of her leg—rough skin coasting over smooth—until it reached where she wanted him the most.

He cupped her pussy through already dampened underwear and rubbed over and over and over. "Does that feel good to you, Winter?" he asked.

"Oh yes," she answered, watching his hungry eyes take in the sight of her.

"This excites you, doesn't it? Show me," he murmured, lifting her hand to his lips and kissing the palm.

"Show you?" she asked.

"Show me, darling," he repeated, bringing her finger into his hot mouth and suckling. Winter leaned her head back and moaned. God, if he sucked a finger like that, what could he do to the rest of her?

Blue eyes locked into hers. "Show me," he said, and kissed her hungrily while he led her palm to her molten center.

Dear Lord, she'd never touched herself in front of a man before. Not like this. With Bryce, the thought of him watching her made her pussy cream even more.

Winter rubbed herself through her underwear and moaned at the pleasure. Never once did she take her eyes off Bryce. He drank in the sight of her pleasuring herself. Raking his gaze ravenously over her pussy and breasts.

She loved how he appreciated what she did for him. So why not torture him more? Winter carefully slid her other hand up to cup her own breast. She took the pucker of her nipple between her thumb and forefinger and twisted slowly, gently while her tongue came out to wet her bottom lip.

Bryce's jaw went slack.

"This excites you, doesn't it?" she asked, repeating his remark.

"Yes, Winter, God yes. Fuck yourself. Do it while you look at me."

She pushed her underwear to the side and met her own warmth and delved in. Her fingers pumped her pussy.

In and out.

In and out.

Bryce stayed with her for each stroke, guiding her rhythm to satisfy his ravenous appetite. Hungrily, he bent down and took her nipple into his mouth, while his other hand ran up and down the inside of her leg.

It was the hottest thing she'd ever experienced and she was so close to tipping over the edge.

Winter couldn't wait to come on their hands and show him how much he'd turned her on.

But just before she exploded, he stopped.

Had he changed his mind? Had she done something wrong?

Bryce slid her underwear down in a languid movement, exposing her hot, wet, throbbing clit.

Guess not.

Instead of ravaging her, he swept his gaze over the entire length of her body. A smile played at the corners of his mouth. "You're so fucking beautiful," he admitted, staring into her eyes. "All of you."

Dear God, this man melted her into a pool of passion. Not only that, the way he looked at her as if he worshipped every last inch of her melted her heart.

Did he want more than just her body? She didn't want to hope.

Before she could respond, Bryce quickly bent his head and kissed a trail starting at her knees. Hair tickled her inner thigh

while the rough stubble of his chin hissed and prickled as the path ascended toward her dampened clit. The contrast had her senses reeling.

"Beautiful, damn it. Beautiful," he said and pulled her to him. The first touch of his tongue on her pussy made her scream in pleasure.

Winter threw her head back and arched up to meet his dancing tongue. *God, this man was good.*

Bryce found her nub with his thumb and flicked it back and forth and her hips rewarded him by arching to meet his mouth.

* * * *

Winter's finely manicured fingers threaded through his hair. Oh, she liked him all right. She rose with each dip of his tongue and she tasted of heaven.

It was all he could do to pull away. Watching her enjoy herself had him so hard, he thought he might burst from his pants.

He should feel guilty about the way he'd gotten her to agree to be with him, but the funny thing was, he didn't.

This was the woman he loved, whether she realized it or not and if she wouldn't come to him in the old-fashioned way, he'd seduce her. And plan number one in the seduction was always leave them wanting more.

He couldn't believe that the woman he'd lusted after for two solid years was lying underneath him with her sweet pussy in his face. He swirled his tongue faster as his

forefinger tweaked the nub. She screamed in pleasure and he'd be damned if his pants hadn't tightened even more.

Winter fisted her fingers through his hair with more determination, pulling his face so hard to her middle, he could barely breathe. "Oh. B-Bryce, oh!" she screamed and he continued delving into her sweet warmth.

Well, maybe he couldn't wait. He lapped again and Winter shattered around his mouth, screaming his name at the top of her lungs.

It was a good thing he'd asked her to stay after hours, because the entire building would've heard that scream.

Bryce studied Winter totally spent and sprawled across his desk. Her pink skirt pulled past her trim waist and he could see a tiny tattoo of a pink butterfly etched on her hipbone. He bent his head to kiss the tattoo and she caught him.

"Give me a minute," she pleaded, attempting to get her breath. She didn't have a minute. Hell, he was so ready to feel her, taste her again, he was barely able to stand.

"No, I'm the boss," he said, not giving her a chance to back down now. Not until he felt her warm pussy weeping over and sheathing his cock. "Now, when you become Senior Editor, you'll need to instruct your secretary on alphabetical order."

"What are you talking about?"

"All your files need to be in perfect working order," he teased.

"I know about files, Bryce," she corrected.

"Still, wouldn't hurt you to have a brush-up course."

"What are you going to teach me I don't already know?" she asked.

"Oh, honey, I'm going to teach you your ABC's." He dipped his head to her molten center once more. He shuddered to find it still warm and welcoming his touch.

"I know my ABC's," she corrected and wriggled against his face.

"A," he breathed, then wrote the letter with the tip of his tongue, "I'm in charge."

"Mmn..." she moaned.

"B." He continued the progression. "You belong to me."

"Oh, Bryce," she said in between pants.

"C. Come on my face, darling, come."

"Bryce," she moaned and panted. He couldn't help but smile into her delicious pussy. Minute by minute, lap by lap, Winter was becoming his. And oh, he would teach her. He'd teach her as long as she was willing.

He continued tracing the alphabet with the tip of his tongue over her clit while he pumped a finger into her heated pussy and thrust it over and over until she screamed and writhed beneath it.

This woman had the most delicious pussy he'd ever tasted and the prettiest one he'd ever laid eyes on. Dampened auburn curls prickled and teased his cheeks while he feasted. Soft, pale skin contracted around his expert lips and she was about to get more...

"Y. Why have you waited so long to let me taste your beautiful pussy?"

He blew warm breath into her cunt and juices ebbed and flowed out. Bryce dove back in, lapping up and down, in and out of her center until she tightened and was ready to explode.

He pulled back.

Dazed, hazy green eyes looked into his. He couldn't let her come again. Not yet.

It seemed Winter didn't want to. She had something else in mind, something that totally shocked him. Unzipping his trousers, she smiled up at him, freeing his throbbing cock.

It shot out of his trousers hard, hot and ready for this woman. It all but ached with the need to sink into her wetness. And it was more ready for this woman than any it had ever had. He'd dreamt of Winter so many nights. This very fantasy and he lived it now.

In this office.

On this desk.

He'd never manipulated a woman in this fashion. And he'd never offered a promotion in exchange for sex, but the tension in the office between the two of them was at an all-time high. He couldn't count the times he'd caught himself staring at her round ass and wishing he could take her into a closet and work off the frustration.

And he was no fool. She'd felt the same way. He was sure, he never would have offered her such a proposal if he hadn't been positive.

He had to have her. Needed to feel her wriggling and writhing beneath him. Despite the way he'd compromised her, he knew Winter had morals.

She'd never slept with him just because he was her boss, but now, she thought they'd be practically equals ... the game had changed and he'd known she'd respond to his touch like this.

Gentle hands folded around his ready cock and stroked him up and down. The fingertip of her other hand drew tiny circles around the velvety tip and swirled the liquid already forming on the head. Bryce closed his eyes and just allowed himself to feel this magnificent woman and her hands.

Damn. The way she touched him made his heart hammer in his chest. Why couldn't she be his?

When her mouth took him in to the brim, he felt he might explode. Hot, warm, welcoming.

Fucking great!

She suckled and tasted him as if he were the most delicious morsel she'd ever had in her mouth. Bryce toyed with her long curls of auburn and urged her mouth closer.

"Damn, baby. You are magic," he admitted and hoped like hell the lesson didn't *end* before it really got started.

She took him deeper. So deep, he felt the back of her throat tickle his tip. He bucked his hips and pressed his cock into her warm, wet mouth. Winter's hand inched under him and cupped his sac, teasing and stimulating.

On the next thrust, he caught her head. "That was good, but if you don't stop. I won't make it."

She looked up at him and did as he asked. "You liked that, did you?" she coaxed, licking her lips suggestively.

"Yes. I like everything you do," he said, smiling as he noticed crimson creeping into her cheeks.

* * * *

Nothing felt better than sucking Bryce's big, juicy cock. She'd wondered why he hadn't seduced her sooner. Had she misread all the signals? He'd wanted her as much as she'd desired him. That much was obvious.

Now, Winter needed to slow things down a bit. Savor the taste and touch of Bryce Cameron, because it'd have to last her a lifetime. Tonight was a one time offer.

And boy, was she glad she'd taken it.

Cupping his hand gently in hers, she coaxed him closer to the fireplace, and sat down on the oval Oriental rug.

Slowly, she began unbuttoning his shirt. One button at a time, torturing him with each movement. She couldn't wait to touch him again. To feel his taut flesh sear her palm. By the time his shirt slid off, she was reeling to see what was beneath his regular business casuals.

Bryce was no bookworm underneath those scholarly khakis, no. He was extremely muscular. Washboard abs, tight chest, the works. This man had hidden a fine physique under those clothes for way too long.

Winter's palms itched to coast over sinewy muscles, touching him until he shivered with need. "You are the one who's beautiful," she said as she ran her hands over each shoulder and leaned to kiss each muscle, stopping to suckle his nipple.

He moaned.

"God, Winter. You're everything I thought you'd be." She looked up at him. Was she?

When those piercing blue eyes locked onto hers, she swore she saw more than passion there. Should she dare to hope?

"Why do you hide your eyes and your body when you're the most gorgeous man I've ever laid eyes on?" she asked, not believing she'd said exactly what was on her mind.

Bryce furrowed a brow. Had she shocked him?

He said nothing, instead, traced the pad of his thumb down her cheek and over her lips with a tenderness she hadn't expected.

Tugging her shirt over and pitching it to the floor, Bryce smiled. He lifted a fingertip to touch the skin beneath curve of her lavender lace bra.

This man's touch stole her breath.

"Lay back," he commanded and she did just that.

Bryce sprinkled kisses over her stomach. Goosebumps prickled her skin. *Dear Lord, this man's mouth.* He continued his fiery trail to her breast, tweaked and plucked her nipple, then took it into his warm, welcoming mouth. Winter held onto his head as he suckled and kissed her nipples as if he worshipped her. And she worshipped him right back. Especially his mouth and how it made her feel.

As if she was the only woman in the world.

"Oh." She moaned when his free hand found the other breast. He rose, tugged the straps down onto her shoulders, and swept his gaze over her body and then into her eyes once more.

And then his mouth crushed hers in a passionate kiss. Their tongues met in a twist of fury and truthfully, Winter

didn't know which one wanted the other more. She'd lost her mind to passion and damn if she didn't want more.

His hardness pressed and teased her hot core. But he didn't enter her yet. She arched, her dampened middle begging him to thrust and make her complete.

"Not yet. I don't think you've been properly trained," he said and kissed her again.

"Please," she begged, breaking the kiss as her gaze swept a hungry trail.

"Tell me it's me you want," he said, eyes locking onto hers and warm breath fanning her face.

"I want you," she admitted, knowing she told the truth.

"No. Not for the promotion. Tell me you want me, even if it's a lie. I need to hear it." His gaze softened. My God, Bryce really cared for her.

Her hands cupped his handsome face, her thumb rubbed along his dimpled cheek. "I've always wanted you. Whether I get this promotion or not, I won't regret tonight." She tugged him to her and kissed him with everything in her.

She loved him. She knew that now. God help them both. What they were doing was wrong, but she couldn't help herself. She loved Bryce Cameron.

He fumbled for his wallet and extracted a condom. Quickly, he unwrapped it and rolled it over his large cock, then repositioned himself on top. Winter held her breath as he entered her in one hard, long stroke. She gasped at his length and how hard he was for her. Damn, the man wanted her as much as she had him.

* * * *

Bryce hadn't believed his ears. Winter wanted him. Regardless of the promotion, she wanted him. But, the question remained, would she love him?

A knot formed in the back of his throat. How could she love a man who had compromised her in this way? He stiffened.

Then Winter grabbed his hips and moved them to meet her more deeply, and he'd forgotten all logic. Her hot, molten center flooded around his cock. She was so tight and wet, with each thrust, he sank deeper and deeper into delight.

The scent of lavender and vanilla wafted into his nostrils from her perfume and drove him mad. Being inside her made him mad. For so long, he'd dreamed of having her tight pussy sheathing his ready cock and tonight, this moment, it was happening. And Bryce felt himself grow harder with each thrust, each meeting of her hips. Each slow pant of breath escaping her beautiful bowed mouth in pleasure.

And he knew at that moment, there was nothing more beautiful than the union of a man and a woman.

He covered her mouth with his and kissed the moans away and pounded harder and harder into her pussy. Fingernails bit and clawed into his back. It burned, but satisfied him immensely, she'd left her mark. Winter's fingernails scraped down his back until they found his ass, and bit and dug into it as he rode her.

She moaned and called his name and whispered how much she wanted him over and over in his ears and Bryce felt his sac draw tighter with each secret admission.

He drove one, hard, long stroke into her.

And she came.

He felt her pulsating wildly around his cock. "Oh God," she cried out, "you're so fucking good."

What man could stand that?

He came right with her, exploding into a million orgasmic pieces inside her pussy. It'd felt so natural. So right.

And so wrong at the same time.

Totally spent, he rolled from on top of her, and nestled her closely beside him.

Winter looked beautiful under the glow of the firelight. Just laying there, basking in the afterglow of sex. Her auburn hair held flecks of gold and her emerald eyes sparkled with the flame's reflection.

Bryce held her close to his chest and regained control of his breathing.

"Do you always do that?" she asked, still breathless.

"What?"

"Fuck the hell out of your employees?"

The question was cold, and what stung the most is that he deserved it. He released her and looked away.

Bryce knew what he'd asked of her had been wrong. Hell, it wasn't something he'd ever done, and he didn't want her to think that. But he'd left her with no other impression.

"No," he said, getting up and tugging his trousers up.

* * * *

What had she said wrong? Winter quickly began dressing. "I didn't mean ... I just ... you were so good," she admitted, trying to smooth things over.

Bryce buttoned and zipped his khakis and turned to face her. "I'm a bastard," he said, pain etched in the corners of his eyes.

"What?"

"I never should have done this."

The words bit her good. She'd known he would regret it, but she'd hoped it wouldn't be so soon.

"I knew you would be this way."

He stuffed his hands in his pockets and jingled loose change. "It's cold outside."

What in the hell was he doing? Were they talking about the weather now? "Yeah, it's winter, Bryce."

He took a hand out of his pocket and offered it to her.

Reluctantly, she took it. They walked to the window and Bryce pulled the blinds back. The view was breathtaking, although she'd seen it many times before. Tonight, it looked different.

Snowflakes sprinkled under the lights of skyscrapers and cascaded down, tumbling to the ground and into the blackness. The winter wind whipped and hissed through the window and she felt a chill standing that close to it.

Nashville didn't get much snow, but when it did, it was cold, crisp and the city became a winter wonderland if only for a day.

Bryce leaned forward and blew a long breath, fogging the glass.

Then he wrote one word with his fingers. *Sorry*.

Sorry? God, was he sorry he'd slept with her? She couldn't bear it if that were the case.

She just looked at him and nodded as if she didn't understand.

Then he placed an arm around the small of her back and gazed deeply into her eyes. "You have the promotion, Winter. You had it before you slept with me."

"What?"

"I lied," he said, she felt his arm slip from the small of her waist and he turned to face the window.

"You can't just do this, Bryce."

"I know."

"Leave, Winter. I'm no good for you."

"I think I can decide who and what is good for me," she corrected, and although she should feel angry with him, she didn't. They'd just shared the most incredible sex she'd ever experienced. He shouldn't be sorry for that. She'd agreed to everything and she'd be damned if she'd let him be sorry.

"You can. I just wanted you to know. I don't do this," he gestured between them, "I haven't done this with anyone else at *Dazzle*." He swallowed. "Only you."

"Will you look at me?" she asked, her breath catching in her throat at his remorse. "I'm a big girl, Bryce. If I hadn't wanted to sleep with you, I wouldn't have. And the truth is, I wanted you, too."

He answered her with silence.

"Not just physically," she said, "I love you, Bryce. Tonight was what I needed to realize it." She lifted her hand and

rested it on his shoulder, with a noticeable flinch from Bryce. "Screw the promotion. I don't want anything without you." Winter couldn't believe her own words, but one thing she knew for sure, she wanted to feel the way she had just now every night from here on out, with Bryce.

"I've been cold for so long, Winter. Putting up shields, putting my career first."

"I know. Why do think I haven't told you how I felt?"

Dread welled in her throat. Was he giving her the brush off?

"I knew if I didn't do something tonight, I'd lose the only thing in this world that meant something to me."

"Are you saying..."

"I love you, too. I have for damn near two years. I thought this would get you out of my system, but damn you, woman, it's worse." He stalked closer and her heart almost burst.

He loved her.

"I don't want to be cold tonight," he said, looking directly at her. "Come home with me."

She smiled at the man she loved. "You'll never be cold again."

And Winter undressed the man she loved and warmed him in all the right places over and over and over.

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NAUGHTY AND NICE by C'ann Inman

Alana Murphy was bored. She flopped around on her queen-sized bed for a couple more minutes and then sighed. She didn't see the antique dressers or mirrors in hand carved oak. Her hands didn't notice the luxurious cobalt bedspread she was plucking at. The sheer beauty of the room was unnoticed.

This holiday season had been nothing but the same old, same old every damn day. Her husband was wrapped up in business and that left everything else to her. Presents to buy. Nice to make. The only bright spot was the party tonight her best friend, Helen, invited her to attend.

Devin assured her he would be out of town for another couple days. And that meant she could attend one of Helen's famous parties. After five years of marriage, she expected some of the fizzle to be gone. But it still hurt. Devin was busy with work. And she was damn sick of it.

When was the last time I enjoyed his company? Alana thought back and grimaced. It had been way too long. She had been replaced as his baby by his business. Their bed was usually only occupied by one person at a time. And that one person was her.

Helen called a week ago and invited Alana to her Christmas party at the club. She balked at first. Everyone knew what went on at Helen's parties. And what came off. The more she thought about it, the more she wanted to go.

She wanted to feel desirable again. So she accepted the invitation.

And now she would attend Helen's "Santas and Elves" party. All the males would be dressed as Santas. All the females would be dressed as elves. Alana bought her costume a couple days ago. It was a short, red velvet number that laced from the low-cut neckline to her waist. It was strapless and daring. The bottom of the skirt was trimmed with white fur, and she loved the feel of it against her skin. She would wear thigh-high stockings and red velvet panties.

Alana glanced over at her clock on the nightstand. She had a couple hours to prepare, and she wanted to take her time. First, she soaked in her fragrant bath salts. The bath salts worked wonders on her skin. She stood up and wrapped a towel around herself. Her skin was silky smooth, and she smelled of flowers.

She stood in front of her mirror and dropped the towel. *Not bad*. At thirty-five, she finally made peace with her body. Alana turned from one side to the next. *Curvy*, Devin called her. And he loved her curves. Or he used to. She ran her hands over her soft body and smiled. And now someone else might have the chance.

She pulled her brown hair up and opened the drawer with her silk stockings and velvet panties. Alana pulled her panties on, then the red garter belt. She slowly unrolled the stockings and slid them up her legs one at a time. The silk was sexy as sin against her bare legs.

Reaching under the bed, she took her red heels out of their box and grinned. *Perfect*. She strapped the heels on so she

wouldn't have a run in her hose. Alana didn't want to make a last minute run to the store for stockings. Then she stood and walked slowly over to her closet. She loved the way her body moved when she felt sexy. And right now, she was on fire.

Alana took the dress off the hanger and held it to her body. It was soft and welcoming. She pulled it over her head and adjusted it. The front was gaping open where she was supposed to lace up the red velvet ties. She didn't worry about that right now. She walked back over to the mirror and tried to gauge how high the skirt was when she walked. There was such a thing as being a little too easy. The thought made her laugh aloud.

Alana studied herself from all angles again and was satisfied. She slowly laced the front of her dress up and smiled. There were flashes of bare skin between the lacings. The top of the dress made her breasts appear even larger and her waist smaller. She rubbed her breasts through the material and smiled when her nipples hardened. She looked like one naughty little elf.

Her hair and makeup was next. Alana lowered her head down and shook her short, dark brown hair to bring the life back into it. She gelled and blow-dried it. When she flipped her head up, she nodded. Wild hair. Hair that looked like she tumbled in and out of beds for the hell of it.

She took her time with her makeup. The basics were simple, but she spent extra time on her eyes. She put on black mascara, green eyeliner, and two shades of green eye shadow to make her enormous hazel eyes appear even

larger. Alana painted her mouth a bright crimson and pouted for herself in the mirror. *Perfect.*

Alana glanced down at the drawer that held her vibrator and then thought better of it. She didn't have the need for a toy right now. She had the need for a man. One more glance in the mirror, and she pulled on a midlength black leather coat. It fell far below her dress, and she knew people would wonder what she had on underneath. Let them.

* * * *

Helen arranged for a cab to pick Alana up and bring her to the club. It was a service she provided for all her guests. Alcohol would be dispensed freely, and Helen didn't want any accidents. Alana stepped into the cab and gave the cabbie a half-smile. He smiled back at her and merged into traffic.

Feeling devilish, she undid her coat and let it drop to her sides. The cab driver looked back, and his jaw dropped. Alana gave him a slow smile and leaned forward.

"I'm going out. Do you like my dress?"

"Yes." His eyes strayed to her breasts more than once, and Alana smiled.

"Good." She sat back and crossed her legs slowly, being sure to let her dress ride up.

The cab driver cleared his throat and adjusted his mirror.

Now that she had his attention, she shifted slightly so that he could almost see up her dress. Alana licked her lips and touched her hair. Her garter was visible now, and the cab driver was looking more in his rearview mirror than his windshield.

"You won't get in an accident, will you?"

"What?"

Alana let her hand trail down her breast and to her lap. She leaned forward again and whispered in the cab driver's ear. "I would like to arrive at the party in one piece."

"Yes, ma'am." He jerked his head around and tried to pay attention to where he was going.

Alana grinned. He was a youngster, and he liked what he saw. The simple thought made her hum under her breath.

When the cab pulled in front of Helen's club, a doorman in a tuxedo opened Alana's door. She took the money from her purse and slid her coat back on.

"Thank you," she purred.

He nodded his head and watched as she slid out of the cab. His eyes lingered on her long legs for more than a minute, and the doorman tapped on the window. The cab driver drove off slowly.

Alana walked into the club and smiled. There were Santas and elves as far as the eye could see.

Gold and silver tinsel and garland wound along the banisters and poles attached to the dance floor. Everyone was bathed in a soft, red light. Faux presents were stacked against the walls, and there was a gigantic sleigh on the stage where bands usually performed. A jovial Santa was smiling as a blow-up doll bobbed up and down on his lap.

The music was loud and rhythmic. Alana walked farther inside and looked her fill at the guests tonight. There were elves in every costume imaginable. Kitten elves. Alien elves. Dominatrix elves. These carried whips that coiled over their

arms or around their waists. Everything and anything was the motto of the night.

She gave her coat to the man at the door and stepped further inside. Heads turned as she entered the room, and she made eye contact with more than one Santa and elf. She noted that some people were paired up, and others weren't.

She walked over to the bar and ordered a shot of tequila. Helen always supplied an open bar to her select guest list. The bartender poured it and smiled. She watched the bartender's sure movements and put him on her short list of men to watch. He was young, tan, and athletic. His brown eyes met hers more than once, and Alana knew he was up for a party.

Alana slammed it down and felt the heat flow through her body. Her nipples tightened, and she arched her back to feel the fabric of her dress rub against them.

The bartender noticed, and ran his thumb along the lip of the shot glass she used. "Care for another?"

"Maybe later." Alana pursed her lips and blew him a kiss as she slid off the barstool.

"Darling."

Alana turned around at the sexy voice and grinned at her best friend in the whole world.

Helen stood there in an outfit that Cher would have been envious of wearing. Her silvery, blonde hair was pulled back from her face and curled loosely on her head. Her blue eyes were sparkling and outlined with miniature diamonds.

A length of red satin was around Helen's neck. The satin couldn't have been more than a couple inches thick. It criss-

crossed down her body and over her breasts. The ribbon widened a little as it dipped down between Helen's legs. Alana glanced down at the four-inch stilettos Helen was sporting.

"I see you've decided to go modest tonight."

"Darling." Helen smiled. "Modest is for those who don't know what they want." She pulled Alana over to the side and motioned to her dress. "I love this. I'm glad to see you decided to embrace this evening's festivities."

"I was almost worried about having too little on." Alana looked around and scanned the crowd again. "Almost."

Helen nodded with her head toward the south wall. "See that lovely elf over there?"

Alana searched that side of the club and finally found her. The woman was covered in silver with a jaunty elf hat and silver ball perched on her blonde head. Several Santas and elves surrounded her. "Yes."

"That's body paint."

Alana's jaw dropped slightly. "Body paint?" She looked again. "You mean she's not wearing..."

"Anything," Helen finished for her. "She has a rather large group of admirers."

Alana threw back her head and laughed. "I'm positively overdressed."

Helen stepped back and looked at her friend with a critical eye. "You look divine. I've noticed more than one Santa looking at you, too. Mingle. You'll find all sorts of interesting people." Helen gave a little wave and faded back into the throng of people.

Alana felt a tap on her shoulder and turned around. A Santa with sparkling, green eyes looked down at her. He held his hand out. "Care to dance?"

Alana nodded her head. "Love to."

He led her out onto the dance floor, and she smiled up at him. She had the easy costume. Each one of the men at the party had a full Santa costume on. Pants, boots, beard, and all. Helen kept the air on so all of her Santas were comfortable. Alana was a little cool. Her green-eyed Santa pressed closer to her and let his hands rest on her ass as they danced.

She was swaying back and forth when she felt eyes on her. Alana lifted her head and quickly scanned the crowd. A Santa at the bar was staring at her. She nodded to him and went back to dancing. When the green-eyed Santa finished the song, another Santa took her by the hand and led her back out to the floor.

This one was bolder, and he let his hands trail down the front of her dress and linger at her breasts. Alana moved closer and pressed her body to him.

She glanced around and saw the Santa at the bar watching her every move. *Voyeur Santa*, she mentally dubbed him. Apparently, he liked to watch. Alana made sure to rub herself against the Santa she danced with. It kept her mind on why she was here. Sex.

Alana was thirsty, and she begged off the next dance to have another drink. She perched on a barstool far away from Voyeur Santa and asked the bartender for another shot. He

poured it and placed it in front of her. His hands brushed up against her breasts, and she all but purred.

