

ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*



Getting Laid

VONNA
HARPER

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Getting Laid

ISBN 9781419919510

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Getting Laid Copyright © 2008 Vonna Harper

Edited by Sue-Ellen Gower.

Photography and cover art by Les Byerley.

Electronic book Publication December 2008

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the authors' imagination and used fictitiously.

GETTING LAID

Vonna Harper

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Cliffs Notes: IDG Worldwide.

Chapter One

"I want to get laid."

"I hate to point this out to you, honey, but you've been out of the dating game a long time. Your little black book has expired."

"Like I ever had one. Kat, I'm serious, I'm about to jump out of my skin." Propelled by her words, Lisi Hallinan stalked to the window and stared out at the overgrown yard. One good thing about hundred-plus-year-old windows, they distorted reality, making the jungle-like growth easier to ignore. "I had no idea I was so uptight. To know I'm going to be able to get out from under this pressure is a huge load off my mind. I can finally see beyond the end of my nose. And hear what my body's trying to tell me."

"The sale's a sure thing? Real estate's such a mess these days."

"Tell me about it. Why do you think I've been so uptight? Get this. It's an all-cash deal. I figure it's some old fart with more money and nostalgia than sense."

"Cash? You're shittin' me."

"You think I'd joke about this? Look, I'll give you all the details, but only if you buy the first drink tonight."

"Boy, you are wrapped tight. Okay, tonight it is. The Stagecoach? A little after six."

"Of course The Stagecoach. As much as I plan on drinking, it's gotta be within walking distance."

"What about the rest of the gang?"

Turning her back on the yard she loved but in less than a month would no longer be her responsibility, Lisi walked into the small kitchen. Of course the floor squeaked. "Kara and Callie are onboard. I have a message in for Squeaky."

"Looking good. With the gang checking out the merchandise, we're sure to find someone willing to scratch your itches. Glad to hear your hormones are finally working again."

That they are, in spades, Lisi acknowledged as she hung up. Going by her fortunately limited experience of once, divorce was super effective in shutting down the sex drive. She'd heard of women who became nymphos before the divorce papers were signed, but not her. All she'd wanted to do was crawl into a cave and hibernate. Instead, she'd been stuck in an aging house with a for-sale sign.

And a job, don't forget that.

Determined to forestall an unproductive session with her inner voice, she deserted the kitchen for the living room and the stereo she'd refused to part with when her ex insisted that half of the furniture was his. Yes, Neil Diamond! A little *Cracklin' Rosie* followed by a lot of *Holy, Holy*. Loud. As loud as the old windows could stand.

Neil belted. She stood hugging herself and hoping she wasn't going to start crying. Get laid, that's what she needed. A one-night stand to end all one-night stands.

The cell phone in her front jeans' pocket vibrated, nearly causing her to climax. Thinking it would be Squeaky, she connected without looking at the incoming number.

"Lisi?" a male voice asked. Thanks to Neil, she had to strain to hear.

"Yes."

"This is Joe Roop. I'm buying your house."

"You're what? Just a minute. Let me—" She spun the stereo volume dial. "There. Now I can hear you."

"I hope you don't mind," the unexpectedly deep and sexy male voice said. "Your real estate agent gave me your number."

You'd heard I needed to get laid and you have a cock and— "She did? Is there a problem?"

Joe whatever he'd said his last name was, didn't immediately answer. Her stomach flipped over, then knotted. Not fair! A man with a sexy voice should not be allowed to be the bearer of bad news.

"With the offer?" he finally broke the silence. "I hope not."

Sigh. "So do I."

"I'm jumping the gun, but what are you doing right now?"

Going a little crazy. "I don't understand."

"Sorry. That didn't come out the way I wanted it to. I happen to be just down the street. I've already driven by twice and was tempted to take pictures but I didn't want to startle you. Besides, what I'm really interested in is the interior. I've started formulating plans for the renovation, but although I took notes when I was there with my real estate agent, I really need photographs."

This stranger with the nerve-tingling voice was a few doors away. Sitting in his car. Talking to her. About renovation. Wanting to step inside and stand next to her so she could see what he looked and smelled like.

Old fart? He didn't sound like one.

"I don't know," she blurted, suddenly scared of the opposite sex. "I'm getting ready—I have an appointment—"

"Would tomorrow be better then?"

Tomorrow sounded like a million years away. Neil was still making his musical presence known, and with every word Joe Whatever spoke, her skin was becoming more sensitive. Given the current state of her system, she wasn't sure she trusted herself around the town's seventy-five-year-old mayor.

What the hell! Six months of celibacy didn't mean she'd turned into a cat in heat. She was conservative and competent, an asset to the town's government, or so the city council said. And at this moment, half crazy.

"No, no. That's all right. I have a little time. This shouldn't take long, should it?"

"I don't think so. But if you prefer I wait until your husband can be —"

"What I have is an ex. I'll be waiting."

* * * * *

Joe Roop put his car into Drive, glanced in the rearview mirror and pulled a U-turn in the quiet residential street. He hoped no one objected, not just because he didn't need a ticket, but Gold Ridge was about to become *his* town. Responsible residents were respectful of the rules, right?

At least he figured they were. Thanks to his career, he'd been home so seldom he'd never felt connected to the exclusive condo complex where he and his wife—his ex-wife—had lived. He'd paid his association dues. What he hadn't done was mow a lawn on Saturday mornings and join his neighbors for barbeques in the evening. Now he was about to become the owner of a lawn in need of a lot more than a lawnmower and neighbors he knew nothing about.

Lisi Hallinan must believe he was a nut. Maybe the poor old lady was rethinking her decision to let him in. In fact, being kicked to the curb might be better than having to sip tea or whatever elderly women offered their guests these days.

The sale would close in a few weeks. He could wait, darn it, be patient. He had a lifetime in which to turn the house into what he wanted it to become. Okay, not a lifetime, but waiting until next month wasn't going to kill him, right?

Pulling into the gravel and weed drive, he pondered two things. One, where was Mrs. Hallinan planning to move to, hopefully not one of those retirement homes. Two, was her ex paying alimony and had said ex traded her in on a newer, younger and less wrinkled model?

Then he opened the car door and a third thought hit. The air smelled wonderful, like growing things and warm dirt and rocks. Yeah, walking away from his former life had been the right thing to do.

* * * * *

Oh shit! Hot shit.

Joe Whatever walked slow, slow and smooth, head high, shoulders wide, narrow hips made for clamping her fingers around, legs hidden under the damn slacks. At least she could see a certain bulge. Mouth watering and dry at the same time, Lisi ran her sweating palms down her thighs. Thank goodness he was looking around at the soon-to-be-his turf, otherwise, he'd see her nose pressed to the window and her eyes bulging.

Face. Yeah, gotta check that out too. But get a load of the way those legs work and the easy hang to his arms. Some men looked as if they never got dirty while others gave the appearance of never getting near a bar of soap. She didn't think much of the squeaky-clean, check-out-my-expensive-suit males who figured women would be all over them because of the amount of money in their wallets. Her taste went more toward dirt-under-their-nails guys. They stuck her as more real.

Joe? Which was he? The clothes said white collar but his hair was a bit scraggly, a few weeks past needing a cut. His dress shirt looked as if he'd pulled it out of the dryer, not picked it up at the dry cleaner's. His footwear confused her. Tennis shoes and slacks? Maybe he was having an identity crisis. If so, welcome to the club.

That's what they had in common? She pondered as the doorbell gave a shorting-out buzz. They were both looking for direction in their lives?

Then she opened her door, determined that he was a good foot taller than her and way broader across shoulders and chest and identity crises mattered not at all. He had no smell, no aftershave or cologne or sweat. His eyes were set deep and then a little deeper in their sockets which called for an extended study to determine their color. Gray. With a touch of green thrown in for interest. Shaggy brows, narrow nose, cheekbones that would make an artist drool, just the slightest bit of shading on his chin saying he knew all about five o'clock shadows.

And a hand too big for a white-collar type heading her way.

They shook, each saying, "Good to meet you." He kept looking at her, which gave her an excuse to continue to do the same thing. He was frowning a bit, staring with his head tipped a bit to the side and his fingers not releasing hers, as if she minded.

She stirred, at least her blood did. Nothing wrong with her circulatory system. Blood pressure elevated, not that she was complaining. Respiration approaching what it reached when she went running. Sweat glands doing what sweat glands did on summer afternoons outside.

No way was she going to tell him about the rolling knot low in her belly or the absolutely insane impulse to catapult herself at this man and drive him backward and to the ground so she could straddle him.

"You aren't what I expected," he said.

Tell me about it. No old fart here unless old starts in a man's thirties. "Oh. What did you expect?"

"This house is on the national historic register. I guess I figured the owner would have been in it since the beginning."

She laughed, a delighted but nervous sound. "Sometimes I feel historic."

"Impossible." He indicated their joined hands, blinked, released her. "I'm—again, thank you for accommodating me."

For the first time she noted he held something in the hand still at his side. Oh yeah, a digital camera. Pictures. Remodeling this place. Should she wish him luck or wait until she had her money, or rather her half of the proceeds?

"Not a problem," she belatedly said. He was getting taller by the second, broader too. And what was she going to do with the energy leaking out of him and sticking to her?

This was a bit much, but Joe put her in mind of the area's bucks when rut season had them going without food or sleep while they mounted or tried to mount any and all

does. It was summer, not late fall, so what was he doing getting her, a non-doe, wishing she had a tail to lift in invitation?

If only she hadn't been thinking about getting laid.

"Ah, you said you're going to remodel." Had not wiping her hands on her shorts ever been this hard? "It's something you've done before?"

He laughed, a real and honest laugh that rippled clear through to her bone marrow. "I'm an architect. Business complexes, destination resorts, high rises, that kind of thing so yeah, I have a little experience."

It was her turn to laugh. She would have if it hadn't meant she might be tempted to explain about her job. As a city hall clerk in a town with a population of not quite ten thousand she'd dealt with the occasional architect. But the locals tackled single-family residences, a small business, a bed-and-breakfast. Not a destination resort pro in the lot.

"This is hardly a business complex." She indicated the half-furnished living room with its worn wood floor and faded, dated wallpaper.

"No, it isn't."

Hmm. He wasn't going to say any more, was he? No explanation of the change from the grand and expensive to the *maybe a wrecking ball's the best solution*.

She didn't like mysterious men. Amend that, she didn't like men who kept secrets, such as a lover, from his wife as her ex had done. A bit of mystery however —

No wedding ring but a pale band on a certain finger of his left hand. Divorced? Maybe he'd simply forgotten to put it on this morning.

"Mrs. Hallinan, I —"

"Call me, Lisi, please." *Because I'm taking back my maiden name.*

"All right," he said, showing a quick grin and perfect teeth. "I don't want to take any more of your time than necessary so —" He held up the digital camera.

I've got all the time you want, big boy. Grateful that he couldn't read her mind and hoping to heck her expression gave nothing away, she answered with a smile of her

own. So her right eye tooth stuck out a bit—he'd have to deal with her imperfections. "What are you most interested in? Maybe we should start with that."

