



Finding Jen

EILEEN ANN BRENNAN

Loose Id

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Chapter One

It took every ounce of Sean O'Connell's considerable self-control not to toss the attorney onto the conference room table and fuck her brains out. Or maybe he should turn her over his knee and give her the spanking she deserved. Instead, he spun around to avoid her notice and inhaled a deep breath in a vain attempt to calm his thundering heartbeat. He didn't know what troubled him more -- that he had finally run into her after all these years or his body's violent reaction at seeing her. Buying time to level out his response, he glanced out the window at the slanting rays of the late-afternoon sun. Even from the seventy-first floor, there was little to see of Manhattan except sporadic patches of sky and the reflective windows of taller buildings.

"Jennifer!" Matt Stewart all but leaped to the door to welcome the woman vacillating on the threshold. "Thanks for coming by. I know it's last minute, but I've got to get to the hospital. As they say, the stork waits for no man, and Betty will have my hide if I miss the event."

The woman hadn't noticed him yet. Just as well. He returned his attention to the contract on the table and prayed no one else could hear his pounding heart, his ragged breathing.

He'd been sucker punched a few times in his life, and as bad as it had been, it was nowhere near the pain he felt now at the sight of Jen. He'd thought he'd gotten over her, that he'd moved on, but all it took was one small glimpse of her to prove him wrong. No, he wasn't over her. He'd probably never be over her -- or stop loving her. After all this time, how could she still set fire to his blood, still melt his heart, and still have him hard as a rock at just the sight of her?

"Sean O'Connell, I'd like you to meet Jennifer Gilbert, one of our top associates. Sean is CEO of Colonial Marine, that string of upscale marinas along the Jersey shore. He's here today to see what Chapman, Hart and Associates can do for him."

At the mention of his name, Sean glanced at Jen. Her eyes widened and flared as if seeing a ghost from her past, an accurate image to say the least. Her gaze flattened and turned blank, but not quickly enough. She looked away, but not before he saw her own passion reflected deep in the emerald depths of her eyes. She had no way to hide the dark crimson color creeping up her long, slender throat, past the sensitive spot just below her earlobe that he knew so well.

He kept his expression schooled in a nonchalant mask. This was her company, her turf, her call whether to tell Matt they needed no introduction.

She'd kept her hair long, or at least it seemed long, wrapped in some sort of conservative, lawyerlike bun. She was exactly as he remembered her -- hair black as an offshore storm, slightly almond-shaped eyes the color of the most precious jade with a fringe of thick, smoky lashes circling them. Jen had never been one for a lot of makeup, and apparently that hadn't changed either. Her soft, full lips about had him out of the chair with a burning need to reacquaint himself with their every crease and contour.

He shifted his gaze lower and his cock hardened to an unbearable length. Even in her conservative suit, there was no mistaking she still had one lush, rounded body. No one would ever accuse Jen of being anorexic. She fairly blossomed with health and energy. Memories

skidded through his mind of long days and endless nights when that sensuous body strained against his, giving and taking until they both came in one heaving, sweet climax.

Jennifer held out her hand. "Mr. O'Connell. How very nice to meet you."

So that was how it was to be? *Mr. O'Connell?* Sean stood, hoping his jacket hid the bulging hard-on that threatened to burst through his fly, and shook her hand. It was small and soft and trembled slightly. He allowed himself a small measure of satisfaction at the knowledge his touch still affected her just as the sight of her still sent a crushing wave of tenderness through him. "The pleasure is mine, *Ms. Gilbert.*"

The plastic smile remained on her face even as she snatched her hand back and avoided his eyes. Good. She wasn't immune to him. He'd gotten to her, and he hadn't done a thing.

"No need to stand on formality," said Matt, gathering up a sheaf of papers from the head of the table. "Jennifer, I realize it's been a while since you left corporate contracts for consumer litigation, but I want Sean to have the best Chapman, Hart has to offer." He gave Jen a wide grin and mouthed, *She's the best*, to Sean. "I've explained the basics, but I'd like you to go over the details regarding our retainer contract. I made a reservation at Mancini's over on Sixty-second for six o'clock. You can discuss the fine points there."

Sean raised an eyebrow. Mancini's? One of his favorite places. Matt had done his research. He smiled inwardly at his second stroke of luck in the last five minutes. At Mancini's, he'd have Jen all to himself. He suppressed a shudder at the thought of being alone with her and focused on a more immediate purpose. Tonight he would get some answers that had nothing to do with retainer contracts, answers he'd waited eight long years to hear.