She slammed down the second shot and felt the warmth blaze through her body. When Alana slid off the barstool, she decided to do a little exploring. None of the Santas here had sparked her interest yet. Maybe she would find one hiding in a corner somewhere.

Most corners were taken by Santas and elves getting to know one another. Alana turned left and walked straight back into an alcove decorated with candy canes. Her eyes adjusted in the semi-darkness, and she gasped at what she saw.

A blonde and brunette elf were kissing passionately against the wall. The brunette elf had her hand up the blonde's skirt, and Alana felt the moisture between her own legs. When the brunette sank to her knees in front of the blonde, Alana flattened herself up against the wall inside the doorway and watched.

The brunette lifted the blonde's skirt and slid her panties off. The blonde kept her skirt up, and the brunette's tongue came out to lick her pussy.

The blonde elf grabbed the brunette's head and brought it closer to her pussy while the brunette grabbed her ass and buried her face deeply into the other woman's crotch.

Alana's own hand crept up her skirt, and she could feel her wetness seeping through her panties. She stroked her swollen clit through the fabric and watched the brunette pleasure the blonde.

The blonde humped her wet pussy against the brunette and started to shake. When she came, she gave a little cry, and Alana moaned.

The brunette got to her feet and pulled her own panties off. She lifted her top and let her large breasts spill over the front of her shirt. She reclined on the sofa and spread her legs. Alana could see her smooth, pink pussy dripping wet. The brunette stroked herself, and the blonde sank to her knees.

The blonde sucked on the other woman's breasts, and her hands went to the other woman's pussy. She stroked the woman's clit and slid two fingers inside while she sucked on each breast in turn. The blonde sank farther down and spread the brunette's legs until they couldn't go any farther apart.

And then she lowered her mouth. The brunette moved her hips against the woman's mouth and pinched her own nipples. She grabbed the blonde's head and ground her clit against the woman's mouth.

The blonde kept working on the other woman's pussy while her own hand was moving urgently against her own. She slammed three fingers deep and worked them in and out.

Alana watched raptly and knew her own orgasm wasn't far away.

"Do you like that?" a man's voice whispered softly in her ear.

She turned slightly and met the eyes of her Voyeur Santa.

His blue eyes watched the scene in front of them raptly. He moved closer, and she could feel the hard outline of his cock nudging her ass.

"Yes," she admitted.

"That's what I want to do to you." The man's right hand came across Alana's throat and slid down her top to cup her left breast. His left hand curved around her thigh and under her skirt. His breath hissed out when he felt her own hand there.

"Let me," he murmured.

She acquiesced and felt her hand replaced with his. Alana glanced at the two women again and shuddered in pleasure. The brunette pulled at her nipples and arched her back. The blonde moved deeper, and the brunette's eyes widened in sublime pleasure.

Voyeur Santa slid his hand into her panties and stroked her wetness. He never pushed his finger inside of her. He simply made lazy circles around her engorged clit with his thumb. Alana knew when the brunette was going to come. Her body began shuddering, and Alana immediately let herself go.

The man tightened his grip on her breast, and she felt moisture slide out of her and over the man's hand. His harsh breathing in her ear and hard cock against her ass told her he had supreme contro

"Come with me," he demanded.

Alana nodded her head and felt the man's hands leave hers. But only for a minute. When she turned around, he grasped her hand in his and pulled her forward.

She knew where they were going. Each man here had a private room where he could entertain fellow guests. People whizzed by her as she walked willingly to wherever he wanted

her. Her clit throbbed painfully, and she knew it wouldn't take much to send her over the edge again.

Orgasms made her horny. Alana had long ago accepted the fact that sex didn't sate her, it excited her. She was never satisfied with one round of sex. Two or three was more her style. She couldn't wait to see if this Santa could deliver.

The man stopped in front of a door marked "SC 14" and produced a key from his pocket. He unlocked the door, and Alana stepped around him and inside. The door shut with a click behind them, and she shivered in anticipation.

"I want to fuck you."

Alana's breath caught on the whispered admission. The room was almost completely dark. A small sliver of light came from one bulb in the far corner of the ceiling. She could barely make out a large bed in the middle of the room.

She turned to study the man in front of her.

"Tell me," she taunted. "Tell me what you want to do with me."

He stepped closer, and his breath fanned her neck and ear.

"I want to fuck you with my tongue and my cock. I want you to spread your legs for me and show me your pussy. I want to hear you moan and scream when I make you come."

Alana's own breathing was harsh, and she took in his words. She moved backwards and sat on the edge of the bed. Very deliberately, she pulled her panties off. When they were gone, she lay back and spread her legs.

When she was sure the man's eyes were on her, she lifted her skirt and showed him her dripping pussy.

"Show me."

The man fell to his knees and ripped the Santa beard off immediately. He buried his face between her legs and flicked his tongue from the bottom of her pussy to the top of her clit. Alana unlaced the top of her dress and let her breasts spill out the top.

She could just make out the top of the man's head buried between her legs, and shuddered in pleasure. He stroked her clit with his tongue and then flicked it mercilessly. Alana jerked as her orgasm hit, and the man continued his attention. She screamed as her second orgasm washed over her.

The man stood up slowly then. His blue eyes looked at her in satisfaction. Alana lay there and smiled back at him. Her legs were still wide open, and she knew the man could look at her pussy and know the pleasure she had. Her nipples were still tight and tender from her orgasms.

He undid his pants and stepped out of them. Then he moved back into the darkness, and Alana could hear plastic. She knew the man was thinking about safe sex. She smiled and waited.

"I'm not finished with you." The man's husky voice washed over her. "My cock wants to be buried in your tight pussy. I want to feel you come all over me."

Alana's caught her breath at his explicit words. She wanted that too. She wanted him to fuck her mercilessly. The thought of his cock in her excited her all over again.

The man stepped out of the shadows, but she couldn't see his face. "I like seeing you like that. Your pussy wide open, waiting for my cock. Play with your nipples."

Alana brought her hands up and pinched lightly on her nipples. She licked her fingers and brought them down to rub against their hardness.

Her Voyeur Santa stepped closer, and she could see his hard cock in his hand. Alana moaned and arched her back. She wanted him in her.

"Bend your knees."

She immediately moved to obey him. He brushed his hands across her wet pussy, and she tried to move so his fingers would slip inside her.

"What do you want?" He teased her clit by brushing his fingers back and forth against it. His fingers dropped lower and traced her pussy lips. "Tell me."

"Your cock," she breathed. "I want your cock."

"Yes," he hissed.

He thrust his hard cock into her with one swift motion, and Alana felt her body tighten around him. She cried out when he buried himself tightly against her.

"I'm going to make you come again. I'm going to watch your face and see your pleasure. Yes," he murmured. His body moved against hers. He grabbed her thighs and watched as his cock moved in and out of her. His balls slammed against her ass, and she loved it.

Her whimpers and moans fueled his excitement. Alana moved her hand down between them and rubbed her clit. Her Santa moved her hand impatiently. "Let me," he said again.

He bent over her and brought his hand to rub against her swollen clit. His breath fanned her ear, and he whispered words to her.

"Your clit is so hard. I know you want to come again. Did you like it when I ate your pussy? Did it feel good? Did you like watching those women fuck each other? Did you like it?"

Alana screamed in pleasure as she orgasmed. Her Santa let go of his self-control and rammed into her over and over again. His cock strained against her, and she felt him come.

Alana came to consciousness a few minutes later. Her body was still enjoying the aftermath of her sex marathon. Voyeur Santa lay on his back on the bed. Her lips twitched as he snored. He deserved a little sleep. So did she. And she might have to change his name from Voyeur Santa to Hands-on Santa.

She stood on shaky knees and tried to arrange her hair into some semblance of normalcy. In all honesty, it didn't really matter. In a few minutes, she would be on her way home and into bed. It was about all she could handle. Blowing her sexy Santa a kiss, she opened the door and stepped out.

The party was still going, but there were a lot fewer people on the dance floor. Most had retired to private rooms for their own business. And then again, some were busy on the tables. Alana walked by a couple where the woman was atop Santa and riding him like a pony. Her breasts swayed with the rhythm, and Santa held her hips while she fucked him. For once, Alana didn't even feel a twitch of interest.

She'd been taken care of. And then some. Walking slowly, Alana picked up her coat and stepped outside. It was only about four in the morning, but there were cabs lined up to take guests home. She crawled gratefully into a backseat and whispered her address.

The cab driver looked at her knowingly, and she grinned back. She had no doubt she looked like she had her brains fucked out. Her mind played back over the events, and she knew it wouldn't be something she ever forgot. A once in a lifetime happening.

Alana was dropped off on her doorstep, and she tipped the cab driver and slowly walked inside her building. She kicked off her shoes and dangled them on her fingertips. When she reached her door, she opened it and willed herself inside.

She stripped off her clothes on the way to the bed and shoved them deep into her laundry basket. That was a problem for later. Right now, she was tired as hell, and her body needed a break. Alana climbed into bed naked and pulled the sheet up over her. Sleep was immediate.

* * * *

"Wake up, sleepyhead."

Alana blinked slowly and tried to focus her eyes. She yawned hugely and shook her head.

"Come on. You can't be that tired." The voice was cajoling and playful. It was also her husband's.

Alana's eyes flew open, and she looked at her husband in the doorway.

His gray suit jacket was over his arm, and his tie was loosened. His luggage was propped beside him on the floor. Devin was smiling at her, and she smiled back. His light brown hair was tousled, and his blue eyes grinned down into hers.

"Did you miss me?" He stepped closer and tugged on the sheet across Alana's breasts.

She shifted slightly, and the sheet stopped on the top of her nipples. Alana spread her legs under the sheet and smiled up at her husband.

"You're back early."

"Something came up." Devin threw his jacket across his dresser and began unbuttoning his shirt. "What do you have on underneath that sheet?"

Alana made a show of lifting the sheet and peeking underneath it. "Just little ol' me." She lowered the sheet and watched as her husband undressed.

He stripped down to his boxer briefs, and her mouth watered. He was obviously aroused, and she couldn't wait to welcome him home properly.

Devin eased one knee onto the bed and looked at his wife. "What did you do last night? Anything special?"

Alana shrugged. "This and that."

"This and that?" he echoed. He stopped short to look into her eyes.

"I may have went to one of Helen's parties."

"And what did you do?" His voice was low and urgent.

"I watched two women fuck each other. And then I let some strange man fuck me with his tongue and his cock. He made me come over and over again."

Devin leaned forward and licked his wife's lips. "Was he good?"

"Yes," Alana nodded. "But he didn't kiss me."

"He was obviously in a hurry. Would you like me to remedy that?"

"Please."

Devin brought his right hand up and cupped his wife's head. He brought her mouth to his and sucked gently on her lips while his tongue moved inside her mouth to stroke her. Alana shivered in pleasure at the sensation.

When they broke contact, Alana smiled up into her husband's eyes. "Helen's having another one for Valentine's Day." She peeked at him under her lashes. "In case you have a hard time finding me something for Valentine's like you did Christmas."

"What will I have to dress up as this time?" His voice was low and teasing.

"Oh, honey!" Alana laughed and kissed his mouth again. "I'm sure you'll look great with a bow and arrow on."

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RUN FOR YOUR LIFE by Barbara Baldwin

Emily Bradford was running for her life. She had escaped Chicago in the middle of the night with no more than the clothes on her back, even though she didn't think Douglas would really kill her. After all, they had lived together for two years. Surely that counted for something.

Shivering, she huddled deeper into her fur coat. She couldn't remember the last time she had slept. She should have known better than to drive through Colorado in winter, but then again, she hadn't been thinking too clearly. If only she'd thought to change into something warmer; if only her car hadn't slid around that last curve and landed in the ditch. She sighed around another shiver, realizing her biggest regret—if only she hadn't tried to turn Douglas into the authorities.

Emily turned the ignition key, knowing she had to have heat as she tried to outlast the blizzard. She only ran the car for short periods to heat the interior enough to keep from freezing. She had tried to call AAA on her cell phone, but there was no signal here in the mountains. Only afterwards did she realize that Douglas might be able to trace the call. After all, he had bugged the apartment and the office.

She tried the ignition again. Nothing. She let out a cry of dismay when she looked at the fuel gauge. Why hadn't she paid more attention?

Emily started crying. She didn't want to die out here, all alone and cold. She was only twenty-four and had her whole

life ahead of her. Or so she had thought until she discovered the financial firm where she worked was a front for money laundering, and Douglas Lattimer, her boyfriend who had gotten her the job, worked for the mob.

"Damn you!" she screamed into the night. "I will not let you do this to me!" She bundled her coat around her and jerked open the door. The blizzard had stopped, but the snow was still deep. As she trudged through drifts toward a light in the distance, she tried to keep her anger wrapped around her, warming her from the inside.

Soon, it did no good. Exhausted and cold to her very soul, she sank to the ground by a tree. She couldn't keep her eyes open; couldn't focus on moving. She'd just rest a minute, then go on. Her last conscious thought was a wish to wake up somewhere warm and wonderful where the mob couldn't touch her.

* * * *

Even with winter in full force, Tyler Sheridan had been keeping the men at *High Ridge Lumber Company* busy in the sawmill and furniture barn. When spring arrived, they'd be ahead of the game with lumber ready for construction and of course, there were always handcrafted furniture orders. Tonight, however, everything had come to a standstill. The men were in the bunkhouse waiting out the storm, which could last for days.

Tyler looked out the front window as an unusual array of lightning flashed and thunder blew in on the howling wind. Something was wrong. He could feel it in his bones; the

uneasiness making his stomach roll and his head hurt. He bent to bank the fire in the huge fireplace, only to turn back when Blackie began growling at the front door of the cabin. Figuring he wouldn't get any rest until he investigated, he pulled on his heaviest coat, tugged a cap low over his ears, and walked out into the night. Even though the snow had stopped, he grabbed hold of the rope they had tied between the company office, the bunkhouse and the sawmill just to make sure he didn't wander too far off course in the inky blackness. As he carefully made his way across the compound, Blackie bounded ahead of him, undeterred by the drifts and cold.

The flashlight's beam was too small for Tyler to see the lump next to the tree until he practically tripped over it. He kept one hand clenched to the lifeline but in an effort to maintain his balance, dropped the flashlight and was immediately thrown into darkness. Feeling his way, he discovered the fur bundled shape was a person.

Knowing how fast the winter winds could kill, he didn't pause to investigate but picked up the surprisingly light figure and slung it over his shoulder, using his other hand to slide along the lifeline that would lead him back to the office. Stumbling as he kicked off his snowshoes on the porch, he heard a soft moan and knew a quick sense of relief that whoever it was, he was still alive.

"Get back." He pushed Blackie away when the dog stuck her nose close as Tyler laid his bundle on the rug as close to the fire as he dared. He tugged the fur hat off and long auburn hair spilled across his hand.

"Christ!" he exclaimed, dropping back on his haunches as he turned her head toward him. Porcelain skin, a small, turned-up nose and luscious pink lips created the picture of an angel; a very cold, unconscious one. He tore at the damp coat she wore, knowing he had to get her warm if she was to have any chance of surviving.

He undressed her as gently as he could, his body reacting to her loveliness with each piece of clothing he removed. His fingers lingered on the cleft between her breasts as he unhooked her bra; his eyes caressed her flat stomach and long, slender legs.

Another moan brought him out of his stupor. He grabbed the quilt from the sofa and wrapped it around her. She began thrashing from side to side and mumbling incoherently.

Tyler reached for her shoulders as she started to rise because he knew it was an unconscious movement. Her skin was icy, and his brain ran through the survival guide he had read not so long ago.

"Help me, dear God, help me," she cried as she flung her arms around him, burying her cold nose against his neck. Tyler knew only one way he could keep her still and get her warm at the same time. As she continued to cling to him, he struggled out of his own clothes.

* * * *

Emily felt blessed heat surround her on all sides. Her face and hands tingled, but when she touched herself, she knew she was warm. As her hands traveled down her throat and across her shoulders, she also realized she was naked. Still,

she couldn't rouse herself enough to worry because the warmth felt so good. She wiggled deeper beneath the soft quilt that was tucked under her chin and heard a groan from behind her. It wasn't until then that she realized the warmth behind her was coming from a body—a hard, very large, male body.

Dear God, Douglas had found her after all. She swiftly turned, ready to fight him and once again, run for her life. But the arm that circled her waist refused to release her and she found herself pulled against a warm, smooth chest. Her eyes flew open.

Brilliant blue eyes met hers; a generous mouth tilted into a grin.

"Hello," the mouth said, but Emily could only wonder how that mouth might feel on hers. The thought startled her. The man was a stranger, not Douglas at all, but than she should have guessed that with her eyes closed. Douglas was much smaller than this man; much leaner and not as strong. And where this man had dark hair and a piercing stare, Douglas was fair-haired with light brown eyes.

"Where; how?" Questions flew through Emily's mind, but were rapidly being pushed aside by the heat from this man and the instant sexual attraction she felt. His eyes and his gentle hold told her without words she was safe. The hard evidence of his arousal probing her bare stomach indicated he felt the attraction as much as she did.

Was it possible to feel this for a stranger? Emily had always thought she could believe in love at first sight, but after her experience with Douglas, she told herself to be

careful. Her brain might believe her, but her body certainly wanted to explore the idea. Her knee bent, allowing her leg to slide up the outside of his.

"My name's Emily," she whispered softly, her lips not touching him but oh, how she wanted to.

"Tyler," he replied, the sound rumbling from deep in his chest, sending out vibes that caused her to shiver. "Are you cold?" His hand rubbed her back, inadvertently pulling her closer. "Do you need more warmth?"

"Yes," she told him, this time allowing her lips to barely brush the soft skin of his neck. He smelled like the outdoors.

He started to rise; perhaps to put more wood on the fire she could hear crackling behind her. She clutched his arms, holding him in place. His gaze came to rest on hers, the blue of his eyes turned dark with passion.

"Warm me," Emily begged, wanting something from this man, this stranger, that she couldn't define any other way.

* * * *

Tyler might have been as frozen as the snow banks for all that her words stopped him in motion. But as his gaze slid over her where the quilt had fallen away, his body temperature soared. With a groan, he dropped back to her side, scooping her up in his arms and rolling onto his back with her on top. His hand cupped the back of her neck and with little effort, he lowered her head until her lips touched his. Cool and smooth, they opened beneath his questing tongue and within seconds, he was breathing the same air;

tasting her sweetness, and those once chilly lips warmed under his caress.

When he slid his hands over her smooth bottom, she moaned softly, then dipped her knee between his legs and rubbed against him. His erection was hot and hard against her hip and he felt an acute desire to be deep inside her. Only when she ran a cold hand down his chest and circled him did he finally realize that he couldn't take her. Not that he wouldn't, if she stayed here for very long, but that he couldn't do it right now.

He broke the kiss and with gentle pressure, tugged her head back to look into eyes the color of the forest in springtime.

"Emily?"

"Hmm?" Her head dropped to his chest and her hand relaxed against his crotch. He waited another minute, barely breathing, wanting her so bad, he ached. When she didn't move or utter another sound, he gently rolled her over onto the rug. Her eyes were closed, her breathing shallow. She was still cold to the touch, so he tugged the blanket up over both of them and settled in for the night.

He had no idea how this woman came to be at High Ridge, or how she had managed to survive in the bitter cold wind he could hear still howling outside. The reasons were irrelevant. She had ended up in his cabin and in his arms, and he intended to see that she stayed there.

* * * *

Tyler wiped a sweaty arm across his brow. *It shouldn't be so friggin' hot in the middle of December*, he thought, rolling over.

"Stop!" A screech broke through his musings and he abruptly jerked awake. At the same time his fuzzy brain comprehended he held a squirming bundle in his arms, he felt the sting of a slap. His reflex action was to push, only to hear a thud and a soft, feminine "ouch."

"Oh, Christ, I'm sorry." He quickly knelt and rolled Emily back over. Her arm flopped to the side as she lay deadly still. He didn't have to touch her again to realize she was burning up with fever.

He lifted her in his arms and walked through the cabin to his bedroom and then into the bathroom. Trying to hold her steady on his lap while he started the water, he couldn't help but admire her naked beauty.

The minute he put her in the tepid water, she began thrashing, clawing at his bare arms with her red fingernails.

"Shit!" He grabbed both hands and lifted them over her head, only to have her start kicking as she jerked against his hold. Water went everywhere.

"Get away from me!" she hollered.

"Sh, baby. I'm trying to help." He kept his voice low, hoping to break through her delirium.

She whimpered and went limp. "Don't kill me, Douglas. You said you loved me; how can you kill me?" Her head rolled from side to side as she continued to mumble.

Tyler grabbed a rag and began sponging cool water across her hot skin. Over and over, he dribbled water across her

chest and down her stomach, wringing the cloth and wiping her brow and face. He couldn't begin to understand who would want to harm such a beautiful woman or why.

Once she calmed and quit muttering, he continued to soothe her. When the cloth fell away, he used his hand, caressing her breasts, cupping water over her hips and legs, letting his fingers linger ever so briefly when her nipples pebbled under his touch.

With a sigh, he lifted her from the tub and carried her wet into the bedroom where he laid her on his bed. He figured her damp skin would continue to cool her, but he pulled a sheet up lightly over her anyway. She seemed to be resting, and he knew he would have to wait for answers to the hundred or so questions he had. As he glanced down at his unruly body, he figured he would have to wait for more than answers.

* * * *

Emily rolled over and stretched. She loved Sundays. She could sleep late and Douglas would usually make her breakfast in bed, after he had wakened her by...

Douglas!

She sat straight up, glancing wildly around but recognizing nothing. The rough board walls, heavy wood furniture and plaid spread on the bed didn't belong in her apartment in Chicago. Then she remembered—the wild flight from town, the days and nights without sleep until she was exhausted. But the last thing she remembered was the car sliding sideways into a ditch, so how did she end up here?

She could hear noise in the other room and decided it couldn't be Douglas if she was still alive. That didn't mean whoever was rattling around out there was a friend.

She stiffened her spine and her resolve as she swung her feet over the side of the bed and stood up. She had made up her mind and there was no turning back but she knew she had to proceed with caution. Not finding her clothes, she jerked the sheet off the bed and wrapped it around herself. As quietly as she could, she eased her way over to the open door and peeked around the doorframe.

She bit her tongue to keep the gasp from escaping. The most gorgeous man she had ever seen sat at a desk off to the side, his dark head bent over an open book. She could tell he was tall, even seated, and his shoulders were broad under the flannel shirt he wore. Corded muscles bunched and relaxed in his forearms as he wrote. His profile was strong, dark whiskers shadowing his chin and cheeks. She smiled when she saw him stick his tongue out to the side in concentration.

She knew him, yet couldn't place him. Jumbled thoughts rattled around in her brain of hot kisses and gentle hands, yet she swore she would remember making love to this man.

His head came up sharply and he swiveled to face her. Piercing blue eyes captured her gaze before they swept down the length of her. She could feel herself blush.

"I couldn't find my clothes," she said as his hot gaze returned to her face. Self-consciously, she brushed her hair out of her face. "Or a brush."

"The clothes, I'd just as soon you do without," the man said with a sexy grin. "But there's a brush on the dresser."

"I think—" she started, her stomach fluttering deliciously at his wicked comment. He stood and advanced toward her but Emily didn't feel fear. Instead, the fluttering increased and she could feel her nipples peak as an ache began between her legs. That did make her take a step back.

"I won't hurt you." His voice was deep and soft as velvet. "You're safe here." He held a hand out and when she didn't move any further, he lightly caressed her bare shoulder. His hand was large and calloused and caused Emily to think all kinds of irrational thoughts. Like hazy memories of those hands on her skin, his lips on hers. Something about this man drew her and she found herself wondering what it would be like to make love with him.

Still, she hesitated. "I don't even know you. You don't know me."

"You're Emily and I'm Tyler Sheridan." He stood in the same spot, not advancing but certainly not giving her any space. His eyes slowly slid down her body and back up. She curled her toes under the sagging sheet. "I found you in a snowbank last night. Here in the mountains, possession is nine-tenths of the law, so I guess that makes you mine."

Under normal circumstances, Emily would have been affronted by his audacity, but the smile he gave her when he spoke implied something other than physical ownership. And he knew her name, which meant at some point, she had spoken to him, because she knew she had left her purse in the car.

Howling wind caused her to glance at the windows. She remembered the blizzard. That meant Douglas might not be

able to track her. The thought of him sent a shiver up her spine.

"You're cold again. Come closer to the fire." He took her hand and led her over to a huge stone fireplace, the logs crackling brightly and giving off a welcome heat. He sat on the sofa and she turned to sit toward the other end. Unfortunately, her feet got tangled in the sheet and she fell right on top of him.

Tyler wasn't about to let such a great opportunity go to waste. His arms came around her and he lifted his head to kiss her. The minute their lips touched, she surrendered completely, her chest coming to rest on his, her arms circling his neck. He didn't know what it was about her that drew him. From the little she had said, and that was in a cold-induced delirium, she was in trouble. As he came up for breath and began nibbling his way to her ear, he knew he should probably be worried, but the storm would keep any unwanted visitors away from High Ridge for several days.

She gasped as he tugged the sheet down to expose one pink areola. He licked the nipple until it was pebble hard, then gently sucked it into his mouth. Her gasp turned to a moan as she arched her back and exposed more of herself to his questing hands.

"I ... I don't want you to get hurt," she whispered as her slender fingers brushed back his hair and she gently kissed his forehead. "I should go."

"The snow..." He peppered her chest with kisses as he made his way to her other breast. "There's no place to go."

"Oh," she said on a sigh just before he reached under the sheet. "Oh!" Her exclamation grew more intense as he cupped her warmth.

"You're hot," he murmured. "So hot." And then he couldn't form a rational thought as he slid a finger through her wetness.

Normally, Tyler could take sex or leave it. Otherwise, he wouldn't be able to live up in the mountains during the winter when more often than not, he and his men couldn't get to town for weeks on end. And after the debacle with his last girlfriend, he hadn't really been looking for a relationship.

He wasn't now, he reminded himself. He just wanted some hot, consuming sex with the incredibly beautiful woman on top of him. And he wanted it now.

In one swift movement, he stood with her in his arms. The sheet fell away but instead of covering herself self-consciously, she reached up with one hand and began undoing the buttons on his shirt. He practically ran to the bedroom.

When he set her down by the bed, she went after his clothes with both hands. No words were needed for them to understand this was purely a physical attraction. When his pants dropped to his ankles and he stood trying to toe off his boots, she sat on the edge of the bed and slid her hands from his neck slowly down his chest, stopping briefly at his nipples and then moving on. His stomach was hard muscle but he sucked it in anyway. She didn't seem to notice as he glanced down to see her gaze at his penis.