"I've been trying to set priorities. Perhaps you can help. If you had the time, inclination and funds, what would be at the top of your must-do list?"

Just like that her thinking shifted. Oh she was still acutely aware of the hunk taking up her personal space, but he'd touched one of her hot buttons. Even knowing the place would soon no longer be hers, her fantasy wish list hadn't faded. "I don't want to scare you off."

"Believe me, you won't. I have my reasons for what I'm taking on—personal reasons—so you have thought about what the place needs."

"It'd be impossible not to." That said, she gave him a few Cliffs Notes. The house had been in her ex-husband's family's hands for most of its existence. Most recently his grandparents had lived in it. When his grandfather died, the family decided Grandma needed to move near her oldest child. The house had stood empty for five years.

"Justin—that's my ex—works for Lockridge, the industry out by the freeway, while I work here in town. When we decided to get married, we looked for housing that didn't call for much of a commute for either of us. Then his folks said why don't we move in here, pay the utilities and taxes. We couldn't turn it down."

"Nothing was said about maintenance?"

As a matter of fact, that had been part of the agreement. She and Justin were supposed to do certain updating in exchange for the free rent. They'd had the foundation shored up and the roof replaced and had been looking for a electrician. Then Justin had moved out and into his girlfriend's house.

"Let's just say he developed other priorities. And since he was the only relative still living in this part of the state and he wanted money too—the sale was part of the divorce settlement."

"Divorce isn't easy," Joe muttered, his attention on his camera.

Are you saying you know from firsthand experience? “No it isn’t. Ah, so anyway, the house went on the market. And you came along.”

“That I did. About that tour.”

Tour, yes. Business first. Hell, business only with the man who was in essence making her homeless. Ducking an impulse at self-pity, she pointed at the ceiling. They’d had insulation blown in when the new roof was installed. Although the insulation helped cut down the heat bill, the current heating system needed to be replaced. There was no AC.

Joe took pictures, snapping in a measured way as they stood in each room. The way he zeroed in on imperfections and must-dos made her nervous. She couldn’t help but apologize for the archaic plumbing in the one bathroom, the low, back-porch ceiling, the termite-ridden railing. She nearly told him she would have tended to some of these things if she’d the money and was again hit by how much she liked the place, warts and all.

“Good bones,” she said, indicating the arched ceiling between kitchen and dining room.

He flicked her a look, started to take a picture, glanced at her again. “That’s what attracted me to the place, its bones. It’s true to its era, honest. Nothing trendy or cutting edge.”

Was Joe speaking from his heart, maybe revealing things he hadn’t intended to about what he did for a living? Was that why he’d bought her home? Because he needed to get back to basics?

Neil Diamond kept her nerves alive. Add Joe’s big, strong, confident body to the mix and she swam in heat. The house was smallish, barely twelve hundred square feet and filled with human history. At the moment, that human element spoke to her as keenly as Neil and Joe did. Keeping her hands to herself was getting harder and harder.

He had to know. Couldn’t he smell her need on her, look into her eyes and see the hunger?

"This..." she indicated the closet in the larger of the two bedrooms, "is where Justin's great grandmother hid during storms. She became an accomplished seamstress and made wedding dresses for every woman around. Her husband was a gold miner. Winters he'd go below ground before dawn. It was dark by the time he came back up. He developed what they called black lung disease. It killed him."

"You know a lot about the house's history."

She nodded, smiling and eyes misting at the same time. What did it matter that she'd just met Joe? Certain things needed to be shared. "I got most of my information from Justin's mother and grandmother. I don't know if you've visited the local historic society. It has so much—"

"Where is it?"

The museum was the most prominent structure in Gold Ridge, albeit off the main street. Did that mean he wasn't familiar with the area? Curiouser and curiouser.

Okay, back to mystery man.

Hopefully he wasn't on the run from bankruptcy, lawsuits, hostile takeover attempts.

On the run?

Hmm.

He'd been working undercover for the FBI or CIA, maybe both. Getting the goods on unscrupulous subcontractors, government kickbacks, sub-standard building materials. Someone had blown his cover and he had to lie low. He'd driven into town at night, determined that Gold Ridge was a quiet, unassuming burg.

In addition to lying low, he had to earn a living so he'd, what? Bought a money pit of a house?

Okay, so that didn't hold water. But there was no reason she couldn't pretend, dream. He'd seen her walking to or from work, lusted after her, decided to make an

offer on her place as a way of getting to know her. Now that he'd made his first move and was standing toe to toe with the object of his lust, what?

Sweep her off her feet, of course, check out her bone structure, jump said bones. He'd lay her. Repeatedly. In both bedrooms, first on the queen bed she slept on, then on the area rug of the unfurnished spare bedroom. The living room couch worked great, him sprawled on it while she straddled him, knees on cushions and cock buried so deep she felt it against her teeth.

The backyard, oh yes! Grass under them and bugs crawling on their flesh as they rolled over and over, sealed together, arms gripping. Then to the front porch with the neighbors watching his ass pump up and down as he blanketed her.

Her eyes felt too big for her sockets, her cheeks flushed, and the only way she could breathe was through her gaping mouth. Fortunately, at the moment Joe was trying to get a window to open. She studied his back, mentally tracing his shoulder blades with her fingertips, laughing as he tried to shiver her off. Yeah, that's what she'd do. Plant her hands in the small of his back and shove him against the nearest wall, hold him there with a well-placed forearm and elbow while reaching between his legs for the family jewels. She'd cup his balls and try to draw them back toward her, laughing when he stood on his toes.

Laughter would turn into a gasp because, quick as a college jock, he'd spin and shove off the wall, grab her around the waist and lift her over his shoulder. Head, arms and legs hanging, he'd march her back into the living room and dump her on the couch. She'd bounce, nearly flop off, settle into softness. He'd kneel beside her, pull her arms over her head and close a big hand around both wrists, pinning her.

With her where he wanted her, he'd finger one nipple and then the other, pinching, pulling, rubbing, stroking, smiling his perfect-teeth smile as she twisted and moaned. No freedom, not even a hint of the same. He'd wait her out, and when she was done twisting and moaning, he'd lick a breast into insanity. Leaving it to air dry, he'd do the

same to her other mound. She'd whimper, dig her heels into the couch and lift her hips off it in silent and desperate invitation.

He'd service her. Pull her onto the floor and under him and take her in the missionary position. She'd rake his arms and shoulders, furrowing his skin as he furrowed her channel. Her head would lash, her legs wrap around him. She'd kiss, nibble, kiss some more, all the while pushing her pelvis against him. He'd pound her relentlessly, grunting like an animal, like her. One of them would start to howl. The other would pick up the sound. Loud, hard and fast they'd fuck. Energy would grab hold of her, lift her out of herself, shake her. She'd howl some more, crying and begging with sweat streaming off her and her pussy clamped death-like onto him. Instead of trying to free himself, he'd dive ever further into her, spear her, claim her, force rolling explosions out of her.

Her climax finally spent, she'd flow outward, ooze into nothing, still under him with him thrusting. Thrusting some more.

There, him, harsh grunts forced past his locked jaw. Lifting his upper body off her and arching his back at the same time. Burying himself even more fully in her, giving in to the powerful, plundering need. Crying out. Then as relief washed him, he'd gaze down at her through half-open eyes.

Chapter Two

"That's asking for a fire."

"What?"

"The way that electrical outlet is being used. Those extension cords are overloading the system," Joe said. "I take it there's been little or no electrical updating."

Still caught in the heady heat of her imagination, Lisi struggled to focus on where Joe was pointing, which happened to be the lone outlet in the living room. "You're right," she agreed, hopefully not breathlessly. *Talk. Try to sound sane.* "I'm careful not to run the lamps and TV at the same time."

He shook his head, drawing her attention not to his frown lines but the way movement made his dark hair dance. Another thing she noted, he didn't have to worry about going bald any time soon, not that she'd ever hold a receding hairline against him.

"It still isn't a good idea," he continued his lecture.

"What was I going to do? Houses of that era weren't built with consideration for future needs."

He still didn't look convinced that the cords snaking along the baseboards weren't something she couldn't remedy. Just because she'd given him the award as number one hunk of the month didn't mean she took kindly to his criticism. "About your must-do list, why don't you put updating the electrical system at the top? I wanted to but my ex had other priorities." *Like bonking his bottle-redhead chippie.*

"Hmm. Still —"

"It's your place," she interrupted. "At least it soon will be. And if you're the sole owner, you won't have to deal with compromising the way I did."

"I didn't mean—"

Just then her cell phone vibrated, causing her to start and clamp her hand over her pocket. Composing herself and her libido as best she could, she flipped it open. Squeaky's number popped up.

"It's about time," Lisi said by way of hello. "Where the hell have you been?"

Squeaky, so-called because her voice was so deep she was sometimes mistaken for a man, said something about a meeting that had threatened to turn into a marathon. Uninterested, Lisi broke in. "Either you show your face at the Stagecoach after work or we'll talk about you."

"We? The gang? What's the occasion?"

"The occasion is I've sold the place."

"You're shittin' me. What fool bought the money pit?"

The fool standing not enough feet away from me and hopefully unable to hear your end of the conversation.

* * * * *

Someday he was going to have to develop some tact, Joe chided himself as he inserted the key in his car's ignition. Obviously Lisi had taken exception to his comments regarding a potential fire, but the moment he'd seen the strained-beyond-its-max outlet, all he'd been able to think about was her safety. How that bastard of an ex could have put a roof ahead of life and limb made him doubly glad she'd shown what's-his-face the door.

Single. She was single. And about fifty years younger than he'd thought she'd be. Average weight and height, light brown hair that just touched her shoulders. She'd been wearing shorts and a sleeveless T-shirt that made it clear she'd left her breasts as nature intended. His own ex had had hers enhanced and expanded before they met which meant he had no idea what they'd originally looked like.

Natural was good. Good to the touch, not that he had firsthand experience when it came to the woman he'd just met.

And Lisi's legs. They'd be good to the touch too if his eyesight and imagination could be trusted.

And her hair. It'd be soft with none of the hard-as-a-rock spray or whatever the professional women he usually dealt with put on theirs.

Natural. If he had one word to describe her, that's what it would be.

Or maybe hot. Yeah, hot.

What the hell was he thinking? She could be frigid for all he knew. If he hadn't had sex in who knew how long maybe he wouldn't have taken one look at Lisi and come to the conclusion that she could hardly wait to shuck her shorts for him. In truth, until she'd opened her door, he hadn't known he was hot and bothered. That confused him.

He'd been divorced for nearly a year and had had ample opportunity to scratch his itches, but he hadn't felt like doing any scratching for months. Of course those months had been filled with major business decisions and soul-searching that had a little to do with why he'd been acting like a monk. What was it about Lisi that made him feel as if he was breaking out in hives?

Only one way to learn the answer. See her again. As soon as possible.