"Perhaps Mr. O'Con -- I mean *Sean*, would rather call it a day and start fresh in the morning?" Still refusing to look at him, Jennifer grasped the back of one of the empty chairs surrounding the conference table. Her knuckles appeared white against her tanned hands, and the black chair only served to emphasize her grip. If she didn't ease up, her fingernails

just might shred the leather. He zeroed in on her fingers -- not a ring in sight. Hmm, and she still had the same last name. A heady sense of relief washed through him. So she hadn't married. Thank God. He caught himself. What the hell did it matter if she was married? He looked away for an instant, the elated feeling still coursing through his veins. Who was he kidding? It did matter -- it mattered a lot.

So, she wanted to chicken out, did she? Didn't want to be alone with him? Of course, she'd be nervous seeing him after what she did. He'd have to go easy, but he couldn't let her back out, not when he'd finally found her, or rather, stumbled upon her.

"Start fresh in the morning? I don't think so." Sean shifted his attention to Matt. "I thought I'd made it clear I wanted to wrap this up and head back to Atlantic City tonight." Oh no, she wasn't getting away from him now.

Matt shot Jen one of those classic "whatever the prospective client wants" looks, and Sean knew the matter was settled. Matt, obviously higher up the totem pole at Chapman, Hart, wanted to reel in the obviously plum account of Colonial Marine no matter how demanding the client.

"If you leave now, you should be able to make the reservation." Matt paused at the door of the conference room. "Again, I'm sorry about this Sean. Betty wasn't due for another week, but you'll be in good hands with Jennifer."

Jen's gaze darted to Sean as if pleading to let her off the hook. He raised an eyebrow and returned an unwavering look of his own. Anticipation hummed through his blood, and he smiled for the first time that day. "I'm sure I'll be in very good hands."

* * * * *

Jen followed the headwaiter, weaving her way through the noisy clatter of the chilly restaurant to the back booth Matt had reserved -- quiet, out-of-the-way, perfect for a business deal. Only she didn't think she could keep Sean's mind -- or hers -- on business. She sighed to herself. *Of all the law firms in all the world, and he's got to walk into mine.*

Jen fought her way through the palm fronds that surrounded the high-backed booth. With a nod to the headwaiter, she slid into the booth and set her bulky envelope purse, which doubled as a briefcase, next to the wall. A solid hip bumped hers. Huh? She jerked her gaze sideways. Instead of sitting opposite, Sean crowded himself onto the bench next to her.

“Something wrong with that side of the table?” She edged closer to the wall. He shifted, keeping their hips and thighs aligned. His touch sent an electric current arcing from his thigh straight to her pussy, flooding her with wave after wave of unexpected carnal desire.

She sucked in a silent breath to steady her nerves. Uh-uh. This was not going to happen again. She was over him, and she was going to stay over him. Even as she asserted this resolution, she knew she was lying to herself. She barely survived the cab ride here without throwing herself into his arms just to feel his skilled hands rove over her body again, to taste his talented mouth pressed against her lips.

To counter the draw of his innate sensuality, she’d pretended he was one of her Midwestern clients who loved all things New York. She’d transformed herself into the Big Apple’s premier tour guide, pointing out every landmark that flew past the cab’s windows. Cripes, did she really need to mention whose statue was in the middle of Columbus Circle? Jeez.

He hadn’t interrupted; in fact, he hadn’t said a word. He’d just stared at her from the other side of the cab as if he were some large predatory cat amusing himself before going in for the kill. She’d agreed to take him to dinner but had a growing impression she was the featured item on the menu. If he stayed next to her much longer, touching her and reminding her of past intimacies, she’d melt into a giant puddle of goo right here on the bench. She fixed him with a frown, then pointedly shifted her eyes to the other side of the booth.

Sean returned her frown with a dazzling smile. A smile that had never failed to start her heart thumping. “Hey, I hear the service is better on this side.”

She ignored the thump. "Trust me, the service is outstanding on both sides of the table, so why don't you --"

"May I get you something from the bar?" Startled, she looked up. A waiter had materialized like a genie from a lamp. He even executed a stiff bow.

Jen gave him her "this is strictly business" look and shook her head. "No, thank --"

"The lady will have a martini, straight up, three olives." Sean raised an eyebrow at her, and the insufferable gesture brought back dozens of images. Images that had haunted her secret dreams. Images she'd tried hard to forget. Images that refused to leave.

They locked eyes, his expression challenging her to counter the order. She pushed down a rising sense of annoyance mingled with excitement. He had no right to override her decisions. He'd given up that right years ago. Still, an exhilarating shiver ran up her spine as his commanding presence swirled around her. After a long beat, she lowered her eyes. What the hell? Why make an issue over a meaningless drink? It didn't help her overactive hormones that he remembered exactly how she preferred her favorite cocktail.