An almost shy smile touched her lips as she circled him with one hand and bent her head forward.

Shit, it had been so long, he felt like he was going to explode and he wasn't even inside her yet. He almost breathed a sigh of relief when she kissed his hip instead, but the heat from her lips had him bent sideways, clawing through the nightstand. *Damn*, he knew he had one somewhere.

She must have heard him rip the packet open, because she tilted her head to look at him. His hands actually shook as he sheathed himself, then he caught her behind the knees and lifted her legs, sliding into her with one stroke.

She fell back on the bed with a moan, her muscles automatically tightening around him as he began to pump. Not slow and easy, either. *Hell no*. He rammed into her, meshing their bodies over and over until she cried out in climax.

Surprisingly, her release caused him to slow down. He barely moved within her, wanting to feel the clutch and release of her muscles; wanting to prolong his own orgasm.

"Lock your legs behind me," he said as he leaned over her. When she did, he released her knees and slid both hands up her ribs to her breasts. She had glorious breasts—high and firm and just the right size. She arched her back as he began to knead them, then rocked her hips against his.

"Oh, yeah," he breathed, then sucked one nipple into his mouth as his rhythm matched hers. It wasn't long before he knew he couldn't hold out. She was just too damn hot.

"More," she whispered, then fucked his ear with her tongue. It was all he could take.

With a shout, he climaxed; the hot, gut-wrenching spasms spiraling outward from his groin until he didn't think he could stand. Amazingly, she came again, the deep pull of her muscles sending multi-climactic shudders throughout his entire body.

* * * *

Emily had never had simultaneous climaxes in her life. As Tyler slid out and crawled up on the bed beside her, she realized what she had been missing. It was awesome, and so thoroughly satisfying, she wondered how soon...

"Can we do that again?" she asked, rolling to her side and running a hand across the broad expanse of his chest.

He gave a hoarse chuckle. "If we do, I'll probably die. Hell, I probably just did and don't know it." He turned his head toward her, his eyes glittering in the soft light from the windows. He cupped a hand behind her head and pulled her to him, kissing her lips softly.

"I think we need to talk first." He nodded toward the window.

She turned to look, realizing it had stopped snowing.

"Oh, God, I've got to go." She jumped up from the bed, her gaze searching for her clothes. She grabbed her trousers only to find them stiff and scratchy; the result of wool getting wet. "Damn." She tried to tug them on anyway, but the fitted dress pants had impossibly shrunk.

"Here, put these on." Tyler tossed a pair of sweatpants in her direction, and although far too large, at least the elastic kept them up. "Better have one of these, too," he added, handing her a sweatshirt from the drawer he had opened. She jerked it on.

She didn't know what to say. How do you tell a man *Thank you very much for the phenomenal sex but I've really gotta run*? She ran her fingers through her hair and twisted it in a self-holding knot as she looked for her boots.

"Even though the snow's stopped, it'll be hours, maybe a day or more, before they get the roads cleared." He had shrugged back into his pants and flannel shirt, although the front hung open as he stood there casually watching her frantically try to collect her things. "That is, if you came by car and didn't really drop out of the sky."

"I'm definitely no angel," she huffed.

"Depends on the definition," he replied with that sexy grin of his. "What happened to your car?"

"I slid into a ditch. I really have no idea where."

"Well then, that's settled. Even if they clear the roads, chances are that will just bury your car deeper."

Emily could only hope her car was buried so deeply, Douglas wouldn't find it until spring. And maybe when he did, he'd figure she froze to death and would quit looking for her. She glanced around the snug cabin. If she had to hide out from Douglas and his henchmen, at least she had found a great place to do it.

She watched Tyler turn and leave the bedroom, his jeans tight across his butt. Emily supposed she should feel guilty

having sex with him when she didn't know him at all, but he had made her feel so wonderful and ... safe. If he asked about her circumstances again, she would have to tell him. One fault she had was that she couldn't lie. That's how Douglas had found out what she had done.

"Talk to me," Tyler said later over a second cup of coffee. He had fed her bacon and eggs, but hadn't asked any questions during the meal.

"It would be better if I don't. The less you know—"

"Honey, I need to know what I'm up against."

She looked at those beautiful blue eyes, his chiseled chin, and those hands that had done such wonderful things to her body. Someone had been watching over her last night in the blizzard and had sent Tyler to save her. Did she have the right to drag him deeper into danger by telling him about Douglas?

Tyler reached a hand across the table to cover hers, which he could feel tremble even as she clenched them together.

"Emily, I told you it was safe here. Even when my crew gets the tractor plows out and open the area around the buildings, nobody can get in without us knowing." He gave her what he hoped was a winning grin. "Besides, what kind of trouble can a beautiful woman like you possibly be in?"

"Have you ever heard of Omerta?" she whispered the word.

"What do *you* know about the code of silence?" He frowned. *He* knew about the mob's oath of silence that guaranteed death to anyone who spoke against them. His

brother had damned near gotten killed because of it while working undercover.

She sighed. "Tyler, you really don't want to know. It would be better if I just left."

"You're not going anywhere, damnit!" He didn't raise his voice, but he knew his words scared her. She tried to draw her hands away, but he gripped them tighter, refusing to release her.

"I thought you said I was safe with you," she said, her lower lip trembling. "We had sex, doesn't that mean any—"

"Don't think one had anything to do with the other," he interrupted swiftly. He wiped a hand over his face. How could he make her understand? "I would keep any stranger safe if she landed on my doorstep. But that doesn't mean I would have sex with her. Something entirely different happened when I held you in my arms. Sparks flew and my body ignited like a forest fire. That's *all the more reason* to keep you safe, not the only one to do so."

The whole time he had been talking, he had kept her hands anchored on the table, but had risen and walked around to where he now stood over her. When she wouldn't meet his gaze, he threaded his hand into her hair and gently tugged, pulling her head back. He looked into eyes filled with tears.

"I don't want you hurt," she whispered, tugging at her hands. This time, he released them and she circled his waist, hugging him close as she buried her face in his stomach. His skin heated instantly as Emily kissed him. He sighed as her lips wandered across his abdomen.

Tyler knew Emily was only trying to distract him, but her lips felt so good that he decided for the moment to let her. He had ways of finding out what the problem was, and if she wouldn't open up to him, he'd just make a call or two. That is, if the lines weren't down from the storm. Figuring that was a good excuse to put off his work, he threaded both hands through her silky hair, enjoying the feel of her lips on his stomach, hoping she would venture lower.

Just as he thought it, her hands drifted down the backs of his thighs, around his knees, and then up the inside of his legs. Her mouth moved just above the waistband of his jeans with hot, moist kisses, but when she got to his belly button, she headed south. He sucked in a breath as she gently bit the bulge in the front of his pants. Nipping down his rigid shaft, she caught just enough skin to make him groan.

As she continued nibbling the tip of him—which for some reason, felt more erotic through his jeans—her hands undid the buttons and then she was sliding his pants down his legs.

The minute he popped free, she had her mouth on him, kissing and licking from tip to base. When he couldn't take anymore, he pulled her up, swiftly taking her place on the chair. He jerked the sweatpants down her legs and she quickly stepped out of them.

"Climb aboard," he invited and was rewarded by a bright smile as Emily straddled his thighs. He gave a sigh and closed his eyes as he felt her heat. When she didn't sheath him, he opened his eyes to find her gaze slowly sliding down his body until it stopped at his cock. She cupped him with one hand and stroked him with the other.

"You are so gorgeous," she whispered and Tyler could feel his face heat, not used to compliments.

Afraid he would burst if she kept stroking him, he tugged her hips, urging her forward. "Oh, yeah!" he rasped as she sank down on him. Keeping his hands on her hips to guide her movements, he slid his thumbs downward, opening her to his touch.

She gasped when he rubbed her clit and immediately began moving faster. Tyler knew she was close as her inner muscles clutched him, but still he wasn't prepared for her effect on him. Within seconds, he was at the edge. He pressed a little harder on her nub and she whimpered, jerking forward as she climaxed, taking him along with her.

It seemed as though he spun in an erotic vortex forever. It wasn't just his cock and groin that felt the clutch and pull of her. His heart hammered, his legs twitched, and his hands trembled. When she collapsed on his chest, it was all he could do to curl his arms around her back, holding her close.

Damn, in less than twenty-four hours, this woman had him bewitched. Even though he knew she could be trouble, nothing mattered except the incredible way she made him feel when he was buried deep inside her. Anything else was minor.

* * * *

Douglas jerked on the extra-large pants and flannel shirt he had stolen out of a trunk in what appeared to be a bunkhouse, shivering when the cold air hit his bare chest.

Longing for his cashmere coat instead of the scratchy wool jacket he had to wear, he cursed again.

Damn bitch, this is all her fault.

If only she'd kept her mouth shut and minded her own business. Now, to prove himself to his employers, he had to give up fucking her and kill her.

She had used cash instead of her credit cards to keep him from tracking her, but she wasn't as smart as she thought. He still had a trace on her cell phone through the GPS chip he had installed only last month, and now he had her pinpointed.

He carefully scrutinized the outbuildings of the lumber camp as he trudged to the cookhouse. Well, located to a point. The GPS had led him to a gigantic snow bank where a little digging had uncovered the tail light of her car. He had carefully mounded snow back over it, hoping she was buried inside. He had decided to remain in the mountains a few days just to make sure, and with another blizzard in the making, he had taken refuge at a lumber camp, pretending to be an out-of-luck worker and the foreman had given him a job in the cookhouse.

He snorted, pulling the wool cap low on his head to cover his distinctive blonde hair. Second-in-command of all racketeering east of the Mississippi, and he was working as a fry cook. *Yeah, the fucking bitch was going to pay for this.*

* * * *

"So there you have it," Emily stopped in the middle of the cabin, turning to face Tyler. She had been pacing the living room the entire time she had talked about this Douglas

Lattimer character. Though listening carefully to her story, Tyler had been more amused by the way she kept pushing the sleeves of his sweatshirt up her slender arms and hiking up the waist of the pants he had lent her. Personally, he'd just as soon have her prance around naked.

"Well, aren't you going to say anything?" Her question brought him out of his daydream, which had been fast progressing to a wet dream.

"That's it?" he asked. "You have records that could bring down the mob on the entire eastern seaboard, and you're worried?"

"It's not funny!" she huffed, wrapping her arms around her midsection. "You can never leave the mob. Unless you're dead," she added in a whisper.

Tyler came to stand in front of her. "Nothing's going to happen. As soon as I can, I'll contact my brother. He's pretty high up in government circles and will know what to do." What Tyler didn't tell her was that his brother, in fact, his entire family, was very well connected. Uncle George was a State Supreme Court Judge and his brother, Harry, was with the FBI. In the meantime, he decided it was time for *him* to distract *her*.

"I hear the plows outside, which means the men are clearing a path around the place. Let's find you some warm clothes and take a walk."

"Outside?" Emily squeaked and Tyler could see fear in her eyes. He reached out and cupped her chin, drawing her gaze to his.

"I told you it was safe."

"It's not that. I just..." She sucked in her trembling bottom lip and all Tyler could think of was kissing her until she trembled all over, but in need, not fear.

He gave in to his own need, covering her mouth with his, his tongue sinking deep to savor her sweetness. She immediately softened beneath him, wrapping her arms around his waist and hugging him tightly. His world tilted wildly as she answered his mating call by sliding her hips against his. Without releasing her mouth, he picked her up and headed for the bedroom. So what if they didn't go for that walk? He could think of plenty of other ways to get exercise.

* * * *

It was afternoon by the time Tyler had Emily bundled up enough to venture outside.

"We can stop at the cookhouse and see if Mic has any leftovers," he said as they stepped out into the bright sunshine. "I usually eat with the men, so there's probably plenty."

"I'm not hungry." Emily let herself feast on the sight of him. She hadn't been able to take her eyes off him when he was naked above her in bed, and even with clothes on, he was a wonder to look at. He wore a bright blue parka, heavy boots, jeans and a pair of wraparound sunglasses. He looked like something out of *Skier Magazine*.

As they trudged down the steps and onto a shoveled path, he tucked her mittened hand into his larger one. He pointed

out the various buildings as they walked and she could hear pride in his voice.

"The mill had to be completely rebuilt after a fire about twenty years ago."

"You would have been too young to run this operation then. How did you come to own it?"

"Family. Nobody else wanted to take over from Grandpa. Winters in the mountains were getting too much for him, so he retired to Florida." He shrugged, like owning an operation of this size was an everyday occurrence. He waved in the direction of the other buildings, both with mounds of snow piled as high as the porch and a narrow path coming away from the steps. "Those are the bunk and cookhouses. Are you sure you don't want something to eat?"

As they paused on the path, an unaccountable fission of fear raced down Emily's spine. She nervously glanced around, sure someone was watching her. The cookhouse looked deserted, but a movement at the corner of the window froze her in her tracks. She looked again, the fogged over windows staring eerily back at her.

"Hey, what's the matter?" Tyler stepped into her line of sight, momentarily blocking the brightness of the sun.

She glanced past him but the shadow was gone. A shiver went through her.

"Emily?"

She had to make herself focus on Tyler's voice.

"Are you all right? We can go back if you're cold."

She shook her head, determined not to let him know she was spooked. After all, he had said she was safe here.

"Sorry. I was just thinking that after being stuck in that snowbank, I would have to agree with your grandfather about winters in the mountains."

Tyler wrapped his arms around her and gave her a quick kiss. "Honey, if you spent the winter in the mountains with me, you'd either have the right clothes to keep warm outside or," he paused dramatically and gave her a scorching look, "you wouldn't need anything to wear at all because I wouldn't let you out of my bed."

She held her hands out, palms up. "Hmm. Clothes or no clothes, how's a girl to choose?"

He swatted her playfully on the butt. "Come on. I want to show you the mill."

Together, they walked toward the biggest building on the complex, their boots crunching on the hard-packed snow. Emily still couldn't shake the feeling of being watched, so she decided to stick very, very close to Tyler.

* * * *

Tyler couldn't get enough of Emily's soft body and giving nature, and for the next two days, they didn't leave his cabin. When he wasn't making love to her in bed, in front of the fireplace, or on the sofa, he took her in the juczzi tub. And it certainly wasn't a one-way street.

Just this morning, he had woken from a very sexy dream to the even more erotic sight of Emily kneeling, her bare butt in the air as she kissed her way down his stomach. He let her have her way with his body for several minutes before he couldn't stand it any longer and let her know he was wide

awake. What followed could only be described as every man's wildest fantasy, and the sweet, musky smell of her lingered on his lips as he sat at his desk trying to concentrate on his books.

"Crap!" He slammed the ledger shut. Balancing the books at the end of the year was the one part of owning *High Ridge* he truly hated.

"I can help you with that, you know." Emily walked over. "Why aren't you computerized anyway?"

"Hell, I have trouble doing it the old-fashioned way, much less knowing the computer programs needed."

She leaned her hips against his desk, facing him. "Oh, I don't know. You seem to have a very good grasp on doing *it* the old-fashioned way." The smile she wore would have a monk stripping, and Tyler was far from monklike.

He grabbed her onto his lap, sliding the rolling chair back far enough so he could prop his feet on the desk. She had no recourse except to fall into him and an instant later, his mouth was on hers and his hand was up the front of her shirt.

"You are insatiable," she gasped when he finally released her from a soul-drugging kiss.

He tweaked her nipple. "You shouldn't offer yourself if you don't want me to take you up on it."

"I offered my services," she replied, then seemed to realize how that sounded and blushed. "I mean my *accounting* services."

Tyler laughed and slid her off his lap as a knock sounded at the front door. He knew it would be Mic, and the man didn't have the manners to wait before entering.

"Hey, boss. Brought you some lunch." His cook came in, carrying a box covered with a towel. "Ma'am." He nodded at Emily and turned into the kitchen.

Tyler had told Mic about Emily because the cook had accosted him in the mill and asked why Tyler didn't like his cooking anymore. That was definitely not the case, because the men at *High Ridge* ate very well with Mic in charge of the kitchen. Tyler had arranged with Mic to bring their meals over to the main office, since he didn't want to explain Emily to his men and she seemed to get spooked every time they ventured outside.

"We need supplies," Mic commented when he returned empty-handed. "That blizzard just about leveled my pantry and condiments. All the men wanted to do was eat." Mic actually was a chef from San Fransisco but his background and language were in direct varience to his looks. He looked like a biker. He was bald and barrel-chested with multiple tattoos up his arms and across his chest and enough earrings, nose, eyebrow and lip piercings to open his own jewelry boutique.

"Get me a list," Tyler said, knowing he would have to make a trip into town.

"Knew you'd say that." Mic grinned at him, pulling a folded paper from his shirt pocket and dropping it on the desk. "I guess tomorrow will have to be soon enough."

Tyler gave him the eye, but Mic just laughed. He had been with the company since his grandpa ran it, and didn't take shit from anybody. That included Tyler, who liked to think he was boss.

"Do you have to go into town?" Emily asked as he sat her at the table so they could eat.

"You don't want to know what hungry men are like," he replied, scooping mashed potatoes onto his plate and covering them with gravy. He forked some fried chicken from the bowl and passed it to Emily. When she didn't immediately take it from him, he looked up to find her eyes swimming in tears.

"Sweetheart, I'll only be gone a day or two." Knowing she would miss him gave him a warm feeling.

"Maybe I'd better go, too," she said. "See if my car's unearthed and head on down the road."

"No!" At her look, he softened his tone. "I like having you around." He hadn't realized just how much until she spoke of leaving. "Besides, I've called my brother. He's on a case right now but he'll be here the day after tomorrow. I had planned to pick him up in Denver."

She was shaking her head, and he knew he would have to tell her the entire truth.

"Harry's with the FBI. He can help you."

* * * *

Later that night, Emily crawled into bed and curled up next to Tyler, who distractedly wrapped an arm around her shoulders as he continued to read a week old newspaper. She knew she was being clingy, but the thought of Tyler not being with her for even a day scared her to death. Mic was the only one at the lumber company she had actually met, but she always felt like she was being watched if they went outside.

"Will Mic bring my meals?" she asked.

Tyler tossed the paper to the floor and rolled to face her. When she wouldn't look at him, he lifted her chin with a finger. "Honey, there's nothing to worry about. Mic will look out for you and I'll be back with Harry before you can miss me." He kissed the tip of her nose.

Emily wanted more. "I miss you already."

"Well, then, let me give you something to remember me by." He took her mouth in a kiss hot enough to melt snow, then spent most of the night giving her a whole lot of memories, the most precious being his soft-spoken "*I love you,*" as he kissed her good-by at dawn.

Emily spent the first day updating Tyler's accounting records, which she had told him she would do. *High Ridge* was a very profitable business, and the custom-made furniture, though a small part of the lumber mill, was showing steady growth.

When Mic showed up with her supper, she asked if he'd heard from Tyler.

"Nope, and probably won't. Cell phones don't work good up here and the land lines are sporadic in the winter."

That didn't make her feel any better. She told herself Tyler was safe and would be home tomorrow. She just wasn't sure her heart believed it.

That night, she was awakened several times when Blackie growled and barked at the door. Tyler had told her to keep the dog inside with her, but now it had her too scared to go investigate. The most she could do was lock the bedroom door and huddle under the covers waiting for morning.

She woke groggy and irritable, feeling only slightly better after her shower.

"If you bark tonight, you're going outside, no matter what." She shook her finger at the dog as she wandered into the kitchen. It wagged its tail and stood expectantly at the door.

Emily let her out and turned to see what Mic had left on the counter for her breakfast. The men started work at dawn so he said he'd leave her breakfast in the kitchen so he wouldn't disturb her. She frowned as she buttered a muffin, wondering why the dog hadn't barked at Mic.

Shortly before ten, she looked up from the ledger when someone knocked at the door. It was too early for lunch. When the knock sounded again, she decided it had to be someone other than Mic and got up to answer it.

She tugged Tyler's flannel shirt closer around her as she walked to the door, breathing in his scent and smiling when she thought of him returning today. She opened the door without thinking.

"Hello, *bitch*."

With her mind on Tyler, Emily's reflexes were too slow to get the door shut before Douglas barged in. She backed against the wall as he waved a large kitchen knife in her face.

"How did you find me?" She asked the question but knew the answer was irrelevant. Douglas had murder in his eyes. For one brief second, she wished Tyler was there, then just as quickly, was glad he was gone. At least he would be safe.

"Where is it?" he growled, grabbing her by the throat and squeezing. All she could do was shake her head.

"If you give me what I want, I'll kill you fast." He slid the knife down her cheek. "I've been in this godforsaken hellhole for over a week working my ass off while you..." he looked around the cabin, "you've been all cozy and well-fed while you fuck the boss."

Douglas shook her, slamming her head against the wall. Emily saw black at the edge of her vision and willed herself not to faint. The only hope she had was to stay conscious and fight him.

She licked dry lips before she spoke. "I have no desire to return to Chicago, Douglas. Your secret is safe with me if you just leave."

His eyes narrowed and for a minute, Emily thought he might take that deal, but then he laughed. "Yeah, right. I should go merrily on my way when you have business records that can implicate me in numerous crimes." He jerked her forward and pushed her toward the door. "Let's go. I've got plenty of ways to get you to talk once we get back to civilization."

* * * *

Tyler walked out of the barn with his brother just as the snow began in earnest. He turned to enter the cookhouse and tell Mic to have the guys unload his supplies when a movement by his cabin caused his heart to constrict. Emily was being dragged across the yard by a stranger Tyler could only assume was Douglas.

"Hey!" he shouted and took off at a run but the snow became so intense, he quickly lost sight of them.

"He's got Emily!" he shouted over his shoulder to his brother. "Round up the men!"

He pulled his scarf up over his mouth and nose as he continued to move cautiously forward. He could hear Blackie bark and he moved toward the sound, hoping the dog was following Emily's scent.

Even without much visibility, Tyler had an idea of their direction and his heart pounded. He couldn't let them reach the river. Throwing caution to the wind, he began to run. He had just reached the clearing, when the snow stopped and he saw Emily stumble. Adrenalin shot him forward and he tackled Douglas before he could jerk her back to her feet. Blinded by passion and fear for Emily, he swung his fists with all his might. The man stumbled backward and then tumbled out of sight.

"Where'd he go?" Harry had caught up with them and had his cuffs out.

Tyler jerked off his coat and wrapped it around Emily. When his brother started forward, he grabbed his arm, pulling him backward along with Emily.

"It's too late," Tyler said.

"What?"

He nodded his head toward where Douglas had disappeared. "Listen."

The snow where they had just been began to cave in on itself, revealing a rapidly flowing river. Water tumbled over rocks and cut grooves into the snow still packed along the bank.

"His body weight caused the collapse. If the fall didn't kill him on the rocks, the water temperatures will."

He didn't care. All he cared about circled his neck when he picked her up and kissed his cheek as he carried her back to the cabin.

* * * *

Tyler put Emily to bed and she immediately fell asleep, although she thought he had probably given her a sleeping pill in the water he made her drink. She woke around supper time and followed the voices to the living room.

"It's all taken care of," Tyler's brother said just as she came into the room. Both men stood when they saw her and Tyler put out his hand. She clutched it as they sat on the couch.

"How are you going to protect Emily?" Tyler asked. She knew even with Douglas dead, she wasn't safe.

"We put out the story that their car went out of control and ended up in the river. Lattimer's body was found and will be shipped back to his family." He looked at her with a sheepish expression. "Since Emily has no family, her remains were cremated."

Emily gasped. Tyler put an arm around her shoulders and pulled her close. "Way to go, idiot," he growled at his brother.

Harry shrugged. "Sorry, but it had to be said. Emily?"

She knew what he wanted. She reached in her pocket and pulled out a key. "It's to a locker at the bus terminal in Chicago."

"People watch too much TV." Harry shook his head, snorting. "We'll have to get you a new name and identity and relocate you."

Emily nodded. "I always liked my middle name—Nichole," she offered.

"How about Sheridan for a last name?" Tyler spoke softly, giving her a gentle kiss on the forehead.

"But that's your name," Emily protested, and then her heart stopped. Did he mean...

"Yeah," he replied. "Want to share it?"

When Emily had been lost in the blizzard, she had wished to be somewhere warm and wonderful. Now, as she gave Tyler her answer with a kiss, she couldn't think of anywhere more perfectly wonderful than being wrapped in his arms.

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THAWING WINTER by Jenna Howard

Through the haze of his cigarette smoke, Lucas watched Winter Drummond. It was a pleasant way to pass the time. She stood outside her family restaurant *Seasonal Changes*, freezing off her fine ass. Her father had pissed away everything good and decent about the place and the building had become an eyesore with years of neglect. Looking at Winter made up for his everyday crappy view.

"Wow, nice," his cousin and partner in *Bad Boyz Motors* drawled.

Lucas didn't respond to the understatement. Why reiterate the obvious? She was. His gaze returned to Winter who had drawn him outside to *enjoy* a cigarette in minus fucking twenty degree weather when she had arrived. She had returned to Henderson a few days ago and Lucas always knew when Winter was around. He went hard as if she were magnetic north to his cock. Ever since he had discovered sex and that the girl he had stolen the toque from in elementary school was a woman, he had wanted her.

God, he shouldn't want to fuck her this bad. She was Winter Drummond, good girl. He was Lucas Durst, bad ass. Then again—he never had been the smartest Durst out there.

"It's fucking freezing out here," Mitch said.

Again, Lucas didn't respond. It was fucking freezing but his rule was no smoking inside the garage. Last thing he needed to do was blow something up.

He lifted the cigarette back up, inhaled a harsh lungful of heaven and watched Winter freeze her delectable ass off.

* * * *

He was watching her. Winter felt the penetrating look from across Lewis Street. Fighting the urge to tug up the hood of her jacket so she was hidden more, she stared at the abandoned restaurant.

Her skin prickled like in high school when Lucas sat behind her. He had moved from tugging on her braids in elementary school to watching her with intense eyes as if she were a mystery meant to be solved.

The need to know if he was still there was too good to pass up. She peeked over her shoulder to find him leaning against the graffiti front building across the street. Once his black hair had been long, now it was clipped nearly to the scalp. If possible, he looked more menacing. Even from her spot on the sidewalk, she saw the black of his piercing eyes.

He flicked the cigarette to the street, then straightened. He didn't walk away. He prowled, like a lethal jungle cat stalking prey. The door painted to match the graffiti swooshed shut behind him and once more, the street was safe.

She gazed at the dilapidated building that had once been *Seasonal Changes*. The years of abandonment hadn't been kind. The restaurant had survived all kinds of trials but not Sam Drummond taking control. Her father wasn't a businessman and within a year of him running the restaurant, it had gone under. The pressure had become too much when Winter had been twenty and her father had turned his

frustration to drink. Once *Seasonal Changes* had closed, Winter became focused on one goal: to reopen the restaurant.