* * * * *

For a Thursday night the Stagecoach was doing great business. Summer in a town that catered to tourists had a lot to do with the why behind the crowd. The owners of the Stagecoach knew how to handle the expectations of both residents and visitors. The swinging front doors, weathered wooden flooring, and walls decorated with barbed wire, six guns, and ten-gallon hats were reminiscent of a frontier saloon. The waitresses dressed like dance hall girls. Tourists loved bellying up to the long mahogany bar for foaming mugs of beer or crowding around tables scarfing down buffalo burgers. Locals were more likely to opt for the pizzas served by waitresses who knew them by name.

Lisi and her friends were partial to barbequed chicken salads because the salads allowed them to mind their waistlines while putting away the wine.

Tonight Lisi couldn't talk herself into sipping. Not only was the three-piece band near the rear of the cavernous room banging out country and western, her earlier fantasy about bonking and being bonked demanded to be fed.

"What about him?" Kat jerked her head at a man near the far end of the bar. "Nice ass."

Even with the muted lighting—mostly reds and oranges coming from the beer logo signs—Lisi took note of skinny buttocks encased in jeans. Unfortunately, even with his back to where they sat at one of the tables, she recognized said ass. "He's married."

"How do—" Squeaky started. "Never mind. I should know better than to ask. He's been in city hall, right?"

"Every day for a week a couple of months ago. He bought the Naman house down from the grocery store. Tried to get the planning commission to approve a garage addition. You want a garage in this town, you don't buy an historic house built without one." Determined to stop before she started talking shop, she snagged a piece of lettuce and chewed.

Okay, she'd wanted to come here so she could get laid, right? So when and how was she going to lay the groundwork for that to happen? The joint was jumping as they said. Unfortunately, there were a lot of groups dressed in ways that identified them as out-of-towners. Putting the move on someone in a family, a co-worker, or group of friends took more guts than she had. The locals had mostly dropped by on their way home from work. There were the guys from the repair shop in their greasy overalls, grocery clerks still wearing their blue shirts with McCoy's Mercantile stenciled on the right, several of her fellow employees in business casual. The last thing she needed was to start tongues wagging by sidling up to the confirmed bachelor who manned the exotic wine shop. Besides, with Joe having set the standard, maybe no one would live up to him.

"We have to try harder, ladies," Kara offered. "Not only do we have to find Lisi a cock, I could use one myself. What about the band?"

The first time she'd noted the musicians, she'd been more interested in their music than them. The keyboard player was about the age she'd initially thought Joe would be. The drummer was nearly Joe's height but carried maybe a hundred pounds more. As for the guy with the guitar –

"I'll take him," Kara said, nodding at the guitarist. "A little on the underfed side, and I'll probably get arrested for robbing the cradle, but I ain't picky."

Maybe that was her problem, Lisi conceded, chewing on more lettuce. She'd seen the cream of the crop earlier in the day. As a result, maybe only Brad Pitt or Tiger Woods could match him, and Brad and Tiger were both taken. Even if they weren't, what were the chances they'd ever care whether she existed?

"I screwed up," she confessed to Squeaky as Kara wound her way toward the band. "I got all defensive when I should have batted my eyes at the man who's buying the place. Do you know of refresher courses in playing the dating game? I'm beyond rusty."

"You'll see him again. Show up at the title company when he comes to sign whatever he has to sign. Or maybe you can get your real estate agent to find out where he lives. Hand him an apple pie and a *welcome to the neighborhood* smile."

"That'll take time."

"So?"

Squeaky didn't get it, did she? Kara must have said something the guitarist liked because suddenly he wrapped himself around his instrument and let it rip. The music doubled in volume. The guitarist stared at Kara. She gaped back. A couple at the bar were practicing lip lock, and one of the bartenders was putting the moves on a trio of college-age females. To her left, another couple leaned across their dinner, holding hands. The woman said something. The man reached under the table to adjust his pants. The woman winked and licked her lips. The man squirmed.

That's why she couldn't wait to bake an apple pie before seeing Joe again. She needed to get laid, by him, tonight!

"Ice," she muttered. Digging into her water glass, she snagged a chunk and ran it over the base of her throat. "God I needed that."

"What'd you see?" Callie demanded. "Where is he?"

Callie, who'd been married only a couple of months, wouldn't stay long because her groom got off work at eight. According to her, they'd *done it* every night since before they'd gotten engaged and she wasn't about to break their record. Damn Callie! She probably didn't remember what frustrated felt like.

"What do you care?" Squeaky was saying. "You aren't in the market."

"I can still look." Callie winked. "If he's hot enough, it'll help get me in the mood."

"There is no *he*," Lisi interjected. "And there's no hottie in the room."

"Yeah?" Squeaky drew out the word. "You might want to reconsider."

Following her friend's nod, Lisi looked toward the entrance. The Stagecoach's main dining/drinking room was sunken a few feet putting those just coming in at a higher elevation. She reverently thanked the architect because little stood between her and a nearly perfect view of none other than Joe Roop.

He was alone. At least he looked alone. He hadn't changed his clothes. She thought he hadn't shaved. The way he stood there with his hands tucked in his rear pockets scanning the scene made her think of a frontier sheriff searching for an outlaw or claim jumper. *This is my town, his stance said. I keep it law abiding. I'm respected. And my six-shooter has more bullets than yours.*

"Holy shit," Squeaky breathed.

"Double holy shit," from Kat. "There's hope for mankind—emphasis on the *man*—after all."

"It's him."

Her friends swiveled toward her, but she couldn't take her eyes off Joe long enough to acknowledge them. "Joe Roop. The man who's buying my—who's buying the house."

"I'll fight you for him. Two falls out of three."

Kat, who she hated for it, barely tipped the scales at a hundred pounds, but she was an exercise fanatic. She'd probably win—unless Lisi resorted to pulling out her hair, which she would. "The hell," Lisi said. "He's mine."

"Not if the waitress has her way."

Squeaky was right. Not content with simply leading the way to a postage-stamp-sized table, the waitress had hooked her arm through Joe's and was acting as if the crowd kept pushing her into him.

Joe wedged his way into his chair. The waitress leaned closer than necessary, smiled and nodded. Not nearly soon enough, she left, presumably to get her latest customer something to drink and the key to her chastity belt.

"You can take her," Kat informed her. "Twist her nipples."

"I can't—"

"You'd better do something. Forget the damn apple pie. Just go welcome him to the neighborhood."

With Kat hauling on her right arm while Squeaky did the same to her left, Lisi found herself on her feet, numb legs propelling her forward.

Music. Loud and fast. People laughing. Lip lock still going on. A couple standing near the bar and the man's hands cupping the woman's buttocks. Too many warm bodies and not enough air. Her two glasses of wine romping through her circulatory system and her pussy getting wet.

She'd changed before coming here. Her vibrant yellow blouse was cheesecloth and she'd worn her new yellow bra. A hot summer night called for shorts, and she'd opted for white cotton even though her panty line showed.

She was hot looking, hair artfully casual, lipstick hopefully still in place, shoulders back and far-from-spectacular breasts doing the best they were capable of. In her mind, Joe spotted her from across a crowded room. Just the sight of her all cleaned up with her cheeks and throat wine-flushed heated his own cheeks, throat, and places south. He'd stand, smacking the waitress in the chin with his elbow and sending her to the mat for the count. Pushing lesser humans aside like bowling pins, he'd close in on her. She'd gaze up at him through her nonexistent false lashes and bat them without blinding herself.

"Hi, handsome," she'd breathe.

"Hi yourself, beautiful. You ready to get out of here?"

"Maybe. What'd you have in mind?"

"A walk. In the dark. Arms around each other. My hand cupping your ass. Lips latching together and holding on until we both need stitches. A stroll to the town park where, after making sure there are no kidlets around, we'll roll around in the sandbox."

"No good. Cats use the sandbox."

"Okay, to your, ah my, ah our house."

The fantasy conversation might still be going on if she hadn't reached Joe's excuse for a table. He hadn't jumped to his feet, but at least he was looking up at her.

"I saw—" she started. "I mean, I wasn't looking for you or anything, but when I spotted you—I—what are you doing in here?"

If her stumbling, bumbling greeting amused him, he was civilized enough not to let it show. He hadn't been smiling, but he started now. Oh yes, the perfect teeth. She felt the sexy grin all the way to her bone marrow.

The frantic guitar playing ended and the drumming took over. The thud-bam-thud rocked her, raced her blood. Most of all Joe's eyes and body stirred the already boiling pot.

Wait, he was talking—she had to listen. “I heard you mention the Stagecoach. I decided to check it out. It’s noisy. How’s the food?”

She didn’t give a damn about food. Mostly she wanted to touch him, to stand close enough to feel his heat. To yank down on his zipper and pull out the goodies. Maybe take pictures. “Not bad. I’m not much into beer, but word is it’s cold.”

The waitress was back, glaring daggers at her, asking Joe if he wanted something other than water to drink. Beer, Joe said. Something from a local brewery. And get the lady whatever she wants.

What *the lady* didn’t need was any more wine, but she asked for the house chardonnay. And because Joe buying her a drink sounded like an invitation, she sat. There she was across from him, their knees bumping. She didn’t draw back. Neither did he.

Even before the drinks arrived, they started talking. Or rather she answered his questions about what she did for a living, explaining that living and working in the same small town had given her roots.

“What about you?” she asked. “You’re new to town, right? Where do you live?”

“Chicago.”

“Chi—cago? That’s more than halfway across the country away.”

“I noticed.”

So say something, explain what brought you to Oregon. Unfortunately, he didn’t elaborate and with their knees exploring, she couldn’t figure out a way to pump him.

“I’ve never been to Chicago,” she finally came up with. “I don’t do cold winters.”

“Just rainy ones?”

“We native Oregonians are used to growing moss. It’s none of my business, but are you planning on being here come winter?”

“Yeah, I am.”

Distracted by her heart's flip-flop, she wasn't prepared for the waitress' return. She deposited a pale, frosty glass next to Joe and slid the wine under her nose. What about dinner, she wanted to know? Would Joe like to hear the night's specials.

"No," he told her. "Not yet."

A puzzled mumble and a frown later, the waitress exited stage left. "I didn't mean to interrupt your plans. My friends – I should be getting back to them."

"Do you want to?"

A casual question? Not if the sexy look in his eye and his knee touching her thigh was any indication. Suddenly the idea of being under his radarscope scared her. Nothing, really, had happened, but she was already in over her head. Time to take her leave and return to the gang.

Except they'd tease her unmercifully. And even scared, sitting close to Joe was better than any alternative.

She'd just decided to go for broke and ask why he'd wanted to buy her place when a couple of men in wrinkled slacks and shirts that strained across the belly planted themselves in front of her.

"So this is what happens when you decide to take an R and R afternoon," Mayor Thomas Blackflower boomed. "You said you had personal business to attend to. If I'd known it was this kind of business –" He gave Joe the once-over. "I wouldn't have been so accommodating."

Trying not to grind her teeth, she introduced Joe to the mayor and his companion, the city engineer. "This is what happens when you live in a one-horse town," she explained for Joe's benefit. "Everyone knows what everyone else is doing."