She gave a slight shrug, and the corner of his mouth quirked up. He shifted his attention back to the waiter. "And I'll have bourbon on the rocks." His movement allowed her to study him unnoticed like she'd wanted to do in the taxi. But there, his unwavering stare had disconcerted her. Even in the darkened cab, those cobalt blue eyes kept her teetering on the edge of a ragged cliff. The same cliff she'd almost taken a nosedive over the moment she saw him in the conference room.

Years of schooling her features into an expressionless mask for judges, juries, and opposing counsel allowed her to maintain a blank yet cordial countenance, when in fact she'd wanted to throw herself into his arms and at the same time slap him into next Thursday. She pushed the thoughts aside and studied him as he spoke to the waiter.

His Irish black hair was shorter now but still long enough so her fingers itched to take a stroll through the smooth, silky strands. He wore what she liked to call the "five o'clock

shadow” look -- not quite a beard but more than just a late date with the daily razor. On Sean the effect was devastating, but then her heart had always done a backflip at the sight of him.

Sean, bare-chested in baggies with a surfboard under his arm, was a sure way to make her panties wet. Now, in a custom-made suit and a blinding white shirt that set off his sun-bronzed skin, he’d matured into a sophisticated corporate executive who exuded power and confidence -- just the sort of fashion accessory she adored. She snatched back her wandering thoughts. No, Sean would never be any woman’s accessory. He was all male, all man, and...and he was...he was *the client* and not the man who -- A tight fist grabbed her heart and squeezed until she thought she’d cry out at the pain lacing through her.

Get a grip, girl. It doesn’t matter anymore. He made his choice.

A montage of scenes passed through her mind like a badly rehearsed high school play. Each time she had asked Sean to stop, to step away and go back to the way things used to be, he’d give her that devastating smile and an empty promise.

But nothing changed. Nothing except the ache in her heart grew larger and the rift in their relationship wider.

Sean hadn’t cared. Hell, he hadn’t even noticed. Even now she could feel the well of sadness that had enveloped her when she finally realized Sean had no intention of returning to the way things had been before.

She tried again to put some space between them, but he rested his hand on her thigh and stroked it as if it were the most natural thing to do. She flinched, but with the waiter hovering over him, she couldn’t very well make a scene and tell him to find a less tactile occupation for his fingers. Sean continued to question the waiter regarding menu specials as the man rearranged the place settings to their side of the table.

When she awoke this morning, reviewing a contract with potential client Sean O’Connell was not even remotely on her radarscope. She’d always imagined she’d run into him again, maybe on one of her infrequent ventures to Atlantic City’s casinos on girls’ night

out, but never as a client in the conference room at Chapman, Hart. *Client*. That's what he was. Why couldn't she get that concept through her head and behave like a professional? She needed to get this meeting back on track before the locomotive sitting next to her made a train wreck of her career, or worse, of her heart.

With an efficient bow, the waiter disappeared.

Sean leaned over, wedging her into the corner of the booth and sliding his hand down to the hem of her skirt. She scooted back farther against the wall, but it was no defense against his magnetic presence. He smelled of expensive cologne and determined male.

"How have you been, honey? You have no idea how I've missed you."

His words washed over her like warm August waves on a deserted beach. His hot breath fanned across her cheek, reminding her of so many times when he'd called her "honey" during days and nights of incredible lovemaking.

"You look wonderful, but then, you always did." His voice rumbled low and sexy, stoking the fire smoldering in her heart and between her thighs. His hand skimmed the top of her shin before resting lightly on her knee where his thumb traced small circles.

She shivered, and it had nothing to do with the near-arctic temperature in the restaurant. It was as if she'd stepped back in time. Back to the days when it was only the two of them. When Sean knew exactly what she felt, what she needed. When he'd overwhelmed her senses until there was nothing in her world but him.

Whoa boy, no good could come from memories like those, especially in a public place like Mancini's, no matter how many potted plants hid the occupants of the booth.

"Sean, you need to put your hands on the table, and we need to get back to business. A lot has happened since we...since we last saw each other. This is neither the time nor the place to renew old...friendships."

"I tried to find you, you know."

She leaned back. He wasn't going to make this easy. Maybe if she let him have his say, he'd get it out of his system and they could get back to business. Sighing, she gave him her best "oh, really" lawyer look.

He continued to draw small circles, only now his thumb worked up her inner thigh. "Okay." He conceded, picking up on her skeptical look. "Not right away, but I did when I finally pulled my head out of my ass. I searched for a long time, called everyone we knew, put ads in the papers, posted inquiries on the Internet, but no one knew where you'd gone. At least now I understand how you vanished. Just move to the city, and you can disappear faster than yesterday's headlines."