Her sisters, however, had a different plan. Not that she had shared her idea with them yet. If ever. Sometimes, dreams just weren't meant to happen.

They wanted to sell the building.

When she looked at the building, she didn't see the broken sign, the boarded-over windows, the weeds growing in the cracks of the parking lot. She saw Grams running the restaurant and the family, in her part dictator/part loving woman manner. She saw Gramps reigning over the kitchen, threatening anyone who dared come into his territory. She saw her father sober, her mother happy.

"Well?" Summer, the second in line after Winter, stuffed her hands into her ski jacket, clearly the leader in this mission.

Before Winter answered, a flashy red sports car swerved into the parking lot. An equally flashy brunette peeled herself out of the low-slung car, flicked her hair over her shoulder and released a smile. Winter trusted neither the woman, nor the smile.

"Winter!" Eloise Bateman shouted with an enthusiasm she had never shown in high school. She threw her arms around Winter, releasing a noxious cloud of perfume.

Her nose tickled from the cloying scent and Winter eased away. "Eloise."

"You look great, Winter. Great." She slurred the word as if Winter had been a disaster before. The other woman was a

viper. Within her was the most toxic venom on the planet and when she sank her fangs into a person, they were as good as dead. The poison of rich bitch.

"It's a great location," Eloise was saying, her snakelike eyes slithering over the building like she already owned it. "This place should be condemned but the location is prime. Shall we make the proposal a reality?" She whipped out a thick pile of papers.

The annoying click of a pen had her looking at her sisters. "No," Winter said softly. Everyone froze at her response. Her sisters hadn't included her in the decision making process and that hurt.

"Oh come on, Win, what the hell are we going to do with it? It's dead." Summer glared at the building as if it was to blame for all her problems. "The past is gone. Let it go. Sign the damn papers, take the money and run. I am."

"You expect me to make a decision like this in a heartbeat?" Winter had never made a rash decision in her life. She wasn't about to start at thirty-two. She took the contract from Eloise. "I'll read this over and consider it."

"God." Summer sighed and threw her hands up. "Trust you to come along and think things through. Don't fuck this up for me, Winter." Her sister spun around and stormed off to an expensive looking black car. Within seconds, she was gone, the rear of the vehicle fishtailing on the icy road.

"This offer won't be available forever, Winnie," Eloise said, reminding Winter of every reason why she hated being called Winnie. "I wouldn't wait too long."

"I guess I don't need the money that quickly. You work on commission. Right?" Eloise's eyes widened at her words. *Yeah, surprise.* Winnie Drummond had grown up and didn't have to take shit any more.

Eloise reached into a shiny leather purse and snapped a business card out between two fingers. "My card. Call me when you're serious."

Winter and her remaining sisters watched Eloise slither away.

"So," she said, looking at her two youngest sisters. "What kind of trouble is Summer in?"

"Not so much trouble," Autumn said in a soft voice. She ignored Spring when the youngest smacked her arm. "This is Summer, Win. I don't think she wants any physical ties to Henderson anymore." They fell silent, staring at each other. Summer had been unhappy for a long time and none of them knew how to help her. Her sister kept her secrets close to her heart. "Excluding Mom and Dad. Not that she ever visits here, anyway." All three looked at the garage across the street where Mitch Durst worked. The relationship between Mitch and Summer had been very passionate and when their spontaneous marriage had died, Summer had walked away from the small town without looking back. Now she wanted to sell? Winter stubbed the toe of her winter boot along the snow covered parking lot. Did Summer seriously believe that selling the restaurant would make the pain lessen? Knowing her sister, that was exactly her thought process. Summer, Winter realized, wasn't going to want to stay and reopen the restaurant. Especially when it was across the street from

where Mitch worked. Winter felt her dreams begin to crumble before she voiced them.

* * * *

A light was still on across the street.

Lucas studied the glow emanating from the restaurant. He didn't need to look at the VW Beetle in the parking lot to know that it was Winter. He didn't like her in the restaurant at this hour. While Henderson wasn't a rough town, it wasn't Pollyanna nice either. He was going to have to play hero.

Shit.

He hunted for a jacket thick enough to keep the cold out. The streets would be crap by tomorrow. Not that he was complaining. Snow made people stupid. Stupid people drove. Cars got wrecked. *Bad Boyz* made money. It was a vicious cycle that always made him grin.

Damn, it was cold. The wind tried to freeze his insides via any orifice.

The restaurant door opened easily for him.

Inside wasn't any warmer than outside. Tip: invest in a heater. That ass was too fine to get frostbite. She sat on the floor, legs bent and arms wrapped around her knees. Her dark brown hair hung in a curtain around her face, baring her creamy neck. A lot of hours had been spent staring at that neck and he knew every intimate inch of it.

"You know, anyone can walk in."

Her scream echoed around the empty restaurant. Her head snapped up as she looked up at him. Rich dark hair flared

before settling back into place. Parted lips dared him to devour her mouth. "You scared me to death!"

"Didn't anyone teach you to lock up?"

She sniffed indignantly, her attention focused on the pile of papers the she-bitch had been waving around. Lucas crouched down to see what was so important. Winter had a list of pros and cons on selling *Seasonal*. The list wasn't very interesting. Boring. Analytical. Plucking the pen from the floor, he added his own suggestion. She snatched the paper back and read his idea. Her cheeks flamed bright pink and her mouth parted in surprise. Her eyes, a grey-blue that bled to a darker shade at the edge, snapped up and she gawked at him. "Lucas!"

"What?" He tried to look innocent. It had been a long time since he had been anything close to innocent.

"You want to do ... do ... do that?"

He grinned. His lashes lowered over his eyes at the thought of Winter stripped raw, his mouth feasting on her pussy. Blood and need pooled in his cock. "Oh yeah," he drawled and stood up. "Get your stuff."

Her jaw dropped. She gazed up at him, a dazed look in her eyes. She probably didn't get a lot of offers like his. Too bad. Her pink tongue darted out to wet her lips. "Now?"

He choked on his tongue. *Hell fuckin' yeah ... now.* With the tip of his finger, he caressed her lips. They were as soft as he'd imagined. "Any time, Win. Any time. Go home, Winter. Get a heater. Lock up next time, or that," he pointed at the list, "will become a reality." He had to get out before he

talked her into putting that pretty little mouth on his cock.
One proposition was enough. For now.

* * * *

While sipping her third cup of coffee the next morning, Winter flipped to the paper she had stuffed under the others. Yep. There it was. In the sloppiest handwriting she had ever seen, were the words '*Your pussy, my mouth.*'

The statement was bold and daring, just like the man. That one sentence had invaded her thoughts and dreams last night, wreaking havoc. Her body, however, wasn't ignoring those four little words anymore today than it had last night. Against the thick turtleneck sweater, her nipples tingled and ached. And, damn it, she was getting wet. Again.

Her libido had been dead a long time, mostly because she had been so focused on her career at *Wesley Design* where she was the office manager and then her dream of reopening *Seasonal Changes*. She didn't need Lucas shaking her up. She liked her life neat and orderly. Lucas was anything but neat and orderly. He was his own version of chaos. Chewing on the sleeve of her sweater, she admitted to herself, that in high school, she'd had a crush on Lucas. How could she not? He was the baddest of the bad. Black hair, black eyes, tattoo, and attitude. Only she hadn't needed to dance by the fire to know she'd get burned.

She didn't know what to do with the nice guys she went on dates with. How the hell would she handle Lucas Durst? The answer was painfully simple: no one handled Lucas Durst.

She traced her mouth like he had. The skin tingled, recalling the sensation of his touch. Hell, he only had to look at her and she erupted into tingles. Flipping the papers up, she stared at his words. *Your pussy, my mouth.* "My God," she whispered. The very thought caused her temperature to spike. Heater? Who needed a heater with him around? She wondered what he'd do if she showed up at his place to take him up on the offer. Snorting, she wondered what she'd do.

Summer sauntered into the kitchen. Her sister poured herself a large mug of coffee, braced one hand on the counter and drank the liquid like it was water. "Why are you doing this, Win?"

The question caught her by surprise. "Doing what?"

"This." Summer walked over and tapped the papers. "It would be better if we torched the building, then sold the land to the highest bidder. At least this way, we make a little money. Why are you being so fucking difficult? Sign the papers so we can kiss this bumfuck town good-bye. Everything has a season and *Seasonal* is past its due date. Why is this important to you?"

Winter thought of Grams and how she had been the family glue. After she died, everything had changed. Winter didn't handle change well. She missed the way things used to be. She missed her family. All of them were a little lost. Spring's ex-husband had ruined her financial career when he'd framed her for embezzlement. Autumn's café had gone under when a large chain had opened a franchise close to her location. Their mother was married to a drunk. Summer was filled with so much pain, that just thinking about it made Winter ache. And

Winter ... she wanted her own loneliness to go away. Yes, they were all a little lost. Maybe *Seasonal Changes* would give them a purpose, a dream. A second chance at happiness. "I don't know," she lied and finished her coffee. "I'm going to the restaurant."

* * * *

There was only one thing to do when she was feeling pitifully sorry for herself. Winter stared at her highball, her first, while the *Watering Hole* house band slaughtered a Bon Jovi song. *If you can't sing, don't destroy good music.*

How could she convince any of them that the restaurant was a good idea, when she wasn't sure herself? She knew the percentage of failed restaurants. She knew having Summer stay in Henderson would be impossible. She knew she could never run the restaurant like Grams had. She knew all this and yet ... she dreamed.

Stirring her drink, she sighed with relief when the band finished the song. Hopefully, they'd take a break. Forever. She winced when they began to play again. *Maybe not.*

Reaching into her bag, she pulled out the wad of papers and set them on the table. Staring at them, she sighed. Dreams were just that, she told herself. It was one thing to have a dream, it was another to actually follow through with it. She had never been very good with risks. She had always considered every side to a decision, worrying the details to the bone. There was a plan in her head that she had worked on for years, but ... it was based on a dream. She didn't deal well with things that weren't tangible.

"If you sign that, I'm going to kill you."

She looked up at the gravelly voiced threat, the mere sound of his voice caused her skin to prickle. Lucas pulled out the chair beside her and sat down. "Why?"

"Because Eloise is a bitch and I have zero respect for anyone who does business with her."

"You liked her enough in high school," she muttered under her breath and focused on sipping her sweet drink.

He paused in the middle of lighting his cigarette. He touched the edge to flame and inhaled slowly before exhaling a stream of smoke to the ceiling. He sniffed while leaning sideways, putting his lighter away. Resting his elbows on the table, he watched her with his impenetrable gaze. The same look had disturbed her years ago. "I don't like every girl I fuck." He flicked ashes onto the contract and Winter hastily brushed them aside, leaving grey smears on the white paper. She fought the urge to lick her finger to make the paper neat once more, carefully blotting away the mess. And she wanted to take a chance on a restaurant? Who was she kidding?

"Uh-huh." Then he must have hated his way through high school.

"And I don't fuck every girl I like."

The comment surprised her and she turned to look at him. Bracing his foot on the bottom of her chair, he leaned toward her. Her heart pounded fast and hard in her chest as those bottomless eyes stripped her raw. Words like raw made her think of nudity. Thoughts of naked brought to mind *your pussy, my mouth*. And that started the whole internal chain reaction once again. The man was lethal.

Winter met Lucas' gaze. "Are you trying to seduce me?"

He traced the ribbing of her shirt, his finger dipping between her breasts. She felt his breath on her ear before his tongue flicked her earlobe. A flood of heat moistened her pussy. "Win, I've already seduced you," he whispered in her ear. He stretched out his arm, stubbing the cigarette out in the black ashtray.

Winter lost her breath when he palmed her breast, his thumb feathering back and forth over her nipple. His tongue traced her ear and an ache filled her. Caressing her neck, he cupped her cheek and turned her head. His mouth covered hers, the kiss destroying her. Kiss was too tame a word. He mated with her mouth, his tongue stroking in primal thrusts.

Clutching his shoulders, she returned the kiss. This wasn't her, she thought as he changed the angle of his head, deepening the kiss into a mating ritual. She didn't devour men's mouths. Her pussy didn't weep from a kiss. Maybe she was drunk.

Yeah, she'd blame the drink she barely touched.

Her womb clenched when his hand once more covered her breast. He lightly pinched her swollen nipple and a low sound came from her. Her skin flashed hot, a wave of cream dampening her panties. The bad band and conversations around them disappeared. All she heard was the thundering of her heart.

He lifted her onto his lap and she turned, straddling him. Against her pussy, she felt the hard heat of his erection and she rocked over it, imagining it sliding deep inside her.

Wrapping her arms around his neck, she pressed her aching breasts against his chest.

He tasted of beer, tobacco and man. Potent. A hand flattened between her shoulder blades, pressing her closer. Never in her wildest dreams had she ever imagined kissing Lucas Durst. Not like this.

A loud squawk of microphone feedback was a vicious jab of reality. Winter pulled away and stared at Lucas. Stunned. Horrified. Winter Drummond didn't behave like this. Ever. Period. His eyes narrowed as if reading her thoughts. Lucas appeared to have strange superpowers that allowed him to see deep inside her.

"Win," he said in a low voice, a warning. Of what, she didn't know.

Men didn't kiss her in bars. She didn't nearly fuck in a bar. She was Winter Drummond. The calm, cool one. This was not her. Grabbing her coat and bag that dangled on the back of her abandoned chair, she climbed off his lap and fled.

The cold air was a vicious slap of common sense, robbing her of every warm, flushed feeling created by his touch. The bitter cold wind smashed through her thin shirt leaving an icy burn against her skin. When she failed to get her jacket on, she discovered her hat stuffed into the sleeve. With shaking hands, she jammed the cap on, shrugged on her jacket, then fumbled for her car keys trapped in her pocket.

Snow trickled down and she tilted her head back. Cold air kissed her flushed face. She ached to return to Lucas, to his mouth, to his promise.

"Running away?"

Gasping, she clutched the front of her jacket without looking away from the parking lot.

"I'll take that as a yes," the deep voice behind her said. "Now, I guess I should ask: Who are you running from? Me? Or yourself?"

Both. His voice made her ache. She was running from both of them. This wasn't her world.

"Coward."

No.

Maybe.

A hand wrapped around her arm and he spun her around so they faced each other. "I have to go. It's late."

"Not yet," he said, hauling her against him. He devoured her mouth.

Oh God. How was she supposed to say no when he kissed her like that? A hand cupped her ass and pulled her against him. She clutched his jacket as he warmed her lips, heated her blood. Heat surged through her. He yanked her toque off and fisted his hand in her hair. His tongue ravished her mouth, marking her as his with each thrust.

Grabbing her hand, he pulled her around the corner of the building away from prying eyes before his mouth covered hers again. His hand shifted, gliding down her front. She felt the bite of cold air against her abdomen as he tugged her fly down. His fingers didn't hesitate, sliding under her panties. Winter cried out when he brushed her clit slick with her arousal. Clutching the back of his head, she returned the bold strokes of his tongue, her leg sliding up to his hip to grant him better access to her pussy.

"That's it, baby, open for me," he growled, before burying a finger in her. She jerked, crying out when he began to pump his finger hard into her. "Ah, beautiful. You feel so good."

She wanted more. Needed more. An ache settled deep in her womb. "Lucas." Her skin felt hot and itchy, even where the cold air swept over her aroused flesh. "Lucas."

"I know, baby. Come for me, Win. Come." His thumb flicked and pressed on her clit until she cried out. The orgasm stole her breath and stopped her heart. This was beyond her world. "Again."

His finger thrust harder, faster. Deeper. Moaning, she surged against him. His strokes shortened and her womb contracted. His mouth covered hers when she whimpered. He flicked her clit twice and she came, screaming his name.

"Yes," he rasped out.

What the hell was that? Her head fell back and she gasped for air. "Let me go."

"No." He met her gaze and shook his head. "No."

"Let me go." Panic began to pulse within her. "Please. Let me go." He frowned as she pushed at his shoulders, his face blurring from tears. She had to go. Now. Slowly, he pulled out of her. She whimpered at the tugging in her sex, at the loss of his touch. Clutching the front of her jeans together, she fled. The hollow feeling growing in her made her yearn to return to him.

Go back, a voice whispered in her head. *Go back to him.* She jumped into her car, slammed the door and locked it for

good measure. "This isn't me," she whispered, wiping her eyes. It couldn't be.

* * * *

He fucked up. He'd known Winter a long time. In kindergarten, she had organized her crayons in the same order of a rainbow, for fuck sake. The woman liked order. He'd pounced too soon. Now he had damage to repair. Fuck. Slapping his hands together to warm them, he stared at the Drummond's two-story house. Winter was thinking shit through and he had the contract in his pocket. He also had her hat. Petty hostage tools, but desperate men called for desperate measures.

He hated this fucking time of year. Freezing his balls off to see a chick. "Dumb fuck. You're thirty-two, Durst. And you're the dumbest fuck I know."

The front door opened.

He straightened from his slouched position against her car. At least she wasn't hauling a suitcase behind her. He'd hate to have to wrestle it from her to hold as another negotiating tool. There was a fine line between a desperate man and insensitive bastard. He figured his line was getting thinner and thinner.

She looked up and her eyes went wide at the sight of him.

"I want to show you something."

"Go away."

"I'll give you your hat back." He whipped out negotiating tool one and swung it back and forth. The pale blue matched her jacket and her eyes. The red toque she wore emphasized

the red in her eyes. Damn it. She'd cried. The line was beginning to fray beneath him. He'd made her cry a few times when they were kids. Now, there were no excuses.

"Give it to me."

"Come on. I won't bite." He headed toward his pickup. "Unless you ask prettily." She huffed loudly in irritation. Snow crunched beneath her boots as she stomped toward him. His shoulders relaxed.

"This better be good."

"Oh, it's good." He opened the door and waited until she climbed up before reaching up and yanking off the hat. Cupping her cheek, his thumb caressed the soft flesh under her eye. "Shit. Don't cry over me, Win."

She sniffed haughtily. "I didn't."

"Yeah," he snorted. "Right." He slammed the door and was stunned when the oh-so-sensible Winter lifted up her hand, giving him the bird. Sassy.

Sexy.

He jogged around the front of his pickup, then opened his door. At least she hadn't locked him out.

She held out her hand. "My hats." He tossed the blue one to her and the other onto the road. "Hey!"

He shrugged as he drove away from her parents' house. He didn't want to see the hat that reminded him of her red eyes. Red eyes he had caused. Oh yeah, he was a bastard. "Coffee?"

She glared at the two cups in the holder. "Oh, you think you know me so well."

"I sure as hell didn't know you were snarky in the morning. How uncivilized of you."

"Fuck you."

He whistled but decided not to push his luck. The silence was broken by her soft blows of air into the paper cup.

"Fine. I give up. Where are we going?"

He pulled into a parking lot and threw the car into park. "Nirvana," he drawled, leaning back at the sight of the most ridiculous sight in a small town. A mall.

He grabbed his coffee and climbed out, leaving the engine running and not bothering to lock the door. It was Henderson. Who the hell would dare steal a Durst vehicle? The passenger door slammed shut. "Welcome to small town death row." He pushed the mall door open, then followed her inside. Not even the temperature warmed him. This place left him cold.

"Why is there a mall? We have like three thousand people."

"Ah, but we're a thriving metropolis. 'If you build it, they will come' kind of shit. Remember old man Gentry?"

"Nice guy. Good pies."

He pointed at a storefront with *Gina's Patisserie* in gilded letters scripted on the glass. "Shut him down in two months. He moved to Victoria to live with his son."

"Gina?"

"Mmm. Gina Gerrison. You remember her, right? One of the bitch squad. Check out the names of the larger stores, Win. See the pattern?" This place was the shrine to the bitch squad. Everyone who had a big piece of cake in here was a close, personal friend to the she-bitch. Winter dropped onto a

bench and stared at a window filled with elegant dresses. He sat down on the edge of the trash bin, his boots resting by her hip. "If she can't buy you, she flattens you."

"Eloise?"

Grunting, he dropped his empty cup behind him. "She is systematically destroying my town. Look around, Win. Where do you think she got the money to pay for that restaurant she's going to bulldoze?"

"What do you mean?"

Resting his elbow on his knee, he pointed behind her. She turned and saw the closed door for *Everett's*. The dude had been a pussy in high school, marrying Eloise hadn't given him balls. The restaurant was tanking in a huge financial way because Everett knew as much about cooking as he did about marriage. Cock and all. Even though *Seasonal* was closed, people still talked about the old days, when Winter's grandfather cooked the best damn food in their corner of the province. Eloise didn't like others succeeding, even in past glories. To bulldoze *Seasonal* would be her way of erasing memories that wouldn't be a constant reminder of her hubby's failings. He reached into his jacket and threw the contract beside Winter's hip.

"Think about it. This place reeks. I'll be in the truck." He left her to sit and think shit through.

* * * *

Placing the contract on the table, Winter stared at her mother and sisters. Was she making the right choice? Was she ready to put her dream out there?

"I made a decision," she announced. Her mother grew still as if holding her breath. Autumn stopped cooking and Spring was silent. The glow of anticipation in Summer's eyes made her hate what she was about to do. "I'm not going to sign."

She waited until the din died down before she continued. "I want to reopen *Seasonal*." The uproar was no surprise. She lifted her hand like Grams used to, and surprisingly, everyone went quiet. "Grams taught us all. We each have our strengths. Spring is brilliant with numbers." Her youngest sister snorted. "You are. He was a fuckhead. He screwed your career, Spring, not your mind. Autumn is a genius in the kitchen. Summer, you're good with people. And Mom, she has the most experience out of all of us. She grew up in *Seasonal* during its peak years. We all contribute. We're smart women. I know we can do this. Think it through. Consider your options." *They could do this*, she thought, watching her sisters leave the kitchen until only she and her mother remained.

Mom sighed and began to tidy up her kitchen. "I don't know if you're a lunatic or genius, Winter. You're asking us to take a giant risk without a sure bet of success." Like Winter had with her argument, she halted Winter's rebuttal with a raised hand. "However, I do know that in this moment, you never reminded me of Mom so much. Let them think about this like you obviously have. The idea clearly isn't new to you." Winter caught the use of them in the sentence. Her mother smiled slowly, her eyes lighting up as they hadn't in years. "I'm in."

* * * *

Winter joined her sisters in front of the restaurant that evening. They stood in silence, staring at a building way past its prime.

"If we do this," Spring said quietly, "we do this right. Either all of us agree on everything or nothing."

Winter nodded, glancing at Summer. "You sure?"

Her sister snorted. "Hell no. You screw this up, Winter, I'm running over you with my car."

"About your car, Summer," Spring said, looking over her shoulder to said vehicle. "What do you think you can get for it?"

"Uh-uh, I'm not selling my car. Screw you."

Winter pressed her mouth into the collar of her jacket to hide her smile. The back of her neck prickled and she knew Lucas watched her. "We can do this," she said.

"I can burp the alphabet too," Summer said, slapping her hands together, "but it ain't on my resume." She sighed. "Okay. Why not? What else do I have going for me?"

"I'm in," Autumn said in her soft voice.

Winter glanced at Spring, who nodded slowly. "I love you guys," Winter said softly, staring at the sign dangling above the door. "I really do."

"Shit. Winter's turned emotional. We're screwed now." Summer pushed her, then sighed. "This is it. You guys ready for this?"

Winter nodded as she looked over her shoulder to see Lucas leaning against the building like he had the other day. Yeah. She was finally ready for this. If she could take a risk

with *Seasonal*, why couldn't she with the rest of her life? She walked away while her sisters began to make plans.

Straightening, Lucas flicked his cigarette onto the road when she drew close. "We're going to reopen."

"Yep." His gaze searched her face.

"That doesn't surprise you?" His mouth slowly curled up at her question. "You know me that well?"

His thumb caressed her lower lip. "I'm getting there."

His touch left her breathless. "Me too," she sighed. "I don't know what I'm doing, Lucas."

"I do."

"What?"

"Taking a chance. You ready?" His eyes narrowed and she slowly nodded. "What the fuck took you so long?" His hand slid up her cheek and knocked her hat to the sidewalk. He pulled her close, his mouth slanting over hers.

* * * *

He wasn't going to give her time to think. When Winter thought, she became a rational human being. He didn't want her rational. He wanted her wild. Her cool lips warmed against his while her mouth parted, letting him in. She was going to stay and take a chance on the restaurant.

He wanted her to take one on him—on them.

Her hands covered his cheeks, her tongue dancing with his, seducing him. He shifted, trapping her between his body and the brick façade of his shop. One of those low, sexy sounds came from her as their tongues and lips mated. He'd itched to kiss her since high school when one day, he had

looked at her and no longer saw the girl he had teased. She'd taken his breath away with each shy peek over her shoulder at him with her unique blue eyes. How many hours had been spent fantasizing about her? Too many. What had those damn fantasies given him, aside from hard-ons and little satisfaction? Yeah, he knew her well. He knew the line of her neck, the way her hair swept forward when she leaned forward in concentration. He knew the way she blushed when he caught her looking at him before she focused on her schoolwork.

"Whoo, Win!"

She gasped and pulled away when Summer's shout drifted through the dusk. He could kill her sister. One good twist of the neck. He practically heard the gears working in Winter's head. Now Winter would start to think, then she'd panic and off she'd go. He wasn't sure he could handle her vanishing on him again. The crinkling of paper had him looking down when she flattened her hand on his chest. A blush stained her cheeks, her lips were swollen and a sexy sheen glistened in her eyes.

He took the paper and unfolded it to see his writing from that night in the restaurant. He stared at his suggestion. *Your pussy, my mouth*. His mind didn't comprehend what she was agreeing to. He glanced up and an elegant brow arched up. Sliding from between him and the wall, she opened the door and walked inside. *Fuck me*, he thought.

"Coming?"

He coughed. "Not yet." He followed her inside and grabbed the back of her coat, pushing her against the fully painted

door. He didn't want to give her time to think. He couldn't. Thinking was bad.

He slanted his mouth over hers, unleashing years of Winter-caused frustration. A low moan escaped from her and he began to fear how long he'd really last. His hands fumbled on the zipper of her jacket. Fuck, he couldn't be nervous about her. This. If there was one thing he knew, it was sex. He had screwed a lot of girls in his life, he knew the moves.

Unfortunately, this wasn't just anyone. This was Winter.

She caught his hands, halting his awkwardness. God, he was a fuckup. He let his head fall to her shoulder and he struggled for control. A soft grinding sound had him opening his eyes to see her jacket open. He saw the pale pink of her top, the rise and fall of her breasts, her fingers trembling as she toyed with the zipper tab. Reaching over, he turned the lock in the door and set his hands on her hips. Tracing the low riding denim, he lifted his head to meet her gaze.