"Which is what?" Thomas asked as she knew he'd do. "I'm delighted to see you out on a date. I just don't know why you felt you had to try to keep it from me."

"This isn't a date," she protested, determined not to blush. "It's –"

"Business," Joe finished. "We're having a business meeting."

Thomas looked in danger of giving himself whiplash trying to study both her and Joe. Obviously curiosity was driving him crazy. Fortunately, the engineer took that moment to grab the mayor's arm and tug. "The first beer's on you, remember. My throat's dry."

She waited until the two rotund men were out of earshot, then dropped her head to the table. After a moment, not bothering to try to hide her laughter, she straightened. "Welcome to town. Are you sure you're ready for living in a fishbowl?"

"I find it refreshing."

"You do?" Lordy but his eyes twinkled. Much more of that and she really would be jumping his bones.

"You haven't lived in a big city, have you?" he asked. "If you had you'd know how easy it is to get lost in the crush. How isolating it—"

At that moment, the band kicked into high gear. Hanging glasses behind the bar rattled. Wincing, she clamped her hands over her ears. *Sorry*, she mouthed.

You want to get out of here? he mouthed back.

Chapter Three

Night wasn't going to arrive anytime soon, but the sun was behind the surrounding mountains. Most of the businesses had closed down for the day, and the four-block-long main street with its historic red brick buildings, gaslight lamps, and well-worn sidewalks was nearly deserted. The few people who were out were more interested in gazing in the shop windows than checking out their neighbors.

Echoes from the band reached her and Joe. She felt quieted by the music although maybe the deepening shadows and her companion had everything to do with her floating, drifting mood. Truth be told, she truly appreciated the town once the day's business was over. Decisions no longer had to be made. Whatever crisis reared its head could wait until morning. Evenings were for smelling the summer air, kicking a crumpled piece of paper down the sidewalk, thinking about those responsible for the historic town's existence.

More important, this evening was about walking in step with a man who turned her on. If pressed, she couldn't say why. Granted, he was in great physical condition and, she assumed, the owner of a functioning cock. But even though being this close to him had her body humming, it wasn't all about sex, not entirely. He had a brain. He was financially solvent. He had great teeth.

"You didn't get dinner," she pointed out.

"You didn't get to finish your wine."

"That's all right. It wasn't my first."

"That's right. Your friends—what are they going to think of my kidnapping you?"

"They'll say it's about darn time I got kidnapped."

Stopping, he planted a hand on her shoulder and turned her toward him. Her belly lurched, and her feet wanted to slide closer. "Sounds like you have good friends."

"They, ah, they want what's best for me."

"What is best for you, Lisi? Beyond getting out from under a house that's too much work for you."

"I don't mind that, never did," she blurted when, despite the danger, she wanted to take the conversation in a more personal direction. Like, did he ever fuck on the first night and did he know how to handle hopelessly horny females?

"Then what—"

"I told you, didn't I? The sale was part of the divorce agreement."

He didn't need to keep holding on to her—she wasn't going anywhere. But neither did she mind having both of his hands on her shoulders, far from it. Competent. That's what everyone said about her. Tonight she didn't give a damn about projecting that image. In fact, she was getting younger by the minute. Much longer and she'd start giggling like some love-struck adolescent.

Or should she say sex-struck?

The next street over, the owner of the town's venerable hotel had built a couple of honeymoon cottages. She'd seen couples emerge holding on to each other as if they were the only people in the universe. Sex had fairly oozed from them, and she'd sworn the shared heat spread out for hundreds of feet in all directions. As her own marriage was deflating like an old balloon, she'd wished the newlyweds a lifetime of rocking nights.

"I won't be leaving Gold Ridge." She spoke from some deep and true place. "One-horse town or not, it's right for me."

"What's that like?"

Something different had slipped into Joe's voice, a depth of emotion he'd kept to himself. "Are you asking me what it's like to know you belong somewhere?" she asked as she fought the urge to glance down so she could check on the mound between his legs.

A simple and not-so simple nod of the head. Suddenly her arms were around his waist. "That hasn't happened to you?" she gently pushed.

A shake this time. And his eyes going darker. "No. The thing is, it never mattered before. My family moved a lot when I was growing up. Then I settled in Chicago because that's where the career I thought I wanted was. There was a lot about the city that appealed to me, the wealth of things to do and see. But there's also a hell of a lot of anonymity. It's so different from here."

"Where everyone knows each other's business?" They were standing close together, smoking close if she was being truthful. And in answer to her question, yep, the lump was right where it was supposed to be.

"And people care about their neighbors."

He leaned down, For a moment she thought he was going to kiss the top of her head. Then he straightened, guided her to his side, and put his arm around her shoulder, which prompted her to wrap her arm around his waist. *Lordy, lordy, lordy.* They started walking again, slow and measured, in sync. Her hip and thigh kept kissing him.

She couldn't think of anything to say, or rather, the things she wanted to ask were too personal, questions one stranger had no right to ask another. This pace was a dance of sorts, muscles meshing. If only they were naked.

Naked. Walking into the night. Accepting each other's bodies. As oblivious to the world as honeymooners. Heading to a place and time of sex.

A stranger. He was little more than one.

And yet here she was holding on to him, the wine running through her and the need to fuck his brains out expanding.

"The shops here pretty much cater to tourists, don't they," he observed, slowing to look in a window featuring period costumes.

Think. Engage brain.

"Ah, most of them." This particular business offered photographs of visitors dressed as everything from gunslingers to dance hall girls. "What appeals to you? Maybe you'd like to dress as a banker. No, too stiff. How about a prospector?"

"I'd rather be a claim jumper or horse rustler."

"Hmm." She studied, or rather pretended to study a canvas trail duster. "Kind of an unstable career, not one known for its longevity."

"At least I'd make the wanted posters. I've always wanted to see my mug on one of those."

Studying him, she tried to imagine him wearing a ten-gallon hat with a rifle slung over his shoulder. Unfortunately, the image included a noose around his throat. "Not going to work."

"Why not?"

"Okay, here I am, the local schoolmarm heading for her fainting couch because this dark and handsome stranger just rode into town. The next time I see him, he's heading for the gallows."

"Point taken. Except I don't see you as a schoolmarm."

"Oh?" She had no doubt her eyes were twinkling. "Then what am I?"

"Can-can dancer."

"Yeah, I can see that." Sticking out her leg, she tried to imagine a red garter around her thigh and black fishnet stockings. "Let's see. You're a bank robber, highly successful. You're on a wanted poster, but because no one has seen anything except your mask, you don't worry about being recognized. You walk into the saloon where I'm working, and our eyes meet across a smoky room and—"

"Some drunk's giving you a hard time. Trying to get into your pantaloons. You are wearing pantaloons, aren't you?"

This was fun, fun and seductive at the same time. They'd started ambling again, body-wrapped arms keeping them together and hips touching and the heat index heading higher with each step.

"I'm not sure about the pantaloons. They might cover more territory than a can-can girl wants covered. I have a room above the saloon where I *entertain* certain select customers."

"Am I one of them?"

"You better believe it, big boy," she drawled. "I'm a sucker for low-slung revolvers and steely eyes. You do have steely eyes, don't you?"

"Of course. And I'm a deadly shot. Ride a big, black stallion."

"Then it's no wonder I invited you up to my room."

"And I came," he said softly. "Placed my six guns on your dresser and kicked my boots and spurs under your bed."

They were being silly, playing around. And yet the undercurrent pushed her even closer to heatstroke. She suspected the wine had nothing to do with it. "It doesn't bother you that I've entertained other gentlemen?"

"How can I say anything when I've left broken hearts in every cow town I passed through?"

"Good point." *Stop walking. Melt into him and stand on your toes and kiss him, long and hard until everything sizzles.* "So this roll in the hay we're having, it's a one-night stand?"

"Depends. How good is the sheriff in your town?"

"He's a bumbling idiot. Elected to the position because the crooked banker pulled some strings."

"Then we'll take each night as it goes. See what happens."

Silence. Walking with their shoes slapping softly on the worn sidewalk. Coming to the end of the commercial district and turning left. His long legs working in a smooth rhythm and her shorter ones easily keeping up. The air cooling, daylight oozing.

They reached the residential area with old, proud houses surrounded by white picket fences and sheltered by trees that had been planted well over a hundred years ago. Walking on the side of the road because there was no sidewalk here, breathing in the scent of roses.

She didn't want to be a can-can dancer after all, not that there was anything wrong with the career. Instead, she wanted to keep it simpler, clearer. Soiled dove meets outlaw. Everything laid out on the table. The moment he rode into town and spotted her lush breasts barely contained in the tightly laced top and naked legs, he knew what she was. He paid his money, and she led him to her crib out back. Naked even before he'd gotten out of his boots, she knelt before him and went straight for the family jewels.

Whew!

This was her street, familiar and safe, houses belonging to neighbors and friends, but she'd never walked down it like this before. Not with her arm around a man she'd just met and a hooker's heart beating in her chest.

Sex. Simple. No dancing around, no "glad to meet you—where have you been all my life" crap. Heeding the hot message in her head and the even more powerful one between her legs. Feeding a hunger so deep she wondered if it might drive her crazy.

She was hungry all right, revved up. Shivers running along her shoulders and down her spine. Just thinking about what waited beneath his slacks nearly made her scream. They'd keep things simple and straightforward.

"My ex left a couple of condoms behind if you –"

"No need. I'm always prepared."

"Works for me."

"The question is, will this work for both of us?"

"I hope so. And, ah, I don't have a lot of experience. There haven't been that many men in my life."

"This is about you and me. Tonight."

But what if the only thing he had in mind was walking her home?

No, couldn't be. He'd left the Stagecoach, with her, before having dinner.

Then what were they doing?

"This used to be a pretty wild town," she came up with as her/his house came into view. "Founded in the wake of a less-than-spectacular gold discovery. Some claim jumping and a serious lack of law enforcement. There were problems with the Native Americans, who lost. No real wars, just a lot of people carrying weapons."

"Have you ever been gold mining?"

"A few times, for fun. Obviously I didn't have much success, or I wouldn't still be working eight to five."

They were standing just outside her requisite white picket fence when he spun her toward him, caught her wrists, and turned them so he could look at her hands. Ran his index finger over her palms. "No calluses."

Distracted by the shiver charging down her spine, she twisted free and took hold of his right wrist. Instead of repeating what he'd done, she brought his hand to her mouth and traced his palm with her tongue. She couldn't believe what she was doing, couldn't make herself stop. Fresh shivers, most feeding off the one at the base of her spine, slid down the backs of her legs.

"What'd you find with that exploration of yours?" he asked. He was closer than she remembered, taking over and insulating her from the rest of the world.

"Your palm's rougher than mine," she said, the shivers making her bold and the flame in her belly ratcheting up her hunger. "But it isn't a workman's hand."

"That's something I want to change. To be proud of what I accomplish physically instead of hiring others to do my work."

She knew so little about him, next to nothing. Her body didn't care about what lay beneath the surface, but if the night was going to turn out the way she prayed it would, she'd learn about more than the external package.