The fist that had squeezed her heart when he'd sat next to her threatened to yank it from her body. He'd *searched* for her? He *had* changed his mind?

Sean lifted his free hand and brushed his knuckles across her cheek. She closed her eyes and lost herself in the feel of his warm fingers on her skin, his soft breath in her ear. *He looked for me? It seems so long ago that he...* Her eyes popped open and she drew away. *Too long ago and, dammit, too much heartache.*

"That's interesting, but I've moved on. I have a new life, and I like it." At least, she'd liked it for a while. In fact, it had been a wonderful life until a month ago -- well actually, thirty-one days and about sixteen hours ago.

His fingers stopped, and a dark line creased his forehead. "You're not married, are you? Your name is the same. You're not wearing a ring."

"No, I'm not married," she blurted out. So, he'd already checked out her fingers. Heat crept between her breasts, and a warm feeling of satisfaction settled over her. She'd scoped out his hand too, but of course, that was just a necessary habit every thirtysomething, single female acquired.

"Are you seeing anyone?" The urgency in his voice disconcerted her and brought her back to reality.

What was wrong with her? One second she was mooning over a lost love, and the next she wanted to run from him like he was carrying a live grenade. Who did he think he was, asking personal questions like this? After all this time, what she did and who she saw were none of his concern. Either she had to end this little scene now, or she'd succumb to the spell he was weaving with his deep, sexy voice and unwavering gaze. "This conversation is ridiculous. We need to discuss the contract."

His face clouded. "From your answer, or rather lack of, I assume you are seeing someone. Is it serious?"

She blew out a long breath. Evidently saying, "I don't want to talk about it" was too subtle. But then, if this Sean O'Connell was anything like the Sean O'Connell of her past, he wouldn't let the subject drop until he got what he wanted. Damn, with tenacity like that, he'd be great in a courtroom. His fingers stopped their mesmerizing motion. She turned to face him. Their gazes locked. Against her will, her mouth opened. "I was seeing someone, but now I'm not."

"Was it serious?" He leaned forward, his eyes riveted to hers.

Her breath quickened under his scrutiny. Was it serious? That depended on who you asked. It was for her. Too bad it hadn't been for Rick. The thought of Rick brought a sharp stab of pain, like the other morning when she'd found one of his socks under the bed. Gone but not quite forgotten.

"Let's just say Rick Evans had a little problem with commitment." A *little* problem? After being together for three years, she'd suggested they shop for an apartment. After all, they stayed with each other every night anyway. Rick had given her the "deer in headlights" look and bolted. Evidently, it had never occurred to him to add a little more permanency to their relationship.

"So, it's over?"

“Oh yeah, it’s over.” Over. Done. Dead. Buried. Rick had made that perfectly clear. She’d cried for a week -- and she never shed tears for anyone, well, anyone except Sean. But tears hadn’t brought Sean back, and they wouldn’t bring Rick back either. So, she’d squared her shoulders and put on her big-girl shoes, determined to move on. And now look, here she was having dinner with Sean O’Connell. Funny how life comes at you when you’re not looking.

“How about you, Jen? Do you have a problem with commitment?”

“Commitment problems? You’re getting off track again.” She hedged, fingering the edge of the tablecloth. She didn’t need this third degree on issues she wasn’t prepared to face by herself, let alone share with a man she hadn’t seen in years.

He was too close. That scent that was his alone settled around her, reminding her of a time when she would have done anything for him, let him do anything to her. Worse, he was conjuring up urges she shouldn’t be feeling, urges that would only get her into trouble. “I think we need to talk about the retainer contract.”

“All right, we’ll let the commitment discussion drop...for now.” He crowded closer in the booth and resumed stroking her knee. His warm breath caressed her cheek as his fingers moved up her thigh. His eyes took on a look somewhere between hunger and starvation that mirrored her own inner thoughts, thoughts she shouldn’t be having. She should tell him to move over and get his hands off her, but she had neither the words nor the inclination. Somehow, he had a way that made her forget about heartache, forget about everything but him.

Oh yeah, she was in trouble.

She savored the feel of his thumb tracing circles on the inside of her thigh. Memories and emotions flooded back. Any second now, his hand would travel higher. He would go so slowly she wouldn’t notice until his thumb reached the crease in her thigh.

The clatter of dishes and silverware, the conversation and laughter of the patrons, the aroma of garlic, oregano, and a dozen other spices receded into the background. Past and present blended until she couldn't be certain she wasn't in both at the same time. It had been so long ago.

His soft eyes never left her face, and she saw a lifetime of yearning, of desire, in them. They held hers captive, forbidding her to look away. But she had no desire to break the spell. With one look, one touch, he'd easily torn down the defenses around her heart that she'd only recently rebuilt. She pushed away thoughts of