* * * *

Her nerves vanished when he looked at her. What was there to be afraid of? Winter cupped his cheeks, her thumbs tracing his mouth. He took a soft nip out of one finger before turning his face completely into her hand. Her womb contracted at the soft kiss pressed into her palm. She felt the slow glide of fabric on her stomach as he untucked her shirt. Winter ached in anticipation of his touch. He kissed her, another devastating kiss that left her wanting more. She wanted everything. His teeth tugged on her lip and then he sank down onto his knees. "Now?"

He laughed against her belly, his tongue circling her navel. *Oh yeah*, she thought as she combed her fingers through his hair. *Now*. Her head fell against the painted glass door as heat blossomed deep in her womb. His tongue dipped in and out in tiny thrusts, teasing her. She felt her panties grow damp as he played in her bellybutton, taunting her with what was to come. "Lucas," she moaned. Her hips shifted, restless and needy. She barely felt her fly open. Denim slid down her legs and she gasped in anticipation. She ached for more.

She had run from this?

"My mouth," he rasped against her flesh. He tugged her panties down. "Your pussy."

That was all the warning she got before his tongue swept along her vagina, ending with a flick of her clit. The world faded. The jeans bunched at her feet didn't grant a lot of movement but Lucas didn't let that hinder him. Oh no, not this man. She cried out when his teeth scraped along her clit, sending bolts of fire through her body. His fingers blazed a trail up the inside of her legs, then without any hesitation, one finger filled her. Her orgasm began to build, swelling in her womb with each thrust of his finger. "Lucas," she moaned and surged towards him. A second finger buried to the hilt, twisting and thrusting her toward explosion. Her hands fisted, pressing him closer, he tongued her. Suddenly, his fingers were gone. "No. No, Lucas!"

"I told you," he growled against her. "My mouth."

Her knees buckled when she felt his tongue slide into her, swirling around, dipping in and out. "Holy fuck," she moaned before her world exploded. "Lucas!" Liquid waves exploded in

her, swamping her in an intense orgasm. Hands cupped her ass, hauling her close as the man feasted his way through the tiny shakes and cream spilling from her.

She couldn't feel her legs. She slid down the door and straddled his lap. Her head fell to his shoulder.

"Like it when you say fuck," he whispered in her ear, his hands pushing her jacket off. Thank God. She was going to evaporate. She leaned against the cool glass, intensely aware of the bulge of his erection beneath his jeans. "Means I shattered your cool exterior."

"Fuck." She leaned forward and kissed him, still hungry. His hands caressed her bottom, rocking her over his swollen cock.

"Not here," he whispered against her mouth.

"Here."

"I'm not fucking you on the shop floor." His hands belied his words, untying her boots, then palming them off. She deserved better. A bed, soft music. The lack of the word *fuck*.

"Here," she repeated, her pussy grinding over him. *Shit*. Like he'd be able to get far. His hands caressed over her bunched jeans to her silky skin. He still tasted her orgasm, heard her crying out his name when she came. Nothing in his entire life had prepared him for how he'd feel knowing she was with him. Like this.

He felt.

Sex had been a game, a way to break the boredom. Winter was something else entirely different.

The knowledge should send him running for the hills. Instead, he wanted to be so deep inside her that he'd never come out.

"Win," he whispered against her mouth. He turned, lowering her to the floor. She gasped and arched up.

"Cold."

He looked around for an alternative. Upstairs was a long way away. *The floor, Durst? Really? You're thirty-two. You think your ass likes this floor? What about your knees? Shit.* When the hell had he become rational? That was Winter's jurisdiction.

Jumping to his feet, he grabbed her hands and lifted her up. A low thud came to him and he looked down to see her jeans discarded on the floor. Oh shit. There was the old leather couch for customers to wait on. It would do.

Unfortunately, it was a two-seater and wouldn't allow for them to stretch out. He sank down and once more Winter was on his lap.

Oh yeah, this was better.

Watching her eyes, he gathered up her top and whisked it over her head and let it fall behind her. Who knew that studious Winter was built like his wildest dreams?

He had.

Against the pale pink of her bra, her nipples were drawn into tight buds. Leaning down, he pressed a kiss between her breasts. His fingers traced the graceful line of her spine, then opened her bra. Her beautiful breasts rose and fell with each deep breath and he caressed her waist, studying her. *Beautiful.* She was so beautiful, she left him breathless. A low

sound came from her and she rocked over his cock. He glanced up to watch her head fall back. He wanted inside her. Badly. He gripped the back of her head, pulling her up to kiss her.

"Lucas. Please," she whispered.

He traced her swollen lips, then caressed down between her breasts. Her stomach tightened under his touch and she came the minute his finger grazed her clit. There weren't enough words in his vocabulary to describe Winter when she came, so he didn't bother doing her an injustice. Her head fell to his shoulder once more and he felt her yanking his sweater up.

She swore when she saw he was wearing a shirt underneath but she quickly dispensed with that, too. The sensation of her hands sliding down his chest made him suck in his breath. She leaned down and licked the devil tattoo above his heart then, like water, slid off his lap.

Oh shit.

Her hands shook as she opened his fly, then she glanced up at him. Who the hell was this woman? And why had he waited so damn long to finally meet this side of her? He combed his fingers through her hair.

"I don't know what to do," she whispered, indecision in her eyes.

He leaned forward and kissed her, tasting the woman he had craved for the majority of his life. "Yes, you do."

And God help him, she did. Her nerves appeared to vanish when she opened his jeans. He lifted his hips and she tugged his jeans and briefs down. The loss of restriction left him

lightheaded. Her hands caressed up his thighs and he watched her study his cock. The thought of that mouth around his dick made his balls draw tight. Pre-cum pearled at the tip and she licked her lips. Yeah. This wasn't going to happen right now.

"Later," he said. Grabbing her arms, he lifted her up. "You covered?"

She nodded, bracing her hands on his shoulders. "But—"

"Later, baby. Inside you. Now."

He felt the heat of her palms on his shoulders, the graze of her nipples down his chest and the wet heat of her body taking him. Then he knew nothing. "Win," he mouthed, his head fell back when she took him with a sigh. *Nothing*. There had been nothing before this. He had been wrong, he thought as she began to rock. He knew nothing about sex.

His hands caressed her back, loving the sensation of her skin against his. He followed the line of the neck he knew and speared his fingers into her hair. She leaned forward, kissing him while he thrust into her. Win. Winter.

Her mouth froze, a low moan escaped from her. Her pussy clamped tight and her hips snapped back and forth.

"Lucas?"

"Yeah," he whispered, flattening one hand on the small of her back. "Win."

"Now?"

He tried to smile. Hard, since every inch of his skin burned. "Now," he growled. Her bowed back snapped her hard against his chest. *Win*. "My Win," he whispered before his own orgasm stole his breath.

This, he thought as the silence wrapped around them, *was something different*. His heart thundered in time with hers. He caressed her back and smiled when she tucked her head under his jaw.

"Does this mean you don't like me?"

"I told you. I don't fuck everyone I like." She glanced up at him as he spoke. "That, baby, was not fucking." She smiled slowly, her eyes glowing like the sun burned inside her.

"Good."

"Yeah," he sighed and clasped his hands at the small of her back, "I like you."

"Are you ready for this, Lucas?"

He shut his eyes. "I've been ready a long time, Winter. I was waiting on you."

* * * *

Spring swore and thrust the papers off the desk in a satisfying tantrum. There was something cathartic in causing chaos. It beat throwing her laptop at the wall. In frustration, she kicked the coffee table and watched it flip over. *Yeah*.

"Problems, baby?"

"Winter is insane, Mom. Do you know how much capital we need? We have no collateral. We have ... well, we have shit." Mostly, the problem was her. No one would touch her with a thirty foot pole. One banker in Calgary had actually refused to see her when he had learned who S. Drummond was. Her name was shit. Anything tacked to her reputation was shit.

"Mom, no one wants to loan us money. Because of me." She slapped a hand against her chest. "Me."

"Then you're going to the wrong people, baby." Her mother caressed her hair. Spring inhaled the familiar scent of lilac perfume that her mother wore. "You'll make this work."

Why did everyone have so much faith in her? She braced her elbows on her knees and fisted her hands in her hair. God, she didn't want to be the one to kill this dream before it got off the ground. What if she did? Tears burned in her eyes. What if she was the reason everything fell apart? She couldn't handle disappointing them again. She wasn't sure her heart could handle hurting those she loved the most.

How could she make *Seasonal* work, when she couldn't even fix herself?

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THE LESSON by Emma Wildes

The swirling snow obscured the elegant façade of the townhouse, which was just as well. The last thing Christina wanted was for someone to see her there. Pulling her hood close, she went up the steps, glad to see that a light glowed in one downstairs window, the warmth a contrast to the cold, hostile night.

There was no choice, she was going to have to knock, but hopefully, the servants were all in bed, and since she had just seen the person she'd been waiting for go inside a few minutes earlier, maybe he would be the one to answer the door. Lifting the brass knocker, she let it fall.

Since her life had been nothing but an unmitigated disaster recently, she was almost surprised when she got her wish, the door opening and the tall man standing there peering out, saying in a deep, curious voice, "Yes?"

Pushing her hood back enough so he could see her face, she said unevenly, "I'm very sorry to bother you at such a late hour, but may I come in and speak with you for a few minutes?"

To say that Nicholas St. James looked surprised at the identity of his late night caller was a complete understatement. In fact, he looked ... stunned. "Is something wrong?" he asked sharply. "Christina? Good God, please don't tell me something has happened to Colin."

Standing on the top step in a mist of blowing snow, Christina swallowed. "No. I just need to talk with you, if possible."

He seemed to realize at once her distress and the fact he was keeping her outside in the inhospitable weather, for he immediately opened the door. "Forgive me, I am a little ... off balance by finding you here ... please, come in."

Ushering her into the warmth of the foyer, he closed the door. The house felt comforting and warm, smelling faintly like tobacco and whiskey. So nervous she wasn't sure she could have done it herself, she was grateful when he politely took her cloak.

"You are shaking," her obviously very curious host said, "here, my study is warm, if you wish to speak with me, perhaps we can go in there."

She wasn't at all surprised that he was intrigued by her unconventional arrival. It was after midnight, she still wore her low-cut ball gown, and the weather was frightful. Not to mention, she was a married woman visiting her husband's best friend alone.

However, her life, which everyone she knew thought a fairy tale, was actually a nightmare and she couldn't take it anymore without doing something about it. Even if it meant risking her reputation and her husband's disdain. Allowing Nicholas to escort her down the hallway to a room lined with bookshelves and a bright fire blazing in the hearth, she only remotely felt the warmth, so cold inside she felt like her very heart was frozen.

"Here, sit ... I can wake someone and have them make some tea perhaps—"

Christina quickly shook her head, obediently sinking into the chair he indicated, whispering, "Please ... don't bother anyone. I would actually prefer no one knew I came here except you."

"As you wish, Duchess." Lowering into a chair opposite where he had apparently been sitting earlier, he reached for a glass of brandy, already poured and half-drunk. "You seem very distressed ... and I admit, I am both alarmed and concerned."

He did look puzzled, Christina saw, studying him from under the fringe of her lashes, wondering how to begin. Nicholas St. James was considered to be one the best-looking men in London society, lean and well-built, with classically handsome features and dark, wavy hair. His eyes always seemed to carry an overt seductive gleam; his smile legendary and charming. He'd removed his jacket and cravat, wearing only a white shirt, dark breeches and polished boots, the tiny frown between his brows indicating his trepidation over her unorthodox visit.

Good heavens, with him sitting across from her, looking both very large and very male, she wasn't quite sure she could go through with this. Her palms were damp, her heart beating unevenly in her chest, hammering her ribs. Despite her resolve not to cry, tears filled her eyes suddenly, a hot rush closing her throat.

"I'm sorry," she said apologetically and unsteadily, seeing his frown turn to rueful masculine helplessness at the sight of her tears. "I promised myself I wouldn't do this."

"Here." He got to his feet and urgently shoved the brandy glass into her hands. "Take a sip, it will steady you and perhaps you can tell me what's wrong before I perish from suspense." Thrusting his fingers through his hair, he watched her as she complied.

Finding the beverage burned going down, but taking another sip anyway, she handed the glass back and attempted a wavering smile. "I think brandy must be an acquired taste."

"If so, I acquired it long ago ... Christina, please have mercy on me. Why are you here? Does Colin know where you are?"

"I'm not sure," she responded quietly, "if he would care."

That startled him, his brows winging upward. "Don't be ridiculous. You are just newly wed and he unfashionably adores you." Draining what was left of the brandy, her husband's best friend stared at her.

She corrected softly, "He did at one time, but the truth is ... I have disappointed him." It felt awful to say the words out loud, and even worse, to know they were true.

"Disappointed him in what way?"

"I..." She wasn't sure she could sit there and admit it. Fighting back another tidal wave of tears, she steadied herself. St. James watched her, still standing, the empty glass dangling from his long fingers. With as much dignity as

possible, she cleared her throat. "I suppose I should say I *continually* disappoint him. This is not easy to talk about—"

"Apparently not," Nicholas muttered.

"But I am not good at ... that is, I don't really enjoy..."

There was a dismayed glimmer suddenly in his dark eyes, as if he had an inkling of what she was going to say.

Oddly enough, it gave her courage to finish. In a rush, she explained, "I don't enjoy sex. At first, I thought it was just nerves and my desperate wish to please him, but I am beginning to think I'm ... flawed in some horrible way. And I know," she added miserably, "that he is beginning to think the same thing."

There. It was out, the words spoken. Nicholas just stood there, unmoving, his expression something between discomfort and consternation. Hating the quiver in her voice, Christina asked, "Could I perhaps have some more brandy?"

* * * *

Splashing liquor into a glass, Nicholas handed it over without a word to the beautiful woman who drooped in the chair in his study, her eyes luminous with unshed tears; her soft mouth trembling. She looked devastated and her hand shook as she accepted his offering.

This was insane. She was the Duchess of Voth, bride of a wealthy, handsome young peer, her glorious beauty lauded by the *ton*, envied by more than a few for a spectacular marriage that was based on what seemed to be a genuine passion.

Usually unfazed by any situation, infamous for his charm with women, he couldn't think of a single thing to say, comforting or not. In fact, he fervently hoped this was a bad dream, and that his friend's lovely young wife—the friend that was more like a brother to him than his own two siblings, had not just arrived on his doorstep in the middle of a raging snowstorm to confess she found no pleasure in her marriage bed.

And wept over the confession, which was worse. Most women tended to get red-eyed and unattractive when crying, but Christina was not one of them. Her beauty was remarkable at any time, but more so now in her anguish, her skin creamy and smooth, her face a perfect oval, her eyes fringed by wet, thick lashes, her nose small and straight. She had the figure of Venus, slender but with lush, full breasts, her waist narrow, her hips shapely. Her crowning glory was her unusual auburn hair, her lustrous tresses thick and silky, caught fashionably at her nape, revealing the graceful length of her neck.

Colin, he knew, was completely and madly in love with his gorgeous wife.

However, the realization flashed, that Colin had also been unaccountably tense and distant in the past weeks. As the silence in the room lengthened, Nicholas recalled wondering if something might be wrong. It seemed there was.

"Hell," he said vehemently.

"I'll agree with that," Christina murmured. "It is a little like being in hell, I imagine. Wanting to please your husband and failing completely ... I think that qualifies."

"I do not see how you couldn't please him," Nicholas said frankly. "You are very lovely and I have seen for myself how he looks at you. If a man has ever truly loved a woman, I believe that is how Colin feels about you."

For the first time, color came into her porcelain cheeks. "I think he *did* feel that way, months ago when we were first married. Our wedding night was a disaster ... I wept afterwards. He was very gentle but I was so terribly nervous, that it was still painful. Even though I know he tried to help me relax, I think I am actually handicapped by the fact I do love him so deeply and want him to ... enjoy me. I have tried everything, drinking wine, using lotions—"

Never remembering a more discomforting conversation in his life, Nicholas interrupted more roughly than he intended, "I am sure Colin would not appreciate you being here and telling me this. In fact, I have known him most of my life and I would venture to say that his pride would be severely flayed by the fact I even know there is anything wrong between you, especially in the capacity to which you refer."

"I had no choice but to come. You are his friend, a little more than that, I think, and I want you to help me." Her lovely eyes were pleading and more than a little desperate, the brandy glass clutched in her slender fingers.

"Forgive me, but how the devil can I help you?"

For a moment, she sat there, unmoving, her lips parted. Then her long lashes lowered a fraction as she answered, "Colin is wonderful, but he does not have your reputation for ... seduction, if you will. He is incredibly busy running his vast holdings and though I am not so naïve that I do not know he

has had mistresses in the past, he was never a rake. You know how seriously he takes his title and responsibilities, he barely has time to bed me in the first place. I think he simply expects me to know how to please him and he is as frustrated as I am over the fact that I am not more comfortable with that aspect of our marriage." Her mouth quivered suddenly, and her eyes were wide and glossy with more unshed tears. "He will go elsewhere if something does not change. I need someone to ... teach me."

Absolutely unable to believe his ears, Nicholas said incredulously, "You want *me* to tutor you in bed?"

"Yes. That's exactly what I want," Colin's beautiful wife said without hesitation.

"That's completely insane. If there is any woman I would never touch, it is you," Nicholas said flatly.

"You don't find me attractive?" Her smooth brow knitted, as if that were a possibility she hadn't considered.

Well, he certainly did, of course. Any man would, she was beyond lovely. In fact, his treacherous libido reacted predictably to her suggestion of sexual schooling, his body tightening. "It isn't a matter of finding you attractive or not," he argued curtly, "it is a matter of loyalty and friendship. What do you think Colin would do if he found out I took you to bed?"

"Would you tell him?"

The delicately put question threw him a little. "Of course not," he responded restively, pacing across the room.

"Well ... if you won't aide me, can you recommend someone who might be as ... talented and discreet?"

"No," he bit out, furiously whirling. "That would be even worse a betrayal. Jesus, have mercy, this isn't my problem. Christina, please, go to Colin and discuss this with him as you have with me. Tell him how you feel."

Very softly, with her face averted, she said, "I have tried to bring up the subject, going so far as having to make an appointment to see him because of his full schedule. But I think he responds to the situation by simply refusing to acknowledge it. If you do not think it is desperation that brought me here to offer myself to you, you are wrong. I was hoping, in the light of your deep friendship with my husband, you would be the one person who would understand."

Her words cut a little. She was right, too. Nicholas knew Colin was intelligent, good-humored, and witty, but he was also trying to step into the enormous ducal responsibilities that had fallen to him almost two years ago upon his father's death, suddenly shouldering a great deal of responsibility. He could actually believe what she said was true, that when Colin found his bride was nervous and unreceptive, it stung his pride and he left her alone.

With both of them miserable.

The clock on the mantle sounded very loud. Almost not able to believe he said the words, Nicholas murmured, "What happens if I agree to this ... madness? I assume you have some sort of plan."

The beautiful young duchess smiled for the first time, a tremulous curve of her lovely mouth. "Oh yes."

* * * *

The inn was small and charming, perched on the banks of the Thames, currently picturesque in a gleaming wonderland of white. Icicles hung suspended outside the deep window, the afternoon dull under a heavy steely sky. As Christina stood there, staring out, she felt a little like a princess in a fairy tale ... as if she was under a spell, caught in some fantastical web.

For the first time ever, she had lied to Colin that morning. Not expecting to see him, he had been coming in as she was departing. His steward one step behind him, he'd done little more than give her a perfunctory kiss on the cheek as they passed in the main hall, but his warm hand had lingered on her waist and she had certainly felt horribly guilty stammering out something about visiting her sister. Looking into his blue eyes, Christina had felt the urge to blurt out how much she loved him, how sorry she was for this sudden distance, but there had been servants everywhere and he had simply told her to greet Isabelle for him and disappeared into his study.

That encounter had enforced her resolve, it was so symbolic of the way their life had become. If learning how to seduce her husband would mend things between them, she was willing to do it.

"The roads are appalling, I am sorry I'm a few minutes late."

She hadn't even realized the door had opened and swung around with a small gasp at that soft speech. Nicholas stepped into the room, brushing a light dusting of snow from his shoulders, moisture gleaming on his dark glossy hair. Closing the door and shrugging out of his greatcoat, he

looked taller than ever, his shoulders very wide underneath a superfine jacket, his gaze dark and steady.

Lord, she was as nervous as she had been on her wedding night.

Searching for composure, Christina said, "I am just grateful you came at all."

"I'm having a rather hard time believing I'm here myself," he murmured cynically. "I have met beautiful ladies discreetly at inns before, but never under quite these circumstances. How much time do we have for this ... lesson?"

"All afternoon." It was impossible to suppress the blush that rose into her neck and face. "Colin thinks I am visiting my sister and I usually stay a good while."

"Are you still certain you wish to go through with this?"

The quiet question made her swallow and nod her head. She said firmly, "This morning, he rode in the park with you despite the snow, Nicholas ... I passed him in the hall and barely got a kiss on the cheek and an absent greeting. If you added up the hours we have spent together recently, I would say just from your morning ride, you would come ahead in his priorities."

"He does seem preoccupied," Nicholas admitted to her surprise, "and extremely unwilling to discuss you in any way. I would guess he is avoiding you because if he is near you, he wants you, and if his perception is that you would rather he leave you alone, that puts him in a damnable dilemma."

"I wish to make him happy," Christina declared, her voice strained. "I want to enjoy his lovemaking, but we are now so tense with each other, it seems impossible."

"Colin has always been a bit too much of a gentleman, I am guessing because he was always being rigidly trained in his future role as the duke." Nicholas shrugged out of his jacket. His sudden smile was dark and a little dangerous, lighting his handsome face. "I am not nearly so polite, especially in bed, my lady. Now, if you truly believe this is the way to mend things with your husband, and I am here, I say we should get to the task at hand, don't you?"

Oh God.

"Yes," Christina said faintly, watching as he discarded his cravat. Her heart fluttered in her chest, her pulse quickening. She'd come this far. It was too late to back out.

"Then disrobe." The order was matter-of-fact and he began to unbutton his shirt, holding her gaze. "And I mean everything, Duchess. I am not going to grope under your underclothes to protect your delicate sensibilities. The very first part of your instruction is that men like to look at women—especially naked women. It is almost as arousing to see you as it is to touch you." He added with a hint of wicked humor, "Almost."

Recalling how she had insisted that Colin douse the lights and let her keep her night dress on, she felt more foolish and gauche than ever. "You'll have to help me," she said, lifting her chin.

"I am not unaccustomed to the intricacies of female attire." The most notorious rake in London lifted a brow in open amusement. "Here, turn around."

She felt his hands on her shoulders as he turned her, his fingers working deftly, and in seconds, her dress slid to the

floor. Keeping her back to him, she bent and removed her stockings and shoes, taking a deep breath before she slipped the ribbon on her chemise free. Disbelieving she was going to stand in front of him stark naked in the middle of a light room, she shrugged it off her shoulders and turned around.

He was bare to the waist, clad only in boots and breeches that hugged his lean legs. As she turned, he stopped in the act of unfastening his pants, his breath going in audibly. She could literally feel his avid gaze travel over her naked breasts to the juncture between her thighs. Carefully studying her nude body, taking his time and apparently not caring in the least for her deep embarrassment, he murmured huskily, "Colin is a very lucky man. You are ... exquisite, Christina. But then again, I knew you would be. Take down your hair."

He was rather impressive himself, she thought, staring at his bare chest. His shoulders were wide, his arms and chest ridged with defined muscle, his belly flat. Reaching for the pins that confined her heavy hair, she tugged them loose, suddenly wondering for the first time what her husband looked like without his clothes, since he had only come to her at night and in the darkness.

And when Nicholas stripped off his breeches and she saw his rigid erection, his staff high and blatantly stiff against his stomach, she drew in a sharp breath. Fascinated beyond her will, she stared, wide-eyed.

"You look alarmed."

She whispered, "Colin felt so big, but I had no idea—"

"Christ, let me guess, you made him keep the room dark." Eyes narrowed, Nicholas shook his head. "He must be so besotted with you, he has lost all good sense. Here."

She gave a small gasp as he lifted her in his arms and carried her to the tester bed in the middle of the small room. It was half the size of the bed she had occupied with her husband and when Nicholas settled next to her, Christina could feel the heat from his body against her skin, warming her.

He lay very close, looking into her eyes, and his erect cock, so hard and hot, pressed her hip. Reaching out and touching her lower lip with a long forefinger, he said, "I am betraying a friendship that I value very highly. Yet look at me, because you are so very desirable, I am ravenous to take you. My body betrays my honor as surely as what I am doing to Colin. My God, look at this," his fingers sifted through her hair, "it is a thousand shades from amber to the deepest sable and like the finest silk." His touch slid across her cheek. "And your skin is flawless, so smooth and pure ivory."

It was odd, but his very blatant arousal and the way he looked at her, with raw male admiration and hunger, lessened her anxiety over what was to come. In fact, she felt a little warm despite the dreary weather outside, and deep inside, a small flicker of actual anticipation built. "Tell me what to do," she implored, her voice low. "Teach me everything, Nicholas."

His lashes lowered a fraction over that sultry stare. "When I kiss you, open your mouth," he instructed. "Let me taste you."

When he leaned forward, she complied, parting when his mouth touched hers, feeling the slide of his tongue immediately penetrate and begin to explore, rubbing against hers, skimming her teeth, licking the delicate corners of her lips. Colin had put his tongue in her mouth once or twice only and she had always found it shocking and had broken the kiss.

Was there *anything* she had done right?

What's more, she found that she enjoyed the sensation of being kissed so thoroughly. His mouth was firm and infinitely male, and when she tentatively slid her arms around his neck and the tips of her bare breasts pressed against his hard chest, he made a small sound in his throat and pulled her closer. Releasing her mouth, he kissed her everywhere; her eyelids, the tip of her nose, the sensitive spot under her ear. When she felt the pressure of his lips at the point where her neck met her shoulder, she sighed, it felt so wonderful.

Lifting his head, Nicholas smiled, his dark eyes full of pure heated promise. "It feels good, does it not? I have never known a woman who didn't have a sensitive neck. I will touch every inch of your delectable body during our afternoon together, and I promise you, you will enjoy it. Now, these are truly magnificent breasts," he added with a slight thickness to his voice. "During this demonstration, you need do nothing but lie back and let me worship them."

Filling his hand, he began to stroke her sensitive flesh and almost instantly, Christina could feel a curious tightening, a feeling of fullness, of heavy need. She watched through half-closed eyes as he fondled and caressed the pale mounds,

gasping out loud when he leaned forward and took one nipple in his mouth, the sudden wet heat making her body tingle oddly. He did the same thing to her other aching breast, sucking until her nipple was hard and very erect, the sensation intensely pleasurable. She was almost disappointed when his mouth grazed lower.