"That's why you bought a place in need of a lot of TLC? So you could see what you were capable of?"

"That, among other reasons."

Her hands now pressed against his chest, and his hands were around her waist. She needed his fingers on her buttocks, cupping her ass, dragging her against his erection. Damn, she needed so many things! All of them coming from him.

"Call it midlife crisis," he muttered.

"You're too young for a midlife crisis."

"I haven't felt young for a long time."

She didn't want anything that complicated, but if he needed to talk, she'd listen. Later. After.

"I'm going to invite you in." It was her turn to mumble.

"I hoped you would."

"And not just that." Much as she wanted to elaborate, the words fell apart before she could say them. Despite the tantalizing mental images she'd spun out, she wasn't a soiled dove. This wasn't about earning a living on her back. And yet, wasn't she about to haul this man she'd just met into her bedroom? Unless he turned tail and ran—

"Do you want to lay it all out on the table?" he asked. "Or should we just see how this plays out?"

"I don't know." Who had control of her arms and why were they going around his neck, and how had she risen onto her toes—and what the hell was supposed to happen next?

"I don't know any more than you do, Lisi. Except that I want you."

He wanted her, just like that. Clean and clear and uncomplicated. Her head tipped up, eyes closing, lips soft and parting. Finding his and increasing the initial whisper-touch. A little bit dizzy and glad she had his strength to hold on to. Mouth opening yet more. Breathing through her nose and his breath on her face.

She'd wanted him to grope her ass, but now she was glad his hands were on her waist. The neighbors might be watching, rubbing their eyes and picking up their phones to pass on the gossip. Even more important, her triggers were being pressed to the firing point.

"We'd better go inside," she muttered.

"I was thinking the same thing," he said and helped her ease back onto the balls of her feet. "This is happening damn fast."

"Yeah, it is."

Chapter Four

The first time he'd stepped into the house, Joe had tried to concentrate on it. Now he gave the structure no thought beyond being glad that she'd left the windows open and the living room fan going. Otherwise, between the lack of air conditioning and what was taking place inside him, he might combust.

He'd meant what he'd said about things going fast between them, but even as the sensation of being caught in a raging river rushed at him, he didn't want anything to change. Years of making his mark on the world no longer mattered. Only Lisi and tonight did.

She was quicksilver, a lightning rod. Sex on a stick.

The sound of the door closing behind him saved him from trying to plaster a label on her. She stood in shadow surrounded by clues and cues to her life, but none of those things mattered. He'd discovered the opposite sex somewhere in the middle of his fifteenth year but hadn't stumbled upon the opportunity to lose his virginity until the week he turned seventeen. The next few years had been punctuated by what seemed like a perpetual hard-on, but, thank goodness, he'd eventually learned how to put sex into perspective. Yeah, he liked sex, loved it, in fact. He'd also learned that there was more to a satisfying climax than ramming tab A into slot B. There was sensation, the senses, emotion. Heart.

As for tonight, hell, he had no idea where the line between physical and emotional lay. He wanted to strip Lisi down to the essentials, fast. Put an end to the awful/wonderful ache in his cock, fast. He also wanted to eventually determine why she was having this impact on him.

Something about her stance plowed into his tangled mind and body, causing him to give her a long stare. Her laced hands rested on her barely there belly. She'd cocked her

head to the side and back a bit, making her look as if she couldn't decide whether to stay or flee. She couldn't be afraid of him. Maybe she was no more in control of what she was feeling than he was.

There might be a way to put an end to the push/pull, to stop the over-thinking. Praying his next move wouldn't spook both of them, he touched the pulse at her throat. Although she reared back a bit, she stood her ground.

His confidence growing, he slid his hand around to the back of her neck and drew her closer. She took a step, just a single step, but it was enough to bring her in contact with his erection. She dropped her gaze in what he hoped was approval of his offering.

Sorry. Some things I have no control over, he debated telling her. But she wouldn't have left the restaurant with him if she hadn't wanted this to happen, right? His mouth dried. He hadn't been this unsure around a woman in years. Fortunately, thanks to his advanced age, he had a body of knowledge to draw on, buried somewhere deep in his brain.

Women liked foreplay. He'd give foreplay. At least until he reached the point of no return.

Which threatened to be sooner than later.

Giving her a confident smile he didn't feel, he embraced her and went after her mouth. Equally wise in the before-sex moves, she gripped his neck. Her pelvis tipped toward him, again acknowledging his erection, saying she understood. This kiss was private, no neighbors looking on. Grateful for the walls between them and the rest of the world, he moved quickly from tentative exploration to bruising urgency. Hell, he had no choice! Even as he took his taste of the wine she'd drunk, his mind and body jumped ahead.

She was no unsure girl who might bolt, no wife bringing her burdens to the marriage bed. Instead, Lisi was a woman in search of sex, right? Hopefully right. She'd found a man willing to provide same. End of discussion.

Her lips, ah, soft, so wonderfully soft. Her arms around his neck spoke of trust and willingness, hopefully. Maybe most of all, they were locked together. His cock nestled against her warm flesh.

Widening his stance allowed him to position his legs outside hers while keeping certain vital contacts going. He slid his arm along her back just beneath her shoulder blades. His other hand went to her hair, and he pulled her head back so she was arched beneath him and holding on to his neck to keep from losing her balance. He loved controlling her this way, feeling in command for the first time since their meeting. When he was certain he was in no danger of dropping her, he went after her chin, cheeks, ears, even her throat, sometimes bathing her sweet flesh, sometimes nibbling while she squirmed and whimpered.

Yes, he was in charge, briefly. Melting her while deluding himself into half believing the same wasn't happening to him. She was becoming putty in his hands, malleable and incapable of resisting. Bit by bit he'd turn her into a sex-crazed animal, a nympho. She couldn't possibly resist his powerful and sexy body. Whatever he wanted her to do she would, willingly, sighing and moaning as she knelt before him, offered her breasts up to him, spread her ass cheeks so he could —

Ah! His back!

Hissing against the sharp pain, he straightened and then drew her upright.

"What?" she asked.

"Nothing." Damn it, he wasn't going to rub his back, he wasn't!

"You're hurting." Her gaze intense, she slid a hand under his shirt and ran her fingers over his chest hairs. "Let's see, is this where it hurts?"

"No, but nice distraction." Even with sparks lighting up his chest, laughter demanded freedom. "Let's just say I'm not the young buck I used to be."

"And neither am I a sweet young thing." Her free hand went to the small of her back. "I didn't know how much more I could take."

More laughter broke free. "That's what I get for having a desk job."

Her nervous yet sultry gaze fastened on him, she turned her attention to his shirt buttons. "If you're really ready for..."

"I am. I am!"

"Good. Now to see if I can pull it off."

After making short work of the buttons, she drew the shirt out of his waistband, exposing his chest. Her pupils darker than they'd been moments ago, she ran her fingertips over his collarbone and from there to the valley between his chest muscles. Breathing through flared nostrils helped, but much more and he'd be begging her to quit—either that or take her right here in the living room.

"This isn't a desk jockey's body," she observed, her tone husky. "At least what I've examined so far isn't."

"I work out."

"So I notice." She swallowed. "However, I need to conduct a complete evaluation before I feel qualified to comment on the state of your physical condition. I, ah, trust you don't have objections."

Picking up on the teasing note, he nodded. "So far I have no complaints. However, until I've experienced the evaluation you're proposing, I can't comment on its thoroughness."

"Point taken. So, sir, are you willing to let me begin?"

Something in her manner told him she was opting for a light tone in hopes of not revealing how nervous she really was. "Begin. If I feel the need to take notes, I'll let you know."

"Oh, I don't believe that will be necessary. I intend to have your full attention." That said, she lowered her gaze. Her fingers shook a little as she pushed his shirt off his shoulders. Grabbing the sleeves, she towed his back as she slowly worked the fabric down to his waist. She wasn't touching him. Just the same, it took no imagination to

exchange whatever the shirt was made with for her fingers. Between that and the friction, his core temperature continued to rise.

After lightly abrading his waist, she maneuvered the shirt even lower until it cupped his buttocks. Then she drew him toward her, shaking her head when he tried to rest his hands on her shoulders. Not sure what to do with his arms, he settled for holding them out and at the ready.

Still not looking at him, she dropped the shirt and tackled the slacks' fastening. The zipper screamed in the otherwise silent room. As the sound died, he thought back to when Neil Diamond had played backdrop to their meeting. *Thanks, Diamond.*

A tugging at his hips brought him back to dangerous reality. Another inch of the disrobing and his cock would pop free. "You're sure you know what you're doing?" he asked.

"Not really. Do you?"

"I haven't done anything, yet."

He was wrong, Lisi amended. Granted, he was standing there like some gifted Greek god waiting for her to make the next move—and probably make a fool of herself in the doing, but she wouldn't be trying to figure out how and why to strip him naked if he hadn't just manhandled her.

Seduction was the man's job, wasn't it? Women were supposed to play hard to get or if not that, be circumspect, respectful and coy. They teased with a look or word, a certain movement, a bit of cleavage, tight clothes. Men did the undressing, the stroking, at least initially.

Hell, where were the rules?

Propelled by equal mixing of the storm in her belly and his hot and hard body, she gathered strength around her. Eyes still downcast, she drew his slacks this way and that until they were past his hips. No matter how much she tried to concentrate on her task, her gaze latched on to what she'd revealed. Okay, so his shorts still covered the jewels. That didn't mean she couldn't and wouldn't give imagination free rein until, in her

mind and maybe elsewhere, she was looking at flesh and blood. At what tonight was about.

Pins and needles attacked her fingers, compelling her to release his slacks and rub her hands together. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

"A little priming of the pump maybe?"

Her pump was already primed, thank you very much. In truth it wouldn't take much for a gusher to —

Somehow she was on her knees, the braided area rug pressing against her kneecaps. At least she no longer had to worry about toppling over. Wondering who, if anyone, was in charge of her system, she rubbed her cheek against the cotton-enclosed mound. Then, shaking more than a little, she breathed in his essence. *Geez, things were going fast.* He smelled of many things and many hours, but mostly primal male. His male speaking to her female.

Unsteady fingers returned to his slacks, and she drew the garment down around his ankles. Only then did she realize neither of them could finish the job until his shoes were gone. She untied them, then, baffled about what to do next, rocked back on her heels.

"Look at me," he said.

Fighting shyness, she complied. He seemed incredibly tall, a tree of strength.

"Now," he continued, "finish what you began."

"I'm, ah, a bit stymied."

"Then watch as I demonstrate." Using the top of her head for balance, he kicked off his shoes, then peeled off his socks. Although he could have dispensed with his slacks at the same time, he turned that chore into a separate, slow act that floated her teeth.

Only his briefs remained.

She was trying to figure out what to do when he cupped a hand under her chin. "Your turn."

Oozing into his touch, she pondered the complexity behind his command. Finally she hit upon tackling her buttons, but fingers that had dealt with his fumbled anew. He did nothing to help, but at least he wasn't laughing at her, or if he was, he knew to keep his amusement to himself.

"Stand up," he ordered.

She tried to obey, she really did, but her legs had gone numb. Maybe he knew because he gave her a hand up. Instead of freeing her, he drew her to him, her bra-sheathed breasts pressing against his naked chest. For a moment there was nothing except his hands on her back and being slightly off-balance. Then he gently pushed her away, took hold of the semi-sheer bright yellow blouse she nearly hadn't had the courage to wear, and stripped it off her. It floated to the floor near his slacks.

"Now finish the job."

Her head buzzed. She couldn't get in touch with her body. And her mind wasn't working. Wishing he'd point out the necessary steps, she reached behind her for the bra fastening. Her breasts were ordinary, nothing worthy of headlines. But with his gaze unflinching on them, she took pride in revealing nature's design. She did so slowly, a striptease that called for drawing one strap at a time off her shoulders. She kept the cups in place as long as possible then tossed the bra away.

His nostrils flared, and his fingers clenched. "Beautiful."

Swallowing again, she accepted the compliment by cradling her breasts and drawing them upward. *Touch them*, she said without words.

He stepped toward her, that's all, a simple step. Then suddenly she was in his arms and he was carrying her to the couch. Standing her on her feet in front of it, he nearly popped the button on her shorts. "Gotta work on my technique," he muttered when he was done. "I'm rusty."

Later she'd ask about his sexual experiences, maybe. For now she had all she could do to keep her feet under her while he slid the white garment down her hips. There was no need for him to run his nails over her waist and thighs, none at all. Neither did he need to pause in the disrobing and massage her hips through her panties, but he did, and she ground her sandals into the carpeting. He was toying with her sanity, turning the tables so whatever command of the situation she'd tried to convince herself she had no longer existed.

Not that she wanted it any other way.

Now he was on his knees, unfastening her sandals and running his hands up her legs until, gasping, she tried to backpedal. "No, Lisi, nothing except going forward with this."

"You're driving me crazy." Fisting his hair, she tugged.

"We're both crazy or we wouldn't be doing this."

Should she simply agree? Maybe sanity hinged on keeping some small parcel of herself separate from him. Before she could decide what to do, he pressed his mouth against her belly and expelled a long, hot breath.

Whining like some wild thing, she struggled to remain in place. He *helped* by gripping her buttocks and anchoring her. Incapable of thinking beyond his hands and mouth, she continued to pull on his hair. He responded by raking his teeth over her belly. She whined again. Then a harsh whimper broke free.

"Good," he muttered with his mouth against her panties. "I love hearing that."

"I can't...help...myself."

Her shorts were down around her knees, the paper-thin panties dampened by his moist breath. Releasing him, she yanked her hair with both hands, and when that failed to quiet the storm, she pressed her hands to her breasts and stared at the ceiling.

A quick tug on his part brought her panties to her knees. Before she could prepare, he laved her exposed belly. Panting, she roughly massaged her breasts. His hands ran

up and down the back of her thighs, his nails sometimes raking flesh that quivered with each touch.

“I can’t—can’t...” She couldn’t remember what, if anything, she’d wanted to say. The only thing she knew was that even if his nails shredded her, she needed this. Needed him.

Somehow she was out of her sandals. Somehow what remained of her clothing was down around her ankles. And when he commanded her to step out of them, she did so, albeit not gracefully. Finally, her heart threatening to escape her chest, she stood before this stranger who’d dispensed with her clothing.

His gaze meeting hers, he spread her legs and ran a forefinger over her labia. Her head snapped back, bringing instant dizziness. Righting herself, she acknowledged she had no existence beyond her sex. He continued to stroke her, first lightly as if his finger had become a feather. Everything in and around her turned electric. She was becoming one with the air, losing substance and form while merging with him. A small voice argued that she should be pleasuring him, but he’d positioned her for his exploration. Until he was done, she’d stand with her sex offered up and fireballs rolling from head to feet.

Her existence was about a man’s large finger trailing over her labia, finding and teasing her clit, making brief and shallow entrance.

Her clit. Center of her ability to orgasm. She didn’t have to tell him where her trigger lay because each time he touched it, she wound up on her toes, shuddering. If she said something, begged him to linger there, in seconds she’d be past the point of holding back. Her kingdom for a climax, for the tingling explosion!

But if she gave in now, maybe she wouldn’t need or want him for the rest of the night.

“Do—do you know what you’re doing?” She rocked back, stopping when she was in danger of losing her footing.

"Tell me." His breath again dampened her belly. His hand, strong against her sex, stilled. "What am I doing?"

"It's been — I haven't for a long — build-up."

"You're afraid you're going to come?"

"Afraid? No. It's what I want. Just not right now."

"When?"

What an impossible question! "When we can do it together."

"Believe me, if you're on the brink, I'm already there."

How could that be when she'd done nothing to — What was he doing? For a moment the only thing she knew was that his hand no longer trapped and pleased her. Then he wiped his fingers on the inside of her thigh, leaving behind proof of how ready she was to receive him.

Closing his oh-so capable hands around her hips, he spun her away from him. She looked over her shoulder at him in time to see his mouth close in on her left buttock. A sharp raking made her jump, but he still had hold of her hips, and she had nowhere to go.

"Oh shit!"

"You like?"

"My head's going to explode. Just like that, brain matter all over the ceiling."

"Lovely image. Let's see if we can make it happen."

Chapter Five

Why had she said anything? If she'd kept her big mouth shut, he wouldn't now be nibbling her backside. Thank goodness she'd taken a shower this afternoon.

She was his prisoner, stripped and helpless in the grip of a macho male intent on eating her one bite at a time. He'd started with her ass, not drawing blood but finding a million nerves with each nip. Unable to determine whether she was being tickled or *abused*, she swam somewhere between reality and insanity.

When she reached behind herself and wound up stroking his shoulder, she let go of the nonsense about being his prisoner. This was willingness, consensual activity between two adults, although the adult label was in danger of falling off.

Oh, oh my god! No longer nibbling. Running his tongue the length and breadth of her cheek with her marching in place like some quick-stepping soldier. "You're killing me."

"Don't think so."

True. But damn was he coming close. She'd once seen Neil Diamond in concert and for two hours had lived in a magical universe created by rhythm and words, by the band and the compelling man responsible for the all-encompassing experience. She hadn't fallen in love with Neil so much as the pure, wild loss of self.

This was close and getting closer to the earlier experience. Self was floating away to be replaced by a body on fire.

Releasing her hips, he spread her buttocks. The thought that he might lick her back there unhinged her. Then he pressed something, his thumb maybe, against her anus, and she started to lean forward like some brainless horny animal. She'd become a bitch in heat willing to mate with the first mutt to jump the fence. She'd take the mutt time after time until her heat had run its course. Then she'd turn on him and chase him off.

At least she would if she really was that four-legged bitch.

Maybe a second had passed. Maybe it had been an hour. In that time, he'd claimed ownership of about an inch of her rear entrance. Her stretched muscles closed around his thumb. Blood pooled in her forehead. Her temples pulsed.

"No more!" she gasped. Straightening, she stumbled out of his grip.

Then with her nerves raging and pussy soft, she faced him. He'd rocked back on his heels, his hands on his broad, tight, naked thighs. His eyes fairly smoked. Most of all, he was a man with a great erection. His cock looked as if it was trying to break free of the rest of his body, veins blood-stretched and flesh fire-dark. Her clit spasmed.

"Second thoughts?" he asked. "You don't want to do this after all?"

She couldn't walk away if staying meant death, didn't he know that? Without the words to explain, she was left with one recourse. Lowering herself to the carpet, she crawled to him and licked his tip. "Does that answer your question?"

He breathed, loudly. "And more."

Ah good. No longer did she see him as experienced male plying his trade on a struck-dumb female. He wasn't so sure of himself after all, if he ever had been. Quite the contrary, his sucked in belly, white knuckles, and flared nostrils left no doubt—she'd pushed a vital button.

Her turn. Let him try not to turn inside out as she demonstrated a trick or two. And if she could do those things without reverting back to bitch in heat, so much the better.

Or not.

Reaching his side, she sat up. Then, not giving him time to guess what she had in mind, she threw her shoulder into his chest, putting as much weight as possible into the effort. He tried to catch himself, but she put an end to that nonsense by straddling his waist and shoving yet again. His lips quirked, he sprawled on the carpet. After straightening his legs, he rested the back of his head on his palms and gave her a *let's see what you have in mind* look.

That was easy, mindlessly easy. It took a little maneuvering, but she wound up with her back to him and her buttocks settled on his ribs. Leaning forward, she cradled his cock in a palm and gave his head an *ice cream cone on a summer afternoon* lick.

“Oh shit!” He slapped her right buttock. “Shit.”

“Shut up and enjoy!” Not waiting for a word of compliance, she indulged in another lick. This one was slow and long, imitating the effort to keep a cone from dripping. Encouraged by the comparison, she gave herself up to savoring the slowly melting dessert, slurping occasionally, turning her head to one side and then the other to ensure she reached all surfaces.

In her mind, her fingers around his base and resting on his balls became the cone. What a tall treat she’d been given, tasty albeit warmer than any ice cream she’d ever eaten. The texture and taste were different from any vanilla, strawberry or chocolate in her memory, not that she was complaining.

What made the adventure even more interesting – all right, exciting – was that each languid lick earned her an ass slap. His rhythm needed work. One light blow to her right flank was followed by several to the left. Then the right again came under assault and distracted her from her task.

Laughter rolled through her. Every time it threatened to break free, the bitch in heat intercepted it. This was about foreplay, albeit a form of foreplay that hadn’t entered her mind when she’d first declared her need to get laid.

Oh yes, laid. That’s why she’d pinned this man to the floor. If it was going to happen, she’d better get slot A closer to tab B.

Plan, she needed a plan. But first one last deep slurp. She bent even lower and sucked every bit of his cock she could into her mouth. Eyes unfocused, she slowly straightened, lips tight, flesh running over flesh, reluctantly freeing him as his quick, harsh grunts filled her ears.

“Holy shit!” Using the sides of his hands, he lightly pummeled the base of her spine.

"Ah," she whispered on a sigh. "That feels wonderful."

"That should have been my line."

Lines aside, what next? Oh yes, alignment. Thinking to face him, she started to lift a leg. However, she'd barely gotten her knee off the carpet when he grabbed her foot. Using her limb as leverage, he turned her to the side and slid out from under her.

What a fool she'd been to think she was his physical equal, she acknowledged when, once all the repositioning was over, she was the one flat on her back and he loomed over her.

Amend that. Although her spine rested on the carpet, he'd twisted her at the waist, her right hip down. Giving her a look that seemed to say, *I done roped me a doggie*, he said, "Don't go anywhere, all right?"

"What are you —"

"Being responsible."

Glad that one of them was thinking, she waited while he retrieved a small foil package from his slacks. A ripping sound followed.

Returning to his former position, he bent her left knee and lifted it at the same time. She didn't need pictures to know her sex was exposed.