"Spread your legs," Nicholas whispered against the softness of her belly. "Let me see if you are getting wet."

It went against every instinct, but she forced herself to comply, opening her thighs slowly, feeling vulnerable and exposed as he lifted up and stared at her most private place. Caressing her inner thigh, his warm fingers suddenly slid between her legs and she felt the glide of that practiced touch through her thatch, finding the folds of her cleft and parting her. Closing her eyes, she swallowed hard, disbelieving that having a man rub her in such a scandalous way could feel good, but in fact, it was wonderful.

"You are getting damp, my sweet Christina, and are so velvety hot, I can't wait to be inside you. But first, since I am completely certain Colin has never done this to you, let me truly show you something you'll remember."

He shifted between her legs, lying down and pushing them very wide. When his mouth first pressed against her cleft, she was simply so utterly stunned that she tried to pull away, but he held her hips firmly and the very first foray of his tongue was so excruciatingly pleasurable, she actually moaned and went still. He licked the line of her folds, then slipped his tongue between them, abrading the sensitive tissue, lathing her flesh with long strokes, finding a certain spot that when

he touched it, she cried out in wonder at the joyous bliss of it. Her whole body grew tense, yearning, and as the feeling built, she whimpered involuntarily, wanting something elusive. When she thought she would perish from the wild need inside her, he suddenly pressed closer to that magical spot and sucked hard and she suddenly felt a rush of exquisite pleasure so intense, her body shook and convulsed and a small keening scream escaped her lips.

* * * *

Nicholas reluctantly lifted his mouth from the sweet, wet folds between Christina's open legs, watching her as she drifted in the aftermath of her first climax, a small smile of satisfaction on his lips. The truth was, given her obvious fears and embarrassment over the act of sexual intercourse, she had actually been very easily aroused. In fact, with her incomparable beauty and sensual nature, Nicholas suspected she would become a very passionate and willing bedmate. Colin was indeed a lucky man, as he had stated earlier.

Her lovely body, so perfectly formed and overtly female, was flushed pink from recent orgasmic release. Lashes pillowed on her perfect cheekbones, she lay very still, only the quivering of her opulent breasts with each quick breath showing any movement. The fact that she was still splayed open, apparently uncaring of the struggle of the midafternoon light in the small room, spoke volumes of how far she had come in overcoming her trepidations. Rising up, Nicholas moved over her, his own need demanding, wanting to show

her that pleasure was possible also from the actual act of consummation.

Kissing her lightly, he smiled wickedly when her lashes drifted open, positioning himself so that the tip of his throbbing penis prodded her female opening. "Let's finish our first tutorial, shall we?"

Staring up at him, she whispered, "Nicholas ... what did you do to me? That felt—"

"Beyond compare?" he supplied, lifting a brow. "Wait until you feel this," he began to penetrate her, easing into her hot, wet passage, feeling the grip of those seductive, silken walls with a rush of carnal need, "it is different, but you can find the same release, if you relax and concentrate on the sensation. Now, lift your hips and wrap your legs around my waist, Christina. Let me ride you."

She obeyed, still looking a little dazed. "It doesn't hurt," she said with amazement etched in every lovely feature when he was fully embedded inside her. "It feels ... good."

He was glad of that because he burned for release, her body feeling so perfect in his arms. Starting to move, Nicholas pulled out almost all the way, sinking back in with pure sexual joy, his cock so hard and pulsing, he could hardly believe how close he was to exploding. Colin's enchanting duchess was gloriously tight, incredibly hot and soft, and he fought the urge to simply plunge furiously and find relief.

Taking his time, tampering his clambering need, he thrust in and out, watching her face, seeing the color deepen in her cheeks, the darkening of her beautiful eyes signaling her sexual climb, her quickened breathing brushing his face.

Already aroused from what he'd done to her earlier, she quickly began to moan with abandon, clenching her muscles instinctively, her small hands hard on his shoulders.

When he felt her tremors begin and heard the soft cry escape from her throat, he allowed himself to let go. Thrusting hard and deep, he erupted inside her, surging deep against her womb, spilling his seed with such force, he trembled. It seemed he hung there for an eternity, not of this earth, paradise being the body of the woman below him.

When he could finally open his eyes and speak, he gazed down at her, saying hoarsely, "That, Duchess, concludes our first lesson."

* * * *

Picking up her fork, Christina took a dainty bite of her fish, barely tasting it, washing down the mouthful with a sip of wine. Across the table, in the light of the glittering candles, Colin ate studiously, looking at his plate, then at the footman to gesture for more wine ... anywhere but at her.

The dress, she thought with satisfaction, was definitely working.

It was the shade of dark red wine, the color a foil for her pale skin, and she had instructed the seamstress to cut the neckline very low. The upper curves of her breasts were completely exposed, as were most of her shoulders, and though she would have fainted rather than wearing it in public, it seemed perfect attire to seduce her distant husband. The fact he had not even commented on it was a sign he had surely noticed. As a matter of fact, he'd been unable to tear

his gaze away from all that bare skin several times during the course of their meal, apparently finally deciding it was best not to look at her at all.

He looked very handsome, as blond as Nicholas was dark, his features classically aristocratic; his body lean and tall. Dressed impeccably in dark evening clothes, he was every inch the English gentleman, yet ... underneath, she could sense both his desire and frustration. Since she had always been so very attracted to him, Christina now wondered why on earth she had also been so nervously afraid to give herself freely. Of course, it hadn't helped to be so ignorant of what lovemaking could actually be like. Since her afternoon with Nicholas almost a week ago, she felt ... liberated. He had spent hours touching her, arousing her, bringing her to the summit of glorious sensation time and again.

Teaching her.

She couldn't wait to do those same things with the man she loved.

"Your steward told me you rode with Nicholas St. James again this morning. How is he?" she asked pleasantly, as if making conversation, forcing him to at least glance at her.

Polite as always, Colin looked up from gazing at his wine glass, and cleared his throat. "Fine. He sends his regards."

"How nice." She smiled.

Colin's blue gaze strayed downward, his mouth tightening. "Nicholas is always nice to beautiful ladies." He murmured abruptly, "Is that a new dress?"

Looking innocent, she said, "Do you like it? I think the neckline a bit extreme, but Madame assured me it is all the rage."

Thus given permission to study her blatantly displayed cleavage, Colin swallowed. "I like it, of course, but then I find you gloriously attractive whatever you are wearing, my dear."

"Do you?" she murmured suggestively. "Perhaps then, your Grace, you would care to demonstrate your *admiration* upstairs."

His expression was nearly comical, her husband looked so surprised at the very frank invitation. Rising, Christina dropped her napkin next to her plate. "I am no longer hungry anyway. I'll wait for you, if wish to have dessert."

There was a brief silence. Aware of the footman, no doubt listening to every bit of their exchange, her breath seemed locked in her throat. Then Colin said slowly, "I'll skip dessert, I believe."

Watching through half-lowered lashes, she accepted his arm as he came around the table, her heart beating light and fast as he escorted her to the stairs and up to his room. Dismissing his valet, Colin waited until the door closed before he said on a ragged breath, "Christina, I beg you, I cannot endure to cause you discomfort and pain. Please do not do this just to please me. It is ... is a blow to my pride that you do not enjoy—"

Stepping close, she pressed her fingertips to his lips, looking up into his eyes. "Help me out of my dress."

His gaze darkened with desire as he assessed her sincerity. "God help me, I do want you, I admit it. Let me extinguish the candles."

"Absolutely not." Christina shook her head. "Just hurry ... Colin, I need you."

Those breathless words seemed to be all it took. Closing her eyes as he swiftly moved to do her bidding, she let him undress her, aware of his heavy gaze. When she was fully nude, he whispered, "You are like a dream, so soft and beautiful. My desire for you has been driving me insane."

It had been arousing to have Nicholas look at her, but it was another thing altogether to see the longing in her husband's eyes. She was already damp between her legs with anticipation, her breasts tight and needy. Christina touched his cheek. "I am sorry for ... the other times. Let us start over this night, my love."

"Gladly." Sweeping her up into his arms, Colin carried her to the huge bed perched on a dais in the middle of the room.

Watching with heavy-lidded eyes as he hurriedly disrobed, Christina saw that her husband was every bit as well-formed as her talented instructor, wide-shouldered and muscular, his waist lean, his legs long and sinewy. His erection, too, was gloriously large and rigid, the crest distended and beaded with semen. When he joined her on the bed and took her in his arms, she sighed into his kiss with open pleasure, parting her mouth, inviting him inside. Feeling his passion for her was like a glorious awakening, and she told him truthfully as he nibbled on her earlobe, "I love you so much, Colin. Do with

me what you like, love me, come inside me and give me your child, touch me anywhere and everywhere."

Threading her fingers through his soft hair, she tugged his mouth to her breast, exalting in the heated adhesion as he suckled gently. She was so ready by the time he positioned himself between her legs to mount her, she felt almost wild, resisting the urge to beg him to take her. His entry was so pleasurable, she moaned, opening her legs wider, lifting them around her husband's waist as he began to take and give, his engorged cock stretching her burning passage, his whispered words of love in her ear infinitely tender and arousing. She climaxed in minutes, the anticipation of the act of love between them a potent aphrodisiac. Colin went still as she convulsed around him, and there was no question of his surprise, but when he began to move again a moment later, there was also no doubt of his pleasure. He found fulfillment with a low groan, buried to the hilt, his staff flexing as he poured hot semen into her vaginal passage, his breathing harsh and low in her ear as he buried his face into her tumbled hair.

When their breathing quieted, he looked into her eyes, still inside her but softening, his blue gaze both curious and tender. Stroking her hair, he asked quietly, "Christina, that was ... incredible. Like I imagined our wedding night would be. What happened? What has changed?"

"I could not bear that I was so ... disappointing," she said truthfully, swallowing back a lump in her throat. "I admit, I have been so unhappy that I talked to a friend ... and when it was explained to me exactly how wonderful it could be

between a man and a woman, especially when they love each other, I couldn't wait for us to try again."

"I told you it could be wonderful," Colin said reproachfully, but his fingers were still gentle, sifting through the strands of damp hair curling at her temples.

"I was too ignorant," she admitted. "I needed someone to be very frank. You are too much the gentleman."

"You are such a delicate and refined lady," Colin said ruefully, "and so very, very beautiful. I suppose I need to take the blame for all our lost hours of pleasure. I didn't want to shock your maidenly sensibilities by my insistent passion."

"Your insistent passion," Christina purred, lifting her hips a little, reveling in the feel of him still inside her, "will always be welcomed. But, I would appreciate it if you would make a little more time for me."

Her husband smiled then, his handsome face lighting as he lowered his head to kiss her. "It will be my pleasure, my Lady."

* * * *

The scent of tobacco hung in the air, along with the perfume of claret and brandy. Sitting at his usual table, Nicholas tilted his glass to his mouth and took a drink, grateful for the warmth of the lively fire in the hearth. His club was nearly deserted this evening, the frightful winter weather outside undoubtedly discouraging most patrons. However, he had been restless and braved the frigid temperatures.

"I stopped by your townhouse but you were out, St. James. I was rather hoping to find you here. Can I sit down?"

Glancing up, he was surprised to see Colin standing there, his fine blond brows lifted, one hand on the opposite chair.

"Of course," he said automatically. "Do you want a drink?"

"Without a doubt," Colin said emphatically, sinking down. When the waiter arrived with another glass, he poured himself a generous amount. Watching the liquid fill his glass, he remarked conversationally, "I am not sure if I want to put a bullet through your black heart, Nick, or thank you."

Arrested in the act of lifting his glass to his mouth, Nicholas froze. "I beg your pardon?"

Colin's blue gaze was straightforward. "I am talking about my wife, of course."

Lowering his glass, inwardly cursing, Nicholas said carefully, "What about your lovely Duchess?"

"You mean the woman who was so frigidly afraid of intercourse that she couldn't bear to even have me see much more than her ankles bare?" Colin remarked, his mouth twisting wryly. "The same woman who now kisses like a courtesan and makes no secret of her abandoned pleasure in my touch? Last night, she even woke me from a deep sleep and you wouldn't quite believe what she was doing with her mouth and what part of my anatomy she was using it on."

Not able to believe that Christina would ever confess what they had done, Nicholas murmured, "If your wife is an enthusiastic lover, you are blessed, especially when she is one of the most beautiful women in England."

"She had better not have learned that particular technique from you." The statement was flat. "I am having a hard time reconciling myself to the fact she must have come to you and asked for your help, but don't make me picture ... that."

Since he already felt guilty as hell, it was difficult to lie. Nicholas swallowed and said truthfully, "No, that must have been her idea. She loves you."

"And I am apparently extremely inadequate when it comes to educating virginal young ladies in the art of love, while you," the words were said ruefully, "are an excellent teacher."

"You were handicapped by your deep love, not wanting to shock or hurt her. And for your information, I didn't intend to do it. She came to me, weeping because she felt so unhappy. Jesus, please try to picture my situation. You are like my brother. Touching your wife was unthinkable."

"Yet, somehow you were persuaded."

Nicholas responded to that acrid sentiment by saying coolly, "I assume you've looked at your wife lately, Colin."

They stared at each other for a moment, Colin's gaze both accusing and yet somehow, not overtly hostile. Suddenly, he slumped in his chair as if in defeat, sighing heartily. "Christ, women are a damned puzzle. I admit Christina and I are both happier now ... infinitely and joyously happier. I am trying not to spend so much time on estate matters and give her the attention she wants, and in turn, she delights me every night."

"Does she know you suspect anything?"

"No, she is too damnably naïve to realize that I would know something had happened. It wasn't really too difficult to figure out. Tell me, please, it was just one time."

"One afternoon," Nicholas admitted evasively, taking a drink.

"Hell," Colin muttered darkly.

"All she wanted from me was to learn how to please you. It was a little disconcerting, if you want the truth, since I could tell every moment she was thinking of another man. As beautiful as she is, I wouldn't want to repeat the experience."

Apparently, there was enough raw honesty in his voice that Colin believed him. He said after a long silence, "See that you don't ... though I can't imagine she could find the energy, I plan on keeping her so satisfied. In the meanwhile, let's have a toast."

Relieved and curious, Nicholas lifted his glass.

"To friendship," Colin said, lifting a brow. "And to lessons learned."

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THE PAINTED LADY by Tilly Greene

Chapter One

Tiny brushes moved softly across her skin. It was almost too erotic for her to handle. However, Saff was not complaining, this was a job and one that was paying better than good. All that was required was to have her body used as a canvas.

The gentle and steady hand of a masterful artist had been doling out the torture using their weapon of choice, a series of brushes. Fine, sable-haired brushes that moved sinuously across her face and ears, gently over and around her breasts and nipples, stroked down her stomach and pussy mound, even along her bare, plump lips. The final strokes were usually tickling the special makeup along her legs, feet, and toes.

This was the thirty-first and final illusion that had been specifically commissioned by some unknown patron. Once the photos had all been taken, the patron, along with the photographer's expertise, would choose the best images and then send it to a bookbinder who handcrafted beautiful books. It was for a private collection only. Saffron was the model/canvas and when offered the post, she worried for a moment about some strange person possessing nude pictures of her, then realized it would be difficult to know it was her hidden beneath the paint, so left that worry behind.

Joanne Gardner, the artist/body painter, was one of the top in the field. Bruce Wester, the photographer, also top in

his field, was noted for the raw sexuality with a sensual ambience to his pictures. There was also a team of assistants for each and they had all been working on this project for almost a month straight, including weekends. The team was top notch, as would be the final product.

No one ever heard Saff complain about her choice of profession. Model work was not that difficult, but was frequently trying on the nerves. However, that no longer mattered, this was her last job, she was no longer cut out for this career. As a tall gangly prematurely busty girl-child, the industry loved her and she found it easy money. But the woman she became disliked hearing the, "Saffron, you're gaining weight, loose at least fifteen pounds if you want to work." By no means was she a beauty, but what she did have going for her was great facial bones that showed well with makeup and a tall, long-legged frame with large breasts that showed clothes to great advantage. The new waifish body trend was just not for her so, she was taking this last job and heading for a less public life.

Plans were already in place for where she would be heading next. First on her list was to rent out her flat here in New York City that she had bought early on in her career as an investment and head out for greener pastures. Already she had made a few driving forays out into the surrounding countryside and found what she was looking for, a small town and a feeling of community in a historic setting, and still close enough to the city to be able to visit from time to time.

Frenchtown on the Delaware River was her chosen location. There was a derelict mill that she queried about,

even talked with a local architect, who took her thoughts to the local planning board and it looked like they were open to the ideas of her plan. It was now time for her to put her name to paper and make it official.

The multi-leveled building would have a shop to sell spices from around the world on the bottom floor, office space on the next and living space for herself on the upper two. As well as areas for parking, a garden space and a dock. The trick was going to be in maintaining the historical feel of the building and setting whilst making it not only habitable, but also sellable. She had been taught early in her career about always keeping the future in mind with her investments. It was a life changing decision and she was scared to death over the shift, but also eager to make the leap.

Hopefully, this would work for her social life as well, although she did not hold out much hope in that arena by moving to a small town. It had been love for her with her last boyfriend, and she had even thought it mutual. Dirk Madison, gorgeous hunk of Canadian perfection, ice hockey superstar with lush light brown hair that leaned towards wavy and luminous hazel eyes that went from yellow to green depending on his mood. The roommate had been booted out shortly after Saff returned from a shoot abroad when the other woman told her how he had chased after her and it had been difficult to say no to the man.

Nothing was as clear cut as it should have been in a relationship. It had always felt like he was holding something of himself back, so she thought anything was possible. Her self-respect was too healthy to stay in that kind of

relationship, but she still found it easier to choose the coward's route. She decided against the confrontation and instead, buried herself in runway work, something she had not done in years.

Returning from the Milanese and Parisian runways, she moved straight into New York fashion week and kept hearing about her weight from her agency. However, what they did not understand was that at that point, she simply did not care and was in it for the easy money. She had moved onward and was ready for the next phase of her life.

Besides, she felt she was exiting the industry on a high note. Saff liked leaving without scandal attached to her name and a strong reputation amongst all within the trade. This job, although not one for her portfolio, was still wonderful in many ways and the creativity called for by Joanne and Bruce was awe-inspiring. She thrived under these types of conditions. The only downside for her was the long hours of being slowly tortured by the sensuous stroke of a brush in a frigid environment.

What she supposed made it more trying was that there was no man in her life to ease the sexual tension these sessions built, and the onset of what she had previously labeled the snuggle season, fall and winter, did not help either.

To make the shoots go as easily as possible for her, Bruce demanded that only the bare minimum of people be allowed in the studio while she stood stark naked, front and center, before the day's backdrop canvas. Joanne and her first assistant Carol, painted her in situ so there was no telling

where she ended and the canvas began. The warehouse had to stay a fairly cool temperature to help the paint set on her body, making it that much harder when she went home at the end of the day to a cold and lonely bed.

The purchaser of what eventually was to be a private pillow book obviously had money and an eye for beautiful art that spanned mediums and history. The scene choices were extremely detailed and realistic, and at times, just plain odd, although Saff never really queried anyone about who the patron may be.

Some of the pieces chosen were instantly recognizable masterpieces in the art world, like Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. The rest were all very sensual paintings, including some of the more noted pieces like *Leda and the Swan* by Rubens, the cheeky Boucher piece, *Girl Raising Her Skirt*, and the seductive *Tepidarium* by Alma-Tadema. As a medium, statues were not spared either, represented by pieces like the *Venus de Milo*. Neither was religion out of bounds; although not totally surprising was that the chosen piece originated far from the American shores, a beautiful bronze of Vajrasattra with Supreme Wisdom in his lap, her legs wrapped around his hips.

There was a raunchy side to the project as seen most obviously in the detail from a Roman marble sarcophagus depicting an impish smiling female Pan backing herself onto the erect cock of a grinning pan-headed herm. Also picked for the special commission was a painting by Hokusai named *A Pearl Diver and Two Octopuses* featuring an ecstatic woman

being sexually handled by two octopuses with their many tentacles and mouths.

The downright freaky came in the guise of a naked Princess Leia sitting before Jabba the Hut from *Return of the Jedi* and a yellow bathing suited corn-rowed Bo Derek running along a beach in *10*. Saff supposed the latter two said something about the personality of the person who had commissioned the unique series. Besides being into erotic art, these two said the patron was most likely male and young enough in the late seventies/early eighties to be turned on by the hot actresses of the time.

These were the more conventional depictions chosen, which could almost be considered highbrow, because they mirrored existing and recognizable pieces in art. Where Joanne and her team really excelled was when they created scenarios without being restricted to mirror any specific pieces or ideals. These pieces were her favorites because they were so unique.

There was the red-eyed iridescent dragon that loomed over her shoulder, tongue tracing down her stomach to disappear into the cleft of her pussy, a claw wrapped around her thigh to hold her leg high and spread for his oral attentions. Another unique illusion was of a peaceful forest setting with a sunny clearing and a woman writhing in the throes of intense pleasure with a huge snake wrapped around her body, its head buried between her thighs—this one had actually been photographed from a top view as well. Bruce had thought the patron would also enjoy the view from below that showed how far the snake was buried inside her pussy.

Then there was a stunning white horse with a knight atop, dressed in his armor, sword sheathed, and a naked woman laying back along the horse, her legs curled around the man's neck and his head between her thighs.

There were still other pieces depicting fetishes and erotic scenes and, when looked on as a whole, they showed many a man's fantasy. Woman naked, or nearly so, ready to please and be pleased in return, or caught in the act of fucking—specifically created for arousing the viewer.

Today, the final day, there was not as much body painting as there had been in previous days. The setting was a hay-filled musty-looking working barn that showed her from behind. Painted on her was a pair of bright red worn cowboy boots, her real hair falling loosely to the middle of her back but held in place by a bandanna as a blindfold. A gun belt had been detailed to rest low on her hips and was so realistic, that even painted around her thigh was the string that held the holster in place. Her hands, cuffed and stretched high above her head, were attached to a large, rusty hook.

The difficulty with this final illusion was that it was fairly close to one of her fantasies.

Chapter Two

Suddenly, she was truly cold and realized the open space was quiet, empty. Feeling more vulnerable than she had with any of the other shoots, Saffron was startled to hear noises behind her in the studio. The illusionary painting today did not include the handcuffs locked on her wrists, blindfold tied around her head, or the hook her arms were stretched from

and now, there was something happening and Saff could not leave, turn around or cover herself.

This was not how her last shoot should be going.

"Joanne?"

Silence, not good at all. Had everyone just up and left her dangling here?

"Carol?"

The assistant had never left her side before. For the past month, she had always been there for instant touch-ups and sips of water, had been her shadow and now, poof, she, too, was gone.

"Bruce?"

Panic was now behind her pleas for someone.

"Shhh." Came from somewhere over her shoulder.

"What? Who are you? Where is everyone? This is a private set—" She was disoriented and looking for her bravado.

"Shhh." Now so close, she felt the heated words tickle across her bare skin.

Then a big callused hand came around and cupped a trembling breast in its palm and held it gently. Bigger than a handful, she spilled over the palm and a large rough thumb rubbed the excited tip before pinching it firmly, then gave it a little twist.

"No!" Saff gasped.

The body the hand was attached to came up flush behind her and rested fully against her back, chin resting atop her head. Now both breasts were held hostage by the stranger. Saff felt a soft kiss pressed on the top of her head.

Huge, the male body behind her was hot, solid and big. Feeling a soft cotton t-shirt come in contact with her back, she then felt the roughness of jeans pressing against her ass and legs. She cast her mind about for someone who had been on the set today wearing clothing like this and tall enough to rest their head atop hers.

But she could not focus, the hard-on pressed against her back was nothing short of impressive.

One of the man's large hands released a breast and slowly smoothed a heated path down her stomach, pausing to cup the small pouch of her belly, strumming the gentle rise with his thumb before continuing its path down to rest solidly against her naked mound.

"Lovely," the stranger uttered beneath his breath, between kisses and affectionately rubbing his chin against her head, all while petting her mound like one would a kitty. Then she felt something big and rough, she was sure it was his first finger, slowly delve through her moist lips to tease her opening and then back up, using another finger to spread her folds and expose her clit. Gently flicking the hard nub, and again before it slid back down to her opening, pushing in just a small amount, then returning to torture the excited bundle of nerves.

Embarrassed when she heard his finger plunging into the liquid heat of her pussy, she was excited but did not want this stranger to know he could do this to her so easily.

Suddenly, her clit was captured between two strong, scissoring fingers. Held firmly between the two long and thick digits, they lightly tugged their captured treasure.

"Don't hurt me, please just leave me—" Gasping, with fear or pleasure she wasn't entirely sure, but Saff thought she knew and was not willing to submit to being at the mercy of her libido and moved to close her legs.

"Never!" She heard instantly growled low and deeply to her plea and the strong body moved away from her back. Abruptly, she felt him standing in front of her, followed quickly by a thumb rubbing back and forth across the surface of her plump lips. Saff tried to keep her mouth firmly closed, shut to the appendage, the man, and more importantly, the desire he had unleashed. But she did not last long at all, this man had something that was the key to opening things deep within her darkest desires.

Feeling shame, she admitted that this moment was an unmitigated turn-on—being seduced by a stranger, helpless to his desires, and wanting whatever he could give. No matter how foolish it was, she figured there was no way a total nutcase from the cold autumn New York streets could get onto this closed set. Therefore, it was all right to surrender to the sensuous desire he brought to her, that they built together. Later would be soon enough to figure out who was the secretive seducer.

With a sigh, her mouth opened and the patient yet insistent thumb eased in between her teeth, into her cool, moist mouth. Teasing the resting digit with her tongue, she had an instant sense of familiarity, its shape, texture, size and especially, flavor of the loving finger. But the thought dissipated when the finger left her mouth to tease a tight nipple into further excitement.

Click.

There was freedom in her decision to let go and enjoy the erotic moment, a moan escaped uninhibited when his mouth latched onto the other turgid tip. Her admirer nibbled one nipple and strummed the other with his thumb.

With her lusts bedeviled to incredible heights, her hands were clenching and unclenching around the hook with the intense desire he created within her.

Groaning with displeasure when she felt him leave her breasts, she took a quick gulp of air when she felt him kneel at her feet. She was downright stunned speechless when he picked up and moved one boot-painted foot to the side, then picked up the other and moved it out as well, spreading her wide before his eyes, and she could see nothing.

Hearing a deeply inhaled breath, she wondered what he thought of her bald pussy. Because of modeling, she had always had a well-trimmed blonde bush, despite the pleas from the ladies at *The Sisters* each time they gave her a Brazilian wax. Joanne had told her that she would have to be completely shaved for the body paintings and after that first denuding, they kept her smooth as silk. Saff still was not used to seeing herself this way and was not sure she would maintain it.