"You aren't going anywhere." He held her in place via a palm over a breast. "Got that, missy? Enough with you making me crazy."

"What are you talking about? I was having dessert."

"That so? Then it's my turn to do the same. The thing is, if you behave, I can just about guarantee you'll get another treat."

Another? Sounded great.

How right she was about his greater and decidedly substantial size, she conceded seconds later. He'd straddled her leg that was against the ground, working carefully but quickly to place his cock at her entrance. Then he leaned forward and placed his hands

on either side of her. His chest pressed against her raised leg, and with a smooth, incredible movement, he pushed into her.

"Oh my," she got out as he filled her.

"That's all you have to say?"

"Ah, what more do you want?"

"How about a compliment on my inventiveness, unless you do the sideways whatever-this-is all the time."

About to let him know she didn't do anything with any frequency, she realized she wasn't interested in a conversation. She might not hold up under the body twist for long, but in the meantime —

Lifting her arms, she settled them around the back of his head and applied pressure until he looked down at her. His glazed expression said a great deal about preoccupation. She felt exactly the same.

The motion slow and smooth, he pushed deeper into her. Unable to move more than a few unimportant muscles, she concentrated on sensation. Having been married should have conditioned her to certain things. Her pussy had had considerable experience with a man's penis. It understood size and texture, the glorious invasion.

But this was new, throat-dryingly different. Getting laid.

Smiling what she intended as a smile of encouragement, she shifted a little. Lordy, slick gliding along slick!

"So far so good?" he asked.

"No...complaints."

An unintelligible mutter followed her comment. Then he tightened and pushed with such strength that her upper leg rocked. Still holding on, she waited him out. Felt. Thrilled. And when he pulled back, she closed her sex muscles around him, defied him to abandon her.

He didn't. Not him with his guarded gaze and straining body. There was nothing tentative or gentle about his fucking. Hammering about said it, hard and hot blows that threatened to shove him all the way to her throat.

Being trapped under him was good, a little unnerving, but damn good. He pummeled, breathing like a laboring racehorse, his entire body locked in this single thing. She latched on to the act with him, sweat sealing them together, and her pussy assaulted. She wanted to complement his effort via muscle clenches, but his jack hammering had no rhythm, and she kept forgetting what she'd been going to do.

A receptacle, the requisite and more-than receptive cunt for a man at the limit of his self control. That's what she was, what she'd become.

And her left leg was going numb.

"Enough!" she gasped as her calf cramped. "Can't—I can't keep up."

He stopped, tension humming through him. "Huh?"

"Off me. My — A cramp."

Again muttering something probably meant for him alone, he reared up and back, his cock escaping and leaving her hot and empty. Before she could reach for her leg, he did it for her, finding the knot and massaging the knot out of it. In seconds the muscle went slack. Discomfort died, leaving room for other sensations, namely hunger.

"Sorry," he muttered.

"Not your fault."

"I shouldn't have — next time I'll know not to try to be so inventive."

"Next time? We're not done with number one."

"I should hope not. Now, what would you suggest?"

"Where'd I put that sex manual? We could thumb through the positions and find one that —"

"Woman, you talk too much."

She couldn't have agreed more, and when he sat up, she scooted close, pushing his legs apart as she did. Keeping her gaze on tab A and slot B, she rested her legs on his thighs but the alignment was off.

"Do you have a plan?" he asked.

"Just shut up and help."

Measuring the scant space still between cock and cunt, he cocked his head. "I thought sex was about instinct. All this preparation and execution is hard on my brain."

"Okay, okay, what if —"

"Wait a minute. I've got it. Lean back."

"Good idea, great idea in fact," she muttered, happily complying.

Sliding his hands under her buttocks, he lifted her. Guessing what he had in mind, she locked her legs around his backside. Then, mildly surprised by her trust in him, she waited. Yes, there was tab A, touching slot B. "Hmm."

"Hmm as in you approve?" he asked.

"Hmm, as in I like where this is heading."

"Oh, it's getting there."

Getting there? As far as she was concerned, they were at the main event. Granted, his cock head only pressed against her opening, but all it would take was a final scoot on her part to —

Lordy!

Trapping her clit between thumb and forefinger, he gently rolled her swollen flesh one way and then the other. Not thinking, mewling like some lost kitten, she gripped his wrist with both hands. Although she managed to keep her lower half still, from the waist up, she was in movement, constant, uncontrollable movement.

Her entire being began and ended with his fingers. It had all come down to this, her existence hinging around the fiery sparks shooting out from her core. He had her, had

her strong and insistent, finger pads closed around that wildly hungry nub. She dripped, leaked, poured, a dam bursting.

"Oh god, god."

"Take it. Take and enjoy."

"I—*oh god*—am."

There it was! Her climax pressing at her from all directions, taking her by surprise, throwing her at a foaming current. She dug into his wrist. Made a sound she'd never heard before.

"No, no, no," he chanted. His cock still in place, he released her clit. "Not that quick."

"What?" Rolling her head to the side, she tried to study him, but his face was blurred—like her thoughts. The sweet, nearly there explosion continued to hum. If she touched herself—

"You are hungry, aren't you?" He punctuated his question by burying a breast under his palm. Her fingers ached, and she backed off on her grip.

"What about you?" she snapped. He was so damn good at pushing her buttons. "All cool and collected?"

He laughed, briefly, deeply. Then he came at her, slipped past her sex lips, entered. "Ah! Why do you think I stopped letting you lick me? Because I was too close to doing the Roman candle thing."

Say something. Keep the conversation going. Get to know him. But those things would have to wait. She was all hard and hot energy, bitch in heat.

Damn him for controlling the tempo of this thing they were doing! Not thinking, she grabbed his upper arm with both hands and pulled her upper body off the carpet.

Now she could look at him, look and probe and demand the truth. Her effort had also sucked him deeper into her.

"Your other hand," she commanded. "Give it to me."

“What?”

“Give it to me!”

Frowning, he nevertheless did as she ordered. They held hands for a moment, two naked and fucking human beings shaking on their deal. Then he released her. A mini-second later, his hands slid around to her back, supporting her, protecting her, controlling at the same time.

What had he said earlier, that sex was supposed to be instinctive? Surely that’s why she trusted him not to let her fall back, why she provided the balance he needed.

Rocking, rocking, carefree children on a teeter-totter. Swinging as one, bodies fused.

Head back, she concentrated. Yes, there he was all right, full and firm and deep inside her, claiming ownership of her pussy and said pussy greasing his cock. This was getting laid, full and free and fantastic!

Courage in hand, she again straightened so she could study the man who’d swept into her world and body. He was looking back at her, his eyes still glazed as if his attention was focused inward. *I know what you’re feeling*. Tab A was securely inside slot B, no question about it. And the union – incredible!

He wasn’t thrusting as wildly as he’d done before. But yes, oh yes, they could pick up the pace, rocking in a frenzy. He pushed, buttocks tight and strained. In response, she clamped her channel around his cock, tried to isolate each muscle, massaging and exploring at the same time.

Hot. Sweat between her breasts and under her chin. His arms and chest turning slick with his sweat. She kept making those dumb animal sounds, but they no longer surprised her. They were simply part of the act and art of fucking, of muscles under strain and an earthquake building in her core.

There it was! The march.

Shivering in anticipation, she closed her eyes. Mouth open, she waited for the rippling sensation. It began deep inside, but as her climaxes always did, it made a quick shift to her clit.

Didn't matter where. Or when. Or even who right now. She was lost in herself, all selfishness and sucking in air. No flames, no rough explosion. Instead, she eased languidly into her climax. After all the build-up and anticipation, she was utterly at peace. There. This was what it was all about, ripples that went on and on. Holding on to them, milking them, self-absorbed.

Delighted.

She flew, floated, flew some more. Then the floating sensation returned to announce the start of the downhill slide. Deeply, deeply satisfied, she accepted the return to sanity. She could do this again, soon. In the meantime, she burrowed into the quieting. Gentled.

Like a skier at the end of a steep hill, she glided onto the base. She stopped, thought about opening her eyes. But before she could, her spent pussy sent yet another message.

Joe. Inside her. Climbing his mountain.

Determined to experience as much of his journey as possible, she released him and slid her fingers between their joined bodies. He jumped, mumbled. Resting her fingertips on what little of his cock wasn't in her, she imagined what it looked like, what it was doing.

His release. Male grunts accompanying each discharge. Body shaking.

He started to fall back, caught himself. Panted. Shook some more.

"Holy shit," she muttered. "Hot holy shit."

Still trembling, he started to pull out, but she didn't want to have to look at the damnable rubber so she captured his sac.

"What are you —"

"Prolonging the moment. You have anything against it?"

“Lady, right now there’s nothing I’d object to. Holy shit. I never—I mean it, I never thought this would...”

“Neither did I.” *But it has.*

Chapter Six

Although they didn't fuck in every room as she'd fantasized they would, they did baptize her bed and the couch before they ran out of go. Somewhere in there she made him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. They slept spoon-like and might have remained like that all day if her alarm hadn't gone off just before seven.

"You really have to?" he muttered as she slid, naked and spent, out from under the covers.

"I really have to. Yesterday afternoon was all I could get away for." She'd intended to walk into the bathroom without turning around, but so much for the best of intentions. He'd thrown off his blankets, giving her an unobstructed view of the family jewels. For a man who'd declared himself reamed out, he'd recovered. Maybe he woke up with a hard-on every day, something she'd love to know. But would it happen? And if it didn't – "Are you trying to tempt me?" She indicated his erection.

"Is it working?"

"Unfortunately, I don't dare let it. Can you imagine how many tongues would wag if I didn't show up today after our being seen together last night?"

"Not my problem. No one knows me, yet."

"Yet," she muttered. As much as she wanted to explore the word, her bladder was letting its presence be known.

When she was done in the bathroom, she stepped out so he could do the same. In answer to his question, she said, yes, a shower was the first order of business. Usually she set up the coffeepot the night before, but there'd been nothing usual about last night. "Not to worry," he said and took off for the kitchen, still unselfconsciously naked.

Selecting the underwear she'd put on after her shower took an unreal amount of concentration. Finally she opted for white bra and panties. The moment she stepped into the water, the needles of spray stung her sensitive skin. Getting used to the sensation took her full attention briefly. Then she relaxed, a little. Last night had been fun, fantastic fun!

This morning, however, she found herself in a contemplative mood. One-night stands weren't her thing because she had an issue with getting it on with a man just to scratch itches. Sex was profoundly intimate, the path to perpetuation of the species. Fucking, for her at least, resulted in more than physical nudity. Mind and soul came along for the ride.

So where did that leave her emotions this morning?

"I've changed my mind," a familiar male voice said. "I don't want to watch coffee perk after all. Any chance you want company?"

"What did you have in mind?" she asked although she wasn't ready to turn her back on her question about emotion.

"Helping you."

"I know how to soap myself."

"That's not what I'm talking about." His nude silhouette appeared on the other side of the milky shower door.

"Then what—"

"All right, I'll admit it. I'm a bit confused over what happened last night. Can I come in so we can talk about it?"

Something told her they'd be doing more than talking. "Guess I can make room."

The door opened. He stood there, wonderful and overwhelming at the same time, rattling her nerves and making her teeth ache. Holding her breath, she stepped back. Although he kept his hands at his sides, their shoulders brushed.

"What, ah, what did you want to talk about?" she managed.

"A lot of things." He faced her with water raining down his chest and his cock now lightly scraping her belly. "The moment I drove into Gold Ridge, I had this *feeling* about it. My ex would call it a burg, but it's not like that to me."

"I understand. It feels the same way to me. People put down roots here. They care about its past and future."

"Roots," he muttered. "That's important to you."

He hadn't posed it as a question, but although she wanted to think about how right-on he was, the ability to think was floating off with the steam. Nothing more than a shifting of her weight and she'd be in his space. Granted, his cock already invaded her space, but a shifting on her part would send out undeniable vibes.

"What's important to you?" she asked, jumping on the opportunity to expose more of his layers. "No matter what you do to this place, you're not going to get rich off it."

"Rich?" Unmindful of the droplets on his lashes, he returned her gaze. "I have a hard time believing wealth once mattered to me. Maybe it was the divorce, reassessing my life. Maybe I finally had time to find myself."

"Have you found yourself?" she asked. Somehow her arms were around his waist and slick skin slid against slick skin. "The journey's complete?"

"Nothing in life is ever finished, at least I hope it isn't." He embraced her back, enveloped her, really. "Wisdom is a process, right?"

What a wise, and compelling man! "Life's a journey so you're right. Wisdom is a component."

"Which is pretty heavy for a couple of people who haven't had coffee."

Coffee meant less than nothing to her. Same thing when it came to getting to work on time.

"My pot perks pretty fast if you're desperate," she said and leaned into him.

"I'm not desperate yet. But I'm getting there, and I'm not talking about caffeine."

"I know you aren't."

With his greater height, he didn't have to worry about getting water on his head. In contrast, her sopping hair was plastered to her head, and she couldn't keep her eyes open. Not that it mattered.

"You're addictive," he muttered as he ran his broad hands up and down her back, making her shiver with each journey. "I want to learn so much about you and tell you all kinds of probably boring things about myself."

"What, ah, what do you consider boring?" She spoke with her mouth less than an inch from his shoulder.

"My childhood injuries and illnesses. For the record, I was disgustingly healthy and have only one broken bone to boast about, a forearm. I sustained it playing football. Are you impressed?"

"Only one?" She pretended shock. "I had two, both sustained when I couldn't keep my bicycle on the sidewalk."

"I hate it when bicycles get minds of their own. If I'd been there, I would have picked you up and carried you to the hospital."

Wonderful image! Thinking to tell him that, she opened her mouth, but instead of saying anything, she wound up licking water off him. As she did, his hands crept lower so they now cupped her buttocks. Turning her so his back protected her from the spray, he pulled her closer.

More than willing to join in what they both knew was going to happen, she waited for him to widen his stance and then slid into the space he'd created. He leaned over her, curving her back and giving her his strength to hold on to. As he nibbled her hair and closed his legs around hers, she repeatedly pressed her lips to his shoulder, neck, and chin.

Heat sluiced off her, heat that came from both of them as much as the water. Some insane woman had let this man walk out of her life. The two of them hadn't been right for each other, something she couldn't comprehend. One night with him and in some

ways she'd known him forever. At the same time, it might take her a lifetime to fill in the blanks.

It was all right. She had a lifetime for the journey.

More than a little shaken by the thought, she pressed into his erection. Hard, hot, ready, a gift from man to woman.

Hungry for him, she worked her hips from side to side.

He did the same. "You're going to be late for work."

"Do you care?"

"No. And your actions tell me you don't either."

Would it be the same tomorrow? Shaken by the thought and ramifications, she turned her being over to the primitive energy radiating throughout her sex. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she pressed her breasts into him. The hold on her buttocks tightened.

"We're wet," he muttered. "Getting dry and deciding how to handle things will take time. The only other option—"

"Now. Right damn now."

Chuckling, he lifted her. The instant she was off the ground, he spread his hands under her thighs, and she wrapped her legs around him. Then, using her hold on his neck, she leaned back, blinked water out of her eyes, and concentrated on the alignment of vital body parts. Slick and smooth, hot and calming at the same time, she took him deep.

"God," he got out. "Ah, god."

She couldn't speak, not with his cock stabbing her and their bodies trembling. Neither of them could keep this up long, which meant—

Heat that existed separate from the shower seemed to touch every inch of her. Last night should have left her satiated, right? Or at least slow to respond. But being with Joe was changing everything she'd thought she knew about herself.

She needed to climax, quick and hard. Hell, even before he started working his magic on her, she was ready. Right there.

His strength was a marvel, a miracle. How he could support and thrust at the same time was something she longed to explore and consider. Later.

Now – now was for leaping and crying out, holding him tight and safe within her, running her teeth over him and her arms trembling.

Sweat, from both of them, bleeding into the shower and becoming part of a whole. More cries ripped from her throat and a delicious glow that kept spreading until she was drowning in it.

“Going,” she heard herself confess. Nostrils flaring, she tightened her inner muscles. “Oh shit, I’m going!”

“Wait. Wait for me.”

“I can’t – oh damn I can’t.”

Something wonderful and awesome caught her, shook her. Her cries echoed against the close walls, then faded to a whimper as the shaking continued. *Join me*, she thought. *Make this the same for both of us.*

“Now. Now. Now,” he grunted, and she knew she’d been granted her wish.

* * * * *

Joe was still in the buff when she joined him in the kitchen, dressed for battle but wishing she wasn’t. He handed her a steaming mug. “I didn’t see any cream,” he said. “I take it you like yours black.”

“My waistline says keep it black.” She tried not to look down, gave up. Even flaccid, his cock held her attention. What condition would it be in by the end of her work day?

Would he be here, in the house soon-to-be-his when she returned to it?

“Your phone rang while you were in the bathroom. I figured it might be awkward if I picked it up. She left a message.”

Something about his expression told her he was looking forward to her reaction to the message, and when he followed her into the living room, she allowed as how privacy was out of the question.

"Where are you?" Squeaky asked after she pushed play. "You owe me for your share of the dinner. Speaking of last night, how did it go? You get laid?"

"Yes," Joe answered. "As a matter of fact, she did get laid, repeatedly." He turned his attention to her. "That was on your to-do list for yesterday?"

Where's a hole to climb into when I need it? "It's a long story."

"I'd love to hear it."

"I'm sure you would. However, I don't want to be any later for work than I'm already going to be."

He gave her a sideways look. "I hope you aren't blaming me for that. As I recall, you didn't tell me to leave a few minutes ago."

"No, I didn't." *And I'm not now.* "It was, ah, incredible. Having sex in the shower, I mean." Glancing at the wall clock, she winced. "I'm never late. They're going to think—"

Warm fingers touched her wrist. "This'll just take a second. What was the big deal about getting laid?"

"All right, all right! It was my goofy idea of how to celebrate selling the house. A way to release the tension I'd been under."

"Hmm. Would any male body do, or did you have someone in mind before I showed up?"

Groaning, she pressed her now buzzing hand to her forehead. Told herself not to read too much into his question. Failed. "You've seen the size of this town. It's not like the list of availables is that long. In fact, as far as I know, there is no list."

"Then my showing up and fitting the bill was fortunate, wasn't it?"

"More than," she whispered, throat tight. "I've never had—there's never been a night—"

"And this morning, don't forget that."

"Like I could." *Or want to.* "I'm still trying to wrap my mind around everything that happened."

His smile fading, he sipped on his coffee. "You're feeling overwhelmed, are you?"

"Yes."

He touched her wrist again. "Me too. Maybe the woman's supposed to say this, but it's been incredible."

Darn it, she wasn't going to cry! "I feel the same way. And overwhelmed."

"So you already said." A long look had her trembling. "Look, I can throw on my clothes and shower once I get to my motel. That way you don't have to worry about leaving me in your —"

Don't go! "It's going to be your place once the papers are signed."

"I know." Reaching out, he gathered up the hand he'd been brushing with his fingertips. The *zing* returned.

"What are you thinking?" he whispered.

"Nothing you need to..." She took in the window she'd cleaned last week, the old but character-filled cooking stove, the vinyl floor she'd wanted to replace, the solid cupboards and outdated hardware. Generations of women had cooked for their families in this room. They'd tended their gardens and brought in their harvests, canned and froze.

"Where are you going to live?" he asked.

"What?" She blinked back the tears she'd hoped she wouldn't shed. "I'm not sure. There's a newer apartment complex just beyond the city limits that —"

"It won't work."

"What?"

Lifting her hand to his mouth, he kissed her knuckles. "Look, I've known something from the moment I stepped in here. You don't want to move."

"It's a moot point." Stiffening her spine was harder than she'd hoped it would be, but she wasn't going to start blubbering, no way! "Look, I appreciate...everything. You did your part by, you know, buying the place. I'm capable of taking things from here."

"In other words, the one-night stand is over."

If she'd ever hated a phrase more, she couldn't remember. But he was right—it was time for her to go to work and him to do— "What are you going to do now?" she asked, making no effort to free her hand. "Are you going back to Chicago until the sale's finalized? You can't want to spend weeks in a motel."

"You aren't the only one with a long story."

"I'm sure I'm not."

"Mine is filled with chapters like walking off the job one day, selling the highly successful business I started, packing up my car and hitting the road. Things you don't have time to hear this morning."

For a naked man in need of a shave and shower, he had a lot of layers, layers she longed to peel. "What about later?"

"Are you saying what I hope you are?"

"I hope I am."

His soft smile made her forget about stubble. "It sounds to me as if we have two *hopes* working here. Put them together and they might lead into the future."

"They might." She had to swallow before she could go on. "My lunch is at one. The Stagecoach will be open."

"I'll be there," he said and kissed her knuckles again.

As she returned the favor, she knew the first thing she'd tell him was how wrong she'd been about the one-night stand.

About the Author

“Of course I’ve time-traveled to the ancient Everglades, infiltrated bondage strongholds, done wilderness search and rescue, and spent a night trapped in a workout gym with Mr. Universe. How can I possibly write about something I haven’t experienced?”

Although I love telling readers that, the truth is much more mundane. In my “day” jobs, I’ve been a commercial pilot, brain surgeon, worked as a white-water river guide, bee keeper, snake charmer, and garbage collector.

And if you buy all that, let me pitch the bridge I have listed on eBay.

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

Tell Us What You Think

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

Also by Vonna Harper

Brothel Night

Captive Warrior

Dangerous Ride

Dark Touch

Down and Dirty *anthology*

Equinox II *anthology*

Forced

Hard Bodies

Her Passionate Need

Jungle Cries

Night of the Cougar

Refuge

Roughing It

Scarlet Cavern

Scarred Hearts

Spoils of War

Thunder

Virgin Afternoon



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

www.ellorascave.com