Two fingers spread plump lips and a swipe from his long firm tongue quickly followed.

"Mmm..."

The tongue returned, danced and taunted her opening when, confident of its welcome, thrust in deep before curling to pull some of her honey down for further savoring. A finger

softly stroking high on her inner thigh mixed with the tongue continuing to drive again and again into the depths of her pussy was the final straw.

Unable to hold back, she mewled with blissful contentment as her head fell back, wallowing in the undivided attention she was being paid. Wishing the blindfold was off so she could see the man giving her this delicious tongue lashing was almost more than she could handle. When he grasped her nub between his teeth and sucked hard while two big fingers thrust hard in and out of her dripping pussy, she was quickly brought to climax.

"Ahh ... oh yes..." Lust added a quaver to her words.

After a few last licks to her quivering cleft, Saff felt him stand before her hanging form. Hearing the rasp of his zipper, she knew that soon, she would be splendidly fucked.

Strong, muscular, haired arms were thrust behind each knee and she was unceremoniously lifted from her feet to hang from the hook, open and at the mercy of this stranger. Then she felt fear gnaw at her nerves.

"Wait ... I am not..." she started.

"Shhh..." And in one stroke, he drove his thick, hard cock into her pussy.

An unbridled scream burst forth and echoed off the tall ceilings in the studio. The invasion hurt badly, she felt her cleft clench firmly around the intruder. Saff heard him grunt but silently thanked him for holding still until she could ease the muscles clasp him so intently. As her pussy relaxed, the stranger moved his cock in little increments. Out a couple

of inches, in for one, out for a few more and in a little more. At first, he kept the rhythm slow and easy.

With her first moan, he started rocking in and out of her moist depths with greater ferocity. She heard the slap of fucking bodies, the wet sounds her pussy made as he effortlessly slid in and out. Feeling his cock swell and her channel accept it all with grace, she went over the fence and into lascivious lust.

Legs now clasped tightly around his waist, she fucked back as much as she could—which wasn't much at all—this man was definitely controlling her and their sexual exertions.

"Ungh..." she moaned with each hard meeting of their bodies, while at the same time, she heard him grunt. As her climax rolled over her body, she screamed, "Yes, yes, yes!" Her cleft grasped and pulsed around the mighty love stick still banging in and out of her.

Then sanity reared its head.

"Are you wearing a condom?" Saff panted.

As if he didn't hear her, that wondrous cock continued its mighty thrusting.

"Hey, no one comes in my body without protection unless I say so!" Anger crept into her words.

A hand reached up and tugged her blindfold down around her neck and she was staring into the lust-filled golden-yellow eyes of Dirk.

"I do, Saffron Hoyt! You belong to me, this pussy is mine, as is your heart, and you will take every bit of my seed!"

The cock thundering in and out of her cleft swelled and pulsed, grew and pumped load after load of cum deep inside

her pussy. All while she was looking into the eyes of the man she thought had betrayed her and who was gazing back at her with painfully open honesty.

Never wavering from the body and soul connection he had hoped and planned for, had fought to make, he was going to hold this moment close to his heart with a tight fist. Dirk spoke his mind as he continued to leave his still firm erection deep inside her wet warmth, unwilling to stop the little bump and grind motion, subconsciously trying to delve deeper inside her hot embrace.

"Your roommate lied! I never cheated on you, it never entered my mind, and more importantly, I was never tempted to fuck another woman. It was always you and will continue to be, so get used to that notion. I am not a quitter and I won't let you be one either."

Dirk gently disengaged her legs from around his hips and held her steady until they eased beneath her. Thrusting his hands deep in her hair, tangling his fingers within the wild curly length, he held her still for his kiss, trying to show her all the emotions that resided within his soul.

"Do not mistake me, Saffy, I am pissed off with you. Where was your trust in me?" He backed off her lips to rest a breath away and stated his claim.

Taking a step back, he went to walk around behind her toward the door, while putting his prick back in his pants.

Finally, he stopped and turned around to face her hanging frame, her beautiful face peering awkwardly around her raised arm watching him as he zipped his fly.

"We're not done, nor will we ever be. Haven't you figured out we were made for each other? In case you haven't yet realized, you should know that the pillow book is my commission and the final requirement of the contract is for you to hand deliver it to me on January seventeenth. When the completed book is delivered to you, there will be instructions you are to follow explicitly, do you agree?"

After her silent nodding assent, he picked up his coat from the floor where he had tossed it earlier, put it on and looked into her eyes when he told her his truth.

"I love you, Saff. It's been a terrible couple months without you, there's no joy in playing and I cannot concentrate on anything but your absence. I don't want to force the issue, but at the same time, I want you to give us a fair chance. No more dodging phone calls. I'm trying to be patient, but that's becoming more and more difficult each day, so please, don't lock me out of your life so carelessly again. It hurts too much."

Big blue eyes, normally not so difficult to read, stared back at him. Dirk paused one last time, taking in the gorgeous woman hanging before him and gruffly told her one last truth. "You make one fucking beautiful cowgirl, but you are truly glorious with my cum coating your thighs."

Click. Click. Click.

Chapter Three

"Are you all right, Saff?"

"Ahhh, there you are, Bruce. Where have you been?" She spoke casually but inside, was a turmoil.

She heard the big bear of a man walk over to the workings of the winch holding her strung up for the illusion shot and start the hook's descent. Once it was low enough, she lifted her cuffed hands off the hook and stepped back.

"I was right here. Please don't be mad, I know Dirk and consider him a friend. A shoot I did years ago for *Sports Illustrated* of up and coming athletes included him. I thought he was not only gorgeous, and yes, out of my league, but genuinely, a great guy to know. A year later, I was working on a personal project and I thought of him and asked if he would pose for me, which he did without hesitation. Eventually, we became friends.

"When he first met you, he asked if I had ever worked with you. We had never worked together, but I knew your reputation and told him that you were a solid soul in an industry rife with muck. Last year in April, you were gone quite a bit on a handful of remote shoots in a row and he was missing you badly. It was right after they had lost that painful playoff series and he and a few of his teammates were in the mood for a real caveman booze up. At his invitation, I joined the brouhaha. During that night, I mentioned to Dirk the idea of a pillow book to, ummm..." Suddenly he stopped speaking, not sure whether she really wanted to know the truth, or if he could share the personal knowledge.

"Come on, give it to me straight, Bruce," she said, holding her hands out for him to take the handcuffs from her wrists.

"Fine, to use as stroke material when you weren't able to be with him." The words rushed forth. It has been easier to speak of with Dirk, guy talk, than with Saffron.

"Oh." That had not been what she was expecting to hear. Going toward a chair resting against a wall, she picked up the robe and put it on. Not sure what she thought he would say, the concept of Dirk masturbating off his physical frustrations brought a blush to her cheeks.

"We talked about it off and on, but mainly in throwing out ideas for scenes, and always light and easy. Then one day, he's standing on my doorstep, utterly gutted by your desertion—his words, not mine—and with a plan to get you back. When you and I met about the project, I was surprised you hadn't recognized the connection. Then again, I didn't do anything to bring it to your attention either." Bruce felt like he was on more comfortable ground now.

"I did know you were friends, but never hooked up this project with Dirk, so gave it no further thought. Besides, I guess if I'm being honest, secretly, I wanted you to go back to him and tell him all sorts of things about how great I was and how wonderful I looked, and make him regret losing me so foolishly."

"Do you believe him when he says he didn't cheat on you?" The words were out before he thought them through.

"Are you asking to satisfy your own curiosity, or for Dirk?" Saff wondered, arms crossed over her chest in a clearly protective stance.

"Both, I guess. Would it be so wrong to ease his mind?" Truthfulness was his only option.

"He knows where I live and in the time since this happened, he hasn't once come by to talk to me. Sure, there have been phone calls and text messages, but this was

devastating. If he had been so terribly wronged and it was important enough for him to fix it, he should have come to my house." Her bruised ego had taken over the conversation.

"I have to defend him here. I'm not making excuses, but he is in the middle of hockey season and you know how hectic the team's travel schedule is in season. Besides, this all started because he stopped by your house to leave you flowers since he was going to be gone by the time you returned and Maxi put the moves on him big time. Dirk chose the high road and didn't mention it to you, but I think now, he regrets that decision." Bruce knew quite a bit about the couple's falling out but was feeling close to the line that should not be crossed by a third person.

Too much to take in, her mind was spinning from all that had happened. Saff found it difficult to focus on any one thing, except the memory of Dirk's recent wicked possession of her body, and the semen dripping down her thighs. Knowing she still loved him and desperately wanted to trust him with her heart, she also knew their relationship hadn't been perfect before. They were apart almost as much as they had been together and that was not something she wanted to continue.

Looking up at Bruce, she felt the tears well up in her eyes and told him she wanted to go home.

After a moment, he sighed and pulled his phone from his pocket and made a call to Joanne. Next thing Saff knew, the woman was there and, with an arm around her shoulder, escorted her to the dressing room where they worked on getting the paint off. The woman worked methodically and

professionally on clearing her body of the illusionary paint. There was no way to hide the semen, but Saff didn't offer any explanations.

When she was clean and wanting to be alone, dressed in panties, bra and t-shirt, she turned and hugged the woman, thanking Joanne for the experience of a lifetime.

Acting automatically, she put on her jeans, sweater, thick wool socks and heavy winter boots before she turned to the chair that held the rest of her things. Wrapping the scarf around her neck, Saff next put on her heavy coat and picked up her backpack for the walk home. It wasn't far, but it had turned frigid outside with the turning of the calendar to December. Hands thrusting into her coat pockets, she confirmed a glove still resided in each.

She took a deep breath and looked around the room to make sure she left nothing behind because this was the end of the shoot and she would not be back. Saff needed to get home and into her comfort zone before she could think through what had happened and what she was going to do about it all. Actually, she thought she already knew what she would do but her inherent honesty needed to give Dirk the courtesy to think about what she learned today before she made any decisions.

Loving the city in late autumn was easy. People and shops were ready for the holidays, there was a dampness to the air that traveled on a good breeze and knocked leaves from trees and around the streets. Personally, it invoked images of curling up before a fire with her man and loving the grey days away.

Declining the car service that had been arranged for her each day was standard. Saying goodbye to Bruce was another matter. Over the past month, she had grown to like and respect him both professionally and personally. Today, she had been thrown for a loop, and he was a witness.

While he hugged her within his large embrace and could not see her face, she asked what had dawned on her while Joanne helped her clean up.

"Did you photograph us ... well ... uhmmm..." Saff was still surprised by what had happened but a few key moments were starting to filter through her confusion.

"While you made love? Yes, your loving each other was truly beautiful. I stayed because you were blindfolded, feeling vulnerable, and no matter how much I think of Dirk, I would have stopped it if you had said 'no' a second time."

"Professionally, this has been an incredible once-in-a-lifetime experience and definitely the perfect job to end a career on and I thank you for that. As for today, well, I don't know whether to be embarrassed, or thankful. You're a kind and thoughtful person." She gave him a heartfelt hug in return.

With a final squeeze, he stepped back. She was looking for him to offer her some sort of sage advice. Instead, he said that he was sure she would go onto the next phase of her life with all the grace, beauty and energy as she had with the one she was leaving and that he hoped to see her in the future.

Offering a final smile, she left the building with her brain whirling with what had taken place, but the moment she stepped into the fresh fall air, it all went blank and she

enjoyed the peace she found. Heading up Houston, she turned right onto Bedford. The trees that lined the road were starting to drop their crisp red leaves and spread freely in the wind.

Arriving at her old townhouse, she went up the stairs and was greeted at the door by Ice, her beautiful longhaired silver-grey Persian cat with piercing blue eyes. This little fluff-ball, a gift from Dirk, had been her saving grace over this horrible period and it seemed only fair that she share the latest twist with her pet.

"Well, Ice, it has been quite a day. Not only was this the last day of the shoot, but I saw Dirk." Moving into the kitchen, she pulled out a delicate flowered plate and put a soupçon of tuna on it and placed it on the floor for her kitty to nibble while she reheated some fried rice for herself. She continued talking as she prepared dinner.

"We had a bit of an interlude and, I know you'll be shocked, but I got off on not knowing who was doing me, although I think somewhere deep inside, I did know. Once my eyes were no longer covered and I saw who it was, well I don't need to tell you that he was as gorgeous as always. By that time, he'd already given me an orgasm as only he can, one of those toe-curling, screaming type of climaxes. And later, after he left, I found out that not only were we watched, but also photographed. Shocking I know, but exciting in a naughty way." Saff enjoyed these conversations, some people write in a journal, she unloaded onto her cat.

With the bowl of heated rice in hand, Saff headed over to the other side of the kitchen and sat at the little table that looked out over the small backyard.

"I know over the past few months, we had hashed out our future plans but I feel the need to consider what he told me and see if it matters." Blowing on each forkful before eating, she slowly made her way through the bowl, thinking all the while. "I really have missed him, Ice, and not just in the bedroom. Although you are a good cuddler, his absence there is still a big, empty space."

* * * *

Lasting all of three weeks, and she put it down more to experiencing a festive holiday without him, Saff wrapped up warmly, caught the bus and headed over the river to the *Continental Arena* to see the last home Devils' match before Christmas. Buying a ticket at the last minute had her sitting fairly high up in the stands, but the sound of the hockey stick scraping over ice and knocking hard against the puck was heard no matter where one sat.

The dichotomy of seeing huge, strong, fiercely-built men skating so gracefully, with little to no effort, still threw her for a loop. She couldn't skate on the boots available for rent at ice rinks, much less on these thinner, professional blades. No matter how one looked at it, the sport of ice hockey was just odd all the way around. A fast-paced, body thumping, elegant dance is how she viewed it but had never told Dirk that, he had balked when she told him how refined and smooth he was on the ice, just like a ballet dancer.

Oh, that had been an interesting evening. Taken to the brink of coming over and over again, she'd finally screamed and clawed demanding her satisfaction. That had been a little over six months into their relationship and her beloved Ice had shown up right before his next away series. The big softy had said it was so she would not be lonely while he was gone, she had been anyway and the kitty was still trying to work that magic without any success.

Admittedly, right now she was mainly watching Dirk's A-team come on the ice at eight minute intervals. They scored before the second period ended and she was up on her feet screaming for their good fortune one minute and gasping in horror the next.

As captain of the Devils with a reputation as a fair but brutal hitter, Dirk was a target and some unknown on the visitor's team took him to the boards, hard. He was down on the ice for a few moments, which stunned the home team supporters. Teammates on the ice shook their gloves off, tossed their sticks down, and went after the guy big time. Next thing she knew, both benches had emptied but Saff still had her gaze trained on Dirk, who was up on his feet with the team doctor holding something to the side of his head and leading him off the ice.

The ice where he had been laying was covered in blood.

Fear had her hastily gathering her coat, scarf and backpack before she took off down the steep stairs. She was almost to the lower level when word over the loudspeaker announced he was fine and would be heading back out to the ice. Pausing, she looked up at the arena screen, seeing him

shrugging into a fresh jersey before he skated out and moved over to the bench to retrieve a new stick, then he went right back out into the thick of it all.

Was she crazy to love this man?

* * * *

The box had arrived by special delivery yesterday, the twelfth day of January, and she had been staring at the plain brown box resting on her coffee table ever since.

There had been many a diversionary errand but nothing worked on drawing her attention for long.

Picking up the knife she had retrieved earlier, she sliced neatly through the taped seams and spread open the flaps. Resting atop a layer of fluffy white shipping popcorn was a crisp white envelope with her name written in Dirk's handwriting.

Opening the sealed missive, she took a deep breath, then began to read what were basic instructions on how she was to deliver the box to him personally if she wanted to resume their relationship.

If she didn't, then she was to turn around and post the box to him at home instead.

Chapter Four

The final decision, once she relaxed in a nice hot bubble bath with a glass of wine, had been easy. Saff loved Dirk, believed wholeheartedly in his love and trust, and was ready to see where life would lead them next.

As the note of instructions had stated, a car arrived at her front door five days later at six in the evening, ready to drive

her over the river to the arena for the match. Waiting at the box office, she was to retrieve a ticket and a security escort. The man reaffirmed he was to ensure the box was not opened or touched before he placed it in Mr. Madison's car after the game ended. Taking a deep breath, she nervously released the box into this man's hands, trusting Dirk's arrangements.

The seat was prime, a few rows behind the home bench and over towards the ramp, a perfect viewing location.

Her nerves on edge, she fidgeted with the fringed ends of her bright blue pashmina scarf that curled around her neck and over her black thick cashmere coat she had yet to take off. The January cold was harsh so far this year; it felt like a big snow was coming their way, but it had not made an appearance yet.

Tonight, she had thought to dress to entice but with it being a family atmosphere, she decided to go with comfortable casual and save the seduction for later. Going to the game meant a pair of well-worn jeans that she topped with one of his large white fine cotton dress shirts that had been left in her closet. At her worst moments in the past months, she had slept in one that had been in the laundry when the end had come.

Or what she thought had been the end.

The final touch was a pair of cherry red cowboy boots that he had gifted her with for her last birthday, hence how he had known about her fantasy of being strung up wearing nothing but the boots and then being ravished. The blindfold and gun belt, she assumed, had been his ideas.

Standing to take off her coat, scarf and backpack, she held them in her lap, not really wanting them to touch the floor with all its sticky spilled treasures. Turning to lower the seat before she sat, Saff glanced over toward the ramp and noticed the team was congregating before they skated out onto the ice. Looking to see if she could spy her man within the group was simple, she could see him, standing head and shoulders above all the others, and that was no mean feat, considering the other men on his team.

Also making it effortless was the fact he stood up against the plexiglas wall that separated the audience from them and he was looking directly at her. The strong and determined game face briefly gave way to love and a small, self-satisfied arrogant head nod before he moved back within the fold of his teammates.

The game flew by for Saff, she loved hockey matches but really, it was afterwards that was going to be the big event for her. Of course, the Devils won and she had a feeling she would be watching them win through the playoffs and Stanley Cup final in late spring. Hard to imagine spring when it was so frightfully cold right now.

Once the game had finished and most of the people had left, she ran an errand and was back in her seat with plenty of time to spare before the security man would be back. He was to be her escort down to the locker room, although she had always preferred waiting out in the hallway, instead of inside the male-dominated room.

She was left in the hallway while the man went outside to Dirk's car with the box, then he returned a few minutes later

and handed the car keys for her to hold and then entered the bastion of maleness, the locker room. Moments later, the big red door burst open and full of energy, Dirk strode over to her and wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her up flush against him, held her tight and whispered he would never let her go.

Obviously, he had taken a shower because his hair was wet and he did not smell of sweat, although sometimes, she did not mind the odor of his exertions. Wearing dress pants and shirt, he set her down, reached for the keys and her hand and made for the back door and his car.

The drive to his home, an old Victorian gem hidden in the hills of the twin towns Peapack and Gladstone, was not a far drive from the arena, about twenty-five to thirty minutes, but tonight, it felt endless. They spoke of times missed but said nothing of either the pillow book, or the break they had suffered, that would be hashed out in less sexually charged times. Dirk was all for her leaving modeling behind and trying her hand in a fresh avenue, as long as she was firmly settled at his side.

Noting the distance remaining to be about ten minutes, she decided to let her surprise out of the bag, so to speak.

Saying nothing, she started working to release the large buttons that traced down the front of her soft, long coat and then spread it wide. Resting quietly in her backpack were the rest of her clothes, except for her boots. She stretched a silken bare leg out so he could see it out of the corner of his eye.

Saff smiled like the Cheshire cat when she heard his deep intake of air. *Got him*, and it felt good after he had literally nailed her that day of the last shoot.

Using her hand, she slowly stroked it up her inner thigh, over her belly, then up to cup and tease her breasts.

"Shit!" Full of shock, the word came straight from his balls.

"Ummm, is something wrong, stud?" She knew his weaknesses just as he had known hers.

"You're a cruel woman, Saffron." This was said with pleasure rising right along with his cock.

When she felt a surge in the car's sudden burst of forward movement, a secret thrill rose within her. Pulling into his driveway and through the winding road, he slid to a stop, not taking the time to park in the garage as he usually did. Undoing his seatbelt, he was out like a flash, but she was quicker.

With her coat still on, she spread herself across the front of his low-slung Jaguar in the blazing white glare of the security light wearing nothing but her boots and gooseflesh. She paid no attention to the cold.

"Take me, Dirk."

"Shit, Saff, you're going to be the death of me," he muttered as he unbuttoned and unzipped his pants, then pulled out his hard cock. Walking slowly up to her, he stroked the hard length as he moved in between her legs, putting his other hand on the hood next to her head for leverage.

Once he had lodged the weeping crown within her slit, she moved to hook her boot heels onto the bumper, then spread her legs wide around his hips. Heat radiated off him in waves,

seeping into her body. Releasing his cock, he moved his hand to the other side of her head and said fiercely, "Don't ever fucking leave me like that again, Saff!"

"I love you, Dirk. I did then and I always will—now, will you thrust that big, hard cock deep inside my pussy? Give me your heat." Looking him in the eye, Saff gave him back his total honesty.

Growling, she was sure with both lust and satisfaction, he hammered his hard length in and out of her on the hood of his car, giving her no mercy, but then again, none was requested.

The local wildlife population was being entertained by the rough and wild fucking taking place in the spotlight, as were any others who were up at the late hour and happened upon them, but neither participant cared. Nor were they paying attention to the freezing temps.

"Fucking right I'll give you my cock, it's the only one allowed to play in this lush ground!" Pounding his length deep within her wet cleft over and over again, he watched her breasts bounce with the force. He thrilled with each "ungh" he forced from her mouth.

Backs weren't meant to lay across metal surfaces in the cold, but all she felt at that moment was the hard cock carving its own path in and out of her pussy with such force, her breasts bounced and rubbed against Dirk's covered chest, exciting them both further. Saff's nipples felt raw as the iced tips scraped across his warm, clothed chest.

"Shit, your tits are so tight!"

The air they exhaled rested heavily between them as they grunted and groaned, but neither stopped the untamed fucking until Saff wrapped her legs around his hips and screamed, her pussy spasming around his pulsing, seed-shooting cock.

"Dirk!"

"Fuck yeah, Saff!"

Dirk abruptly stood with Saff wrapped around him, his prick still buried deep within her heated cleft and her coat flapping behind her. The lovers moved up the front stairs and into the warm, welcoming embrace of the cozy old house, leaving mistakes and the cold behind.

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THE RESOLUTION SOLUTION by Peggy Hunter

"No more meaningless sex."

Alana Vincent winced as her two friends gazed back at her in stunned silence.

Barbara dropped the potato chip she was about to pop into her mouth and sat back on the sofa. "No more meaningless sex," she repeated. "Al, we're supposed to make New Year's resolutions we can keep."

"Come on," Colleen chimed in, quickly dismissing Alana's resolution. "Pick something a little more realistic."

Alana grinned sarcastically. "Really?" she said as her gaze leveled on the two friends sitting on the sofa across from her. "So, Colleen, you really intend to join the gym and work out daily? You made the same resolution last year and you lasted less than a week." Colleen moaned softly and waved a dismissing hand at Alana. She turned her attention to Barbara. "And do you really think for a moment that you'll become head nurse after working at *Toronto General* for just two years?"

"Well, at least it's a realistic resolution," Barbara retorted.

"What's so unrealistic about my resolution?" Alana asked.

Both friends snickered. "Come on, Al," Barbara said, "you were our sexcapade leader all through college. You making a resolution for no meaningless sex is like the Dalai Lama swearing he'll get revenge on those who have insulted him." Both friends burst into peels of laughter.

Alana knew her two best friends were being nothing less than truthful. During college, they had earned a reputation for being a lot of fun, both inside and outside the bedroom ... but mostly, inside.

Alana, Barbara and Colleen ... the *ABC's* of damn good sex! And Alana had definitely played the role as their ringleader.

Saying she was desperate to break free from a strict, religious, small town upbringing was an understatement. She loved her parents madly, but spent her life being sheltered and watched carefully with suspicious eyes. God forbid anyone should lead their precious daughter astray. The moment she hit college, she vowed things would change. And, holy shit, they certainly did.

While her parents were back home bragging to the neighbors that Alana was studying to become a nurse, a healer of the body and, if they had raised her properly, of souls as well, she was quickly learning skills her parents would not approve of.

Neither Barbara nor Colleen could believe Alana was still a virgin at eighteen and quickly set out to resolve the situation. Within a week after they moved in together, Alana lost her virginity, and better than that, she discovered that she loved sex.

Like a child with a new toy, Alana couldn't get enough. She and her roommates quickly earned the reputation of being *good time girls*, as her parents would call it.

That was all well and good during college. But Alana was twenty-five now, working full time in the ER at *Toronto Mercy*

Hospital. She was a grownup and longed for a relationship with substance.

Perhaps Barbara and Colleen wanted to continue the sex-play, but for Alana, it was over. From this day forward, she resolved that she would not have sex with a man unless they were in a committed relationship.

"Hardi-har-har," Alana said sarcastically. "Laugh if you want, but I stand by my resolution."

Barbara waved a hand in dismissal. "I'm willing to wager my next paycheck that you won't get past midnight without having meaningless sex."

Colleen laughed. "Count me in. I wager Al will be humping some guy before daylight New Year's Day."

Alana rolled her eyes. "Thanks so much for your loving support," she said sarcastically.

"Hey," Colleen said as she glanced at her watch. "It's almost nine. We better get going to Pete's party before it gets crowded."

Barbara bounced up from the sofa. "Shit! Is it that late already?" She smoothed the long black shirt she wore and adjusted the spaghetti straps of her red silk shirt. "How do I look?"

"Perfectly fuckable," Barbara said impatiently. "If we don't get there soon, we won't get a good place on the stairs overlooking the door. I just hate it when we can't see the available men walking in!"

"Who do you think you'll fuck tonight?" Colleen asked as they headed for the door.

Barbara shrugged. "No idea," she said. "That's what I love about Pete's New Year's bashes. You just never know who'll turn up."

"Get the lead out," Colleen said when she noticed Alana hadn't moved from the armchair.

"I'll be along shortly," Alana replied.

"Jesus," Colleen said as they opened the door. "What the hell's with you anyway? Are you sick?"

"No, I'm fine." Alana said. "You guys go ahead. I'll be there soon."

Barbara looked concerned and hesitated at the door. "Go," Alana said. "Save me a spot on the stairs."

Alana breathed a sigh of relief when the door closed firmly behind her two friends. She leapt from the armchair and ran to the door. She twisted the lock and pressed her back against it. There was no damn way she'd show her face at Pete's tonight. Not after what happened at the hospital Christmas party.

With her two best friends gone up to the party in the penthouse suite several floors above her apartment, Alana opened the fridge and took out a bottle of white wine. For the first time in several years, she was going to spend New Year's Eve alone. Colleen and Barbara would soon find themselves with more available men than they could manage and be too busy to notice Alana never showed up.

There was no way she could face Pete after making such a fool of herself at the Christmas party a week ago.

Doctor Peter Howard was ten years her senior. When she was hired as an ER nurse, Peter quickly took her under his

wing. Tall, blond and incredibly handsome, Alana quickly joined the ranks of every other single nurse who lusted after the good doctor. Pete was well aware that his charming smile made his deep blue eyes twinkle with what could only be mischief, yet he never once made a move on any of the nurses.

Pete had always treated Alana like a little sister. He found an apartment for her in his building, checked on her often and even scrutinized the men who showed an interest in her. He'd compliment how she kept her long chestnut hair tucked in a ponytail when they were at work and how the dark green scrubs she often wore brought out the emerald shade of her eyes. Every time the man spoke to her, the deeper she fell under his spell. Certainly, being considered his kid sister was very frustrating when all she wanted to do was drag him into her bed.

And then, last week, all that changed. After finishing the evening shift on Christmas day, Pete invited her to join him at the staff party held in the offices on the fourth floor of the hospital. They arrived shortly after eleven p.m. Pete quickly disappeared into the crowd leaving Alana to her own devices. It wasn't long before Doctor Hamilton, the resident sleaze, cornered her. Decidedly drunk, the doctor made several references to Alana's reputation, all based on the gossip mongers who worked at the hospital. When Alana refused to give him a blow job, Hamilton grasped her arm.

"Doctor Hamilton," Alana said as she struggled to get out of his grip, "let me go right now, or I'll give you a kick in the nuts!"

Hamilton leaned in close to her, the stench of gin on his breath almost knocked Alana on her butt. "Come on," he said, his voice slurred. "All I want is a blow job. I hear you're the best."

"Let me go, you asshole," Alana said through clenched teeth. Hamilton's grasp on her arm was beginning to hurt.

He pulled Alana through the crowd, headed toward the men's bathroom. She swung around, prepared to hit him in the balls with her knee. For a drunken man, he was damn fast. He quickly pivoted as she swung. "None of that," he warned, wagging his finger in her face. "You want to be nice to me. All I have to do is tell the administrator that I don't like you and you'll be out of a job like that." He snapped his fingers.

"And just how is your wife these days, Doug?"

Relief washed over Alana when she heard Pete's rich baritone voice behind her. He reached forward and wrapped an arm around Alana's shoulder, pulling her hips against him as his gaze fell to Hamilton's hand on her arm.

Hamilton's hand quickly fell away as he looked up at the man towering over both of them. "Judy's fine."

"I can imagine being the hospital administrator takes a lot of her time," he said as he slowly pushed Alana behind him. "In fact, I'm willing to bet she doesn't know what you're up to from one day to the next."

Hamilton grinned sheepishly, but didn't utter a single word as he quickly disappeared into the crowd.

Alana rubbed her arm. "God, Pete, thanks so much for helping me out. I wasn't sure just how to get rid of him." She looked up at him and smiled. "What a jerk."

Her breath caught in her throat as the smile faded from her face. Pete's mouth was set in a firm line, his chiseled jaw flexed with tension and his eyes sparked in anger. "What the fuck did you think you were doing?" he said through clenched teeth.

"I didn't do anything," Alana said defensively. "He approached me; I had nothing to do with it."

Pete shook his head and clasped her hand. He tugged her toward the door and pulled her down the hall. "Where are we going?" Alana asked.

"Shut up," he said as he dragged her to a door and fished keys out of his pocket. She was vaguely aware of his name on a bronze plate as he pulled her inside and slammed the door shut. He tossed the keys onto the desk and swung her around to face him. He pointed to the sofa behind her. "Sit down," he said.

Alana frowned. "I will not sit down until you tell me what's going on."

Pete's hands cupped her shoulders and pushed. Alana sailed backwards, her arms flailing as she lost her balance and landed unceremoniously on the couch. "What the fuck did you do that for?" she wailed.

Pete leaned over slightly as his gaze pierced her. "What was that for?" he repeated, his face red with anger. "I'll tell you what that was for. I'm sick to death of looking out for you. You seem determined to crawl off with any man who

gives you the nod and I'm here to tell you that I'm not watching out for you anymore."

Alana sat up straight, her eyes shooting daggers as anger bubbled up inside her, too. "I'm a big girl and can take care of myself."

"Yes, I saw how well you were taking care of yourself at the party," Pete said sarcastically.

"Well, what's it to you anyway?" Alana retorted. "Who the hell asked you to look out for me?" she cried.

"Your father did!" Pete roared.

Alana knew he regretted the words the moment he blurted them out. His hands flew to his hair as he twisted away from her and walked to his desk. "I beg your pardon?"

"He caught wind of your escapades in college and asked me to keep an eye on you."

"You know my father?" Alana's voice squeaked.

"I'm sure you don't remember me," Pete said, keeping his back turned away from her. "I grew up in Shawton, too. I left long ago to attend college to become a doctor. My parents attend the same church yours do. Harold and Agatha Howard."

Alana felt her heart plummet to her feet. Harry and Aggie Howard were his parents? Why hadn't this occurred to her before? Of course, they had a son named Peter. He was the second youngest of their five sons.

"And so my dad asked you to keep an eye on me," Alana said sadly. So much for hoping Pete would ever take an interest in her. But it certainly did explain why she seemed to rise above the other drooling nurses. "I'm sorry my parents

put you in this situation," she said carefully as she rose from the sofa and turned toward the door. "I can assure you that I don't need anyone to look out for me."

Pete quickly closed the distance between them. He grasped her shoulders and spun around to face him. "Don't you?" he asked. "What would have happened if I hadn't been there for you tonight?"

"Okay," she admitted, "I did need your help at the party. But for the most part, I can take care of myself."

Alana pulled out of his grasp and walked to the door. She turned and smiled at him. "I hereby release you from any promises you made to my father."

As she turned to walk out, strong arms wrapped around her waist and pulled her away from the door. Pete whirled her around and stared down into her eyes. "What makes you think I want to be let go?" he said softly.

Alana blinked as his face hovered close to hers. "Because you said you couldn't do it anymore," she said softly, her breath coming in short gasps.

"I can't," Pete said equally as softly.

"Then," Alana said breathlessly, "what's the problem?"

Pete's mouth answered her question as his lips crushed hers. Alana sank against him, her arms wrapping around his neck and his mouth greedily drank from hers. Pete's breathing was irregular as he pulled away and looked down at her through hooded eyes. "I can't keep my promise to your father because I want you for myself," he said raggedly.

"I want you, too," Alana said softly as she tipped her face to receive his lips over hers again. Pete's hands snaked down

her back and rested on her buttocks. His rock hard shaft stabbed into her belly as his fingers curled into her skirt and slowly pulled it up over her waist. His hands gripped her hips and lifted her up, pressing her back against the door as he tucked her legs around his waist. Alana gasped as she felt his fingers delve at her core, poking at her nylons as they pressed against her slick pussy.

She gasped again when she heard the rip of the nylon as his fingers pierced through and finally slid over the crotch of her cotton panties. "Just how many layers are you wearing?" he growled against her cheek as his fingers pushed the cotton fabric aside and found the damp prize hidden beneath. "Ah, there we are," he said as his fingers slid into her moist core.

Alana's body reacted to his intimate touch. Her core dampened, beckoning his fingers to explore her further as her nipples pebbled and cried out for his touch. She thrust her torso against him, reveling in the sweet torture as her blouse slid against his chest.

She was vaguely aware of buttons popping as his one free hand ripped at her blouse. He pushed her bra over her breasts and dipped his head to take a peaked nipple into his mouth. As his lips suckled her, his free hand slid over her vagina. He pushed two fingers inside her, gently massaging her inner folds before he pushed another finger inside.

Alana gasped as his fingers filled her, pushing deep inside her. His thumb ground against her engorged clitoris, pushing with such force that it hurt and yet, the pain brought her so close to orgasm, she thought she might explode right then and there.

"You witch," Pete said against her chest as his teeth grazed her nipple. "You thought I hadn't noticed you. All the while, you thought I was there to protect you as you wagged your sweet ass in my face day in and day out."

Any words that came to mind quickly dissipated when she felt one slick finger slip from her pussy and rub against her anus. As experienced as Alana was with men, her number one rule had always been 'no anal sex.' And now, as she felt Pete's finger rub against her ass, she wasn't sure why she lived by the rule.

"I've wanted to fill you with my cock from the moment we met," Pete said as he fingered the hole. She cried out when his finger filled her ass, twisting back and forth as he slowly screwed his finger as high as it would go. With his fingers still filling her pussy, Alana cried out as she began to pulse against his hand.

"Oh God," she panted against his chest. "I'm going to come."

"No, you aren't," Pete said firmly. He pulled his fingers out of her and wrapped his arms around her waist. "You aren't allowed to come until my cock is firmly planted inside you."

Alana's fingers ripped at the fly of his pants. "I want you so much, Pete. Fuck me now!"

He brushed her feeble hands aside. She was vaguely aware of the sound of a zipper sliding down. Her hands instantly flew to his cock, her body opening to him as she braced her legs around his hips in preparation. She gasped when she reached between their bodies and touched his

engorged need. His sheer girth terrified her as her fingers wrapped around the base of his cock.

Pete didn't wait for an invitation as he pressed the tip of his cock against her slick vagina. The fear she had that he was too big was quickly buried deep in her throat as he pressed his cock against her slit and opened her wide. The pain she felt was excruciating and yet, so exhilarating, as her vagina stretched to accept him.

"You're so damn tight," he whispered against her ear. "Are you sure you're not a virgin?"

She knew he didn't expect an answer and thank God for that. She struggled to keep her emotions in check, not to shed tears as he planted his cock firmly inside her, laying claim to her body ... and God help her, her soul. For the first time in her life, she felt more than just filled, she, as a woman, felt fulfilled. She gave herself to him freely, allowing him to set the pace. For the first time, she felt completely out of control and gladly gave herself up to Pete.

"Do you want me to fuck you hard?" he asked as his hips ground against her.

"Yes," she hissed, barely able to find her voice.

"Your wish is my command," he said as he rammed his cock inside her, slamming her body against the door. His fingers dug into her buttocks as he reeled against her, slowly pulling his cock out of her and then crashing against her again, his balls smacking against her soft folds as he filled her with his hard length.

Alana wasn't sure she could take anymore. His body thrusting against her ignited flames within her, her blood

heated to boiling as she felt her body quickly race toward orgasm.

"Stop!" she cried, knowing she was about to reach the verge of insanity. Her hands pawed at his chest, attempting to push him away.

"Like hell," Pete said, his hot breath fanning her face. "I've wanted you for way too long. Now that I've got my cock inside you, I intend to take it to the max."

The max? What the hell was that? Alana knew she couldn't take much more as his cock slammed into her again and again. Each stroke pushed her closer to oblivion. And then Pete reached behind her, pushed his finger into her ass again and Alana instantly howled her release. Pete moaned as he rocked against her, his body going rigid. Alana cried out as his hot cum scorched its way through her body. Tears sprang to her eyes as she clutched Pete to her. His hands fell away from her butt as her legs slowly slid to the floor. Thank God his arms held her, otherwise, she knew she would have slid down, her legs unable to hold her upright.

Pete quickly pulled the zipper of his pants up and glanced down at her. "Damn," he said. "I didn't mean for that to happen."

Alana grappled with her open blouse and attempted to smooth her rumpled skirt. Her fingers closed over the door knob and twisted. "I'm very sorry I've dragged you down to my level," she said.

Before he could reply, she pulled the door open and ran out of his office. She heard him calling her name, asking her to wait, but Alana didn't stop. She didn't wait for the elevator

and raced to the stairs, taking them two at a time. She had to get away; she had to put some distance between herself and Pete.

Alana was pulled from her deep memories when the phone rang. She set the wine bottle aside and picked up the portable phone.

"Hello?"

"Happy New Year," her mother cried. "I told your father that we had to call, even though he thought you'd be long gone to celebrate by now."

Alana struggled to smile as she replied. "Happy New Year, Mom," she said softly. "As a matter of fact, I'm not going."

"You aren't going to Pete's party?" Her mother sounded far too disappointed for someone who wouldn't admit she knew Doctor Howard.

"I know I've talked about how much fun his New Year's bash is, but this year, I've decided to stay home and ring in the New Year on my own."

"Oh," her mother said hesitantly. "Just a minute, I think your father wants to talk to you."

Alana chuckled when she heard the urgent whispers as her mother handed the phone to her dad.

"Happy New Year," her father's gruff voice sounded on the phone. "What's this I hear about you not going to Pete's party this year?"

Alana sighed. There was no time like the present to tell the truth. "Dad," she began, "I know you asked Pete to look out for me. I just want you to know that I'm a big girl and can take care of myself."

Her father sighed heavily before he spoke. "I didn't want you to know. Letting you go was the hardest thing I ever did. When I heard you were sexually active in college, I wanted to drive to Toronto and bring you home."

Alana gasped. "Oh my God," she said. "How did you even know about it?"

"Colleen's aunt lives here in town. She was very upset when Colleen's mother told her what was going on," her father supplied.

"Why didn't you say anything while I was in college?"

"Because every living soul has the right to sow their wild oats. Harry and Aggie introduced me to Peter soon after you graduated. I asked Peter to look after you. I have to admit that I hoped you'd take a shining to him, that maybe you'd marry Peter and leave your old lifestyle behind."

"Dad," Alana began. She had no idea what she wanted to say. She finally said the only thing that came to mind. "I'm really sorry."

"All we want is a couple grandbabies," her father said. "Is that too much to ask?"

No, it wasn't. But Alana's life was about something else. And her father had no idea just how much it had spiraled out of control. Even though she would have loved the idea of a future with Pete, the sex they shared after the Christmas party quickly sealed the deal. She hadn't heard from Pete since and didn't expect she ever would. "I'm sorry, Dad. In my case," Alana said, "I guess it is too much to ask."

* * * *

Alana had downed the second glass of wine by eleven that night. The clock quickly ticked down the minutes to the New Year and Alana struggled with her resolve to spend the evening alone. Barbara, Colleen and many other good friends were checking their watches several floors above her in the penthouse suite.

And Pete. She hadn't heard a word from him since she walked out of his office a week ago. Any hope she harbored he'd burst threw her door and announce his undying love for her faded with every tick of the clock toward midnight.

Alana sighed. No more meaningless sex. She stood by her resolution. Col and Babs didn't know it, but the moment she shared with Pete had secured her resolve. She loved him, her life was nothing without him and, she knew, if she couldn't have him, she would never have sex again.

Alana sighed heavily as she tipped the glass of wine to her lips. She knew she should be angry at Pete. His interest in her was based totally on her father's wish that she be looked after, as a brother would look after his kid sister. But there was nothing brotherly about their encounter at the Christmas party.

Nothing indeed, Alana thought as she tipped the glass of wine to her mouth and drained the rest of her glass.

* * * *

"Open the door right fucking now!"

Alana woke and looked around her in confusion. Had she heard someone pounding on the door?

"Alana," the voice echoed through the door. It was Pete.
"Open up, or I'll knock the fucking door down!"

She looked at the clock on the wall. A quarter to twelve. Fifteen minutes from the New Year and Pete Howard was flailing on her door? "Go away," she called.

"Open the Goddamn door," Pete called. "I've already warned you that I'll knock it down."

Alana chuckled. When Pete insisted she take an apartment in his secured building, she was assured the doors were built of strong steel. "Knock yourself out," she called.

Alana heard what had to be his shoulder slamming against the door and then what sounded like a low muffled moan. She held her breath, hoping Pete hadn't injured himself. She waited to hear signs of movement. When none came, she walked to the door and peered out the peephole. No sign of him. She slowly unlocked the door and pulled it open just enough to get a view of the perimeter.

Her heart stopped when she saw Pete lying on the floor. She flung the door open and fell to her knees beside him, her cpr training coming out in full force. She checked for a pulse ... it hammered against her finger. "Pete?"

His eyes flew open as he wrapped his arms around her waist. He held her close to him as he rose from the floor and dragged her inside the apartment. When the door closed behind him, he let her go.

Alana took several steps away as her eyes pierced him in anger. "You fucking asshole! How dare you..." she hesitated.

"How dare I what?" Pete asked as he closed the distance between them. "What do you want to say, Alana?"

"I haven't heard word one from you after what happened last week," she spat out. "You made me feel like you used and discarded me."

Pete laughed out loud. "I made you feel used?" he said as his hand thumped his chest. "If I did, it must have felt very familiar to you. Sounds like that's something you've been doing for a long time now."

Alana sputtered, trying to find the right words. "Fuck you!" she cried. "Why did I let you have sex with me last week? God, I hate you so damn much!"

Pete grinned and shook his head slowly. "You don't hate me," he said softly. "In fact, I'm pretty sure you love me."

Alana's chin jutted forward. "My, aren't you sure of yourself?" she said as she sneered at him. "What makes you so damn sure I'm in love with you?"

"No more meaningless sex," Pete said. "Sound familiar?"

Fuck! So much for the sanctity of secrets between friends! Col and Babs ratted her out! "They had no right to tell you about my resolution," Alana said. "And besides, what makes you think you had anything to do with it?"

Pete shook his head and chuckled softly. He took her into his arms and pulled her against his chest. "Just try to convince me what happened between us last week was meaningless."

Before Alana could reply, Pete's mouth covered hers in a crushing kiss. With his hands around her waist, he walked her backward until she felt the sofa at the backs of her legs. He lifted his mouth from hers and smiled down at her as he cupped her shoulders and pushed her down onto the sofa.

Alana landed unceremoniously on the cushions and glared up at him. "That's the second time you've done that," she cried.

As she clamored to get up, Pete fell to his knees in front of her. "Sit still," he demanded as his hands slid up her thighs and under her long black skirt. He smiled at her as he slowly lifted the fabric. "No nylons tonight," he said, his voice rich with passion. "I like the feel of your soft bare thighs. His fingers curled over the elastic band of her silk panties and pulled them off. He threw them over his shoulder and slipped his hands under her buttocks, dragging her closer to the edge of the sofa.

"I made my own resolution," Pete said as his hands braced on her knees and pushed her legs apart. "Ask me what it is."

Pete's blue eyes darkened in passion as he looked down at the swollen lips of her vagina. Alana struggled to find her voice. "What's your resolution?" she asked breathlessly.

"I resolved that I'd have a taste of you before the stroke of midnight," he said as his fingers pulled her open and he dipped his head between her thighs.

All coherent thoughts left her mind as she felt his mouth close over her sodden core. Alana cried out in strangled desire as his tongue lashed against her clitoris and stroked over her opening. His voice was muffled as he said, "Mmm, you taste so good."

Alana threw her arms over her head as she gave herself up to the sweet sensations his mouth and tongue generated. She cried out again when he pushed two fingers inside her as his tongue concentrated on massaging her engorged clit.

Every stroke of his tongue, every thrust of his fingers, brought her closer to the edge. As the antique clock on a shelf in her living room chimed midnight, Alana gave herself up to Pete with unbridled passion.

Pete fell back on his haunches, his face glistening with her hot juice. "I need to fill you with my cock," he said softly as he rose and unzipped his pants.

When his penis sprang free, Alana gasped and wrapped her hand around it. Before he'd had the chance to step out of his pants, she veered forward and wrapped her lips around his swollen cock. Pete moaned in sheer pleasure as her hand massaged the base of his shaft and took the tip into her mouth. She opened her mouth wide and slowly slid over him, letting her teeth graze the soft skin ever so gently. Pete's fingers twined in her hair as his breath hissed slowly out of him.

"Jesus, Alana," he whispered. "God, that feels so damn good."

Encouraged, Alana's other hand gripped his balls and kneaded them tenderly. She winced when his fingers tightened in her hair as his hips undulated against her face. She let his cock slip out of her mouth and gazed up at him with blazing eyes.

"Do you like that?" she asked softly.

"You know I do," Pete replied, his eyes hooded in raw desire.

Alana pulled back slightly and smiled as her hand continued to massage the base of his cock. She took her hand away from his balls and leaned back slightly, wanting him to

see what she was about to do. Pete's eyes followed her hand as she dipped one finger into her moist core.

She waved her slick finger. "What's good for the goose is good for the gander," she said softly. She didn't give Pete time to ask what she was up to before her mouth settled over his cock again. Her finger wedged between his buttocks and slowly shoved into his anus.

"Ah!" Pete shouted as his body convulsed in sheer torturous madness. "Witch," he said as he pulled her away from him and twirled her around so her back was to him. His hands flew to her legs and parted them as he poised his engorged cock at her slit.

Alana gasped as he filled her from behind, pulsing, grinding against her. His hands slid under her silk blouse and shoved her flimsy bra aside as his fingers kneaded and pinched her erect nipples.

She cried out as he slammed against her, his cock angrily throbbing against her inner folds with every thrust. Alana opened her mouth and sucked as much air into her lungs as possible, desperately trying to keep up with Pete's erotic pace. Each plunge drew a groan from her throat to the point that her mouth felt dry, her throat strangled, knowing she couldn't take much more.

And then the orgasm began to build. The world around her fell into oblivion as only their bodies, connecting in the most primal way, became the focus of her entire being ... the musky scent of their connection, Pete's soft moans as he thrust into her, the sound of their bodies slapping together and most of all, the sensation of his massive cock sliding

against her sensitive inner core. All this and the feelings in her heart for the man who was fucking her made her body contract around him.

Alana cried out when her body reached the ultimate pinnacle as Pete moaned his release. He collapsed over her, pushing her down against the soft sofa cushions. "Jesus," he whispered against her ear. "You are so fucking amazing."

Alana felt tears prick her eyes as she rolled over to face him. He gently touched his lips to hers, a connection she felt through to her heart. "I love you, Peter Howard," she said softly.

Pete's smile reflected in his eyes. "I love you, too." His smile widened. "It's just occurred to me that we've both kept our resolutions."

Alana chuckled softly. "You wanted to taste me before midnight and I said I'd never have meaningless sex again."

Pete framed her face with his hands. "And you won't," he said firmly. "Not for as long as I live and breathe anyway."

"You know," Alana said happily as she tucked her head under his chin, "I believe I've found the solution to making New Year's resolutions."

"You have?" Pete asked as his arms tightened around her.

Alana smiled as she looked up at him. "I have," she said firmly. "Never make a resolution unless there's a very clear solution."

Pete chuckled as he kissed her lips. "The resolution solution," he said.

"Would you care to meet in the bedroom?" Alana asked.

"I believe I will," Pete said as he rose from the sofa.
"Making love to you in a bed will be something new for us."

As walked toward the bedroom, he glanced back at her.
"Are you coming?"

"In a minute," she assured him. "I have to make a couple calls first."

Pete frowned. "Who do you have to call at this time of night?"

Alana grinned. Two people came to mind, both former roommates that bet their next paychecks that Alana would have meaningless sex sometime during the course of the night. She knew Col and Babs wouldn't be home but there was nothing wrong with leaving a message on their answering machines with information on how to deposit their checks into Alana's account.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Emma Wildes is the author of eleven erotic romance novels and numerous short stories. She likes nothing better than to curl up with a good book, or better yet, her laptop as she taps away on her next project! She lives in rural Indiana with her husband and three wonderful children. Visit her at www.emmawildes.com.

Kendra Clark is a wife and mother of three, Kendra knows how to multitask. When not writing, she teaches special needs children full-time, private piano lessons part-time, and is currently finishing her Master's degree. An early lover of Romance, Kendra would sneak her mother's romance novels into junior high and read while she pretended to work on her assignments—especially during math class.

Kendra lives in a rural town in Tennessee and she enjoys the sounds of crickets and whippoorwills.

Born into the easy folds of a sleepy beach town, Tilly Greene has ever since been trying to shake the sand out from between her toes. Thinking she had it all figured out, she moved to colder—frigid if you ask her—climes and, although seeing seasons evolve is wonderful, she has yet to recover her equilibrium. The thongs and shorts are still regularly worn, no matter what time of year, and her imagination runs to the wild side of scorching. You can visit Tilly Greene at www.tillygreene.com.

Barbara Baldwin loves to travel and explore new places so each of her stories is usually set in a different locale. She has a BS in Education and an MA in Communication and has been

published in poetry, short stories, essays, magazine articles, teacher resource materials, and full-length fiction. Barb can be reached at writer0926@yahoo.com or www.authorsden.com/barbarajbaldwin.

Peggy Hunter lives in Midwestern Ontario, Canada with her husband, son, two dogs and several cats. She has been writing for many years but only recently decided to write for Torrid. She is thrilled to be among the incredible authors that make up the Winter Wishes Anthology for Whiskey Creek Press.

Becca Furrow lives in a tiny house in wind-swept Wyoming, surrounded by a husband, three puberty-stricken kids, five cats and a large, hairy dog. A bookworm at heart, Becca cut her genre teeth on her much older brother's scary vampire and werewolf comics, soon followed by his collection of classic scifi. These shocking early experiences stuck with her, and try as she might, Becca seems unable to write a romance that doesn't have fantasy, scifi, or paranormal elements. You can learn more about Becca at her website: beccafurrow.tripod.com/

Australian author Karen Mandeville writes a variety of genres including erotica, dark fantasy and paranormal romance. Five of her twenty-eight years was spent as a journalist and she has secured a place in all four seasonal anthologies being released by Whiskey Creek Press Torrid for 2006. If you would like to know more about Karen, then head over to www.karenmandeville.com where you can see when her next chat is, learn more about her writing and read interviews about her upcoming releases.

The voices in her head. They compel Jenna Howard to do twisted things like write. That's probably the best alternative because the voices could be telling her to clean her condo. Due to an allergy of cleaning, Jenna can most often be found sitting at her computer where she's supposed to be writing but usually, she's rapidly pressing her email button. Living in the wilds of Calgary, Alberta, she's not quite as lucky as her heroines, having no hunky guy to call her own, but, considering the avalanche of books in her bedroom and the layer of dust coating everything but her iBook, that's probably a good thing. Since this writer is a lonely creature and a slave to the voices in her head that demand really good stories, great sex and maybe a weapon or two, Jenna's starved for human contact and will happily talk to anyone unfortunate enough to email her. Test the theory by visiting her website at www.jennahoward.com.

C'ann Inman lives in Oklahoma but dreams far beyond her borders. She has a couple of short stories in Whiskey Creek Press Torrid Anthologies. Her first full novel, *What He Wants*, will be released in June 2006 from WCP Torrid. You can visit her website at chryswriter.tripod.com/canninman

While Emma would like to confess to settling before her computer each day while half naked boy toys bring her champagne and truffles, the truth is much more boring. She lives in Maryland with her physicist husband, though they haven't managed to work the travel bugs out of their systems quite yet.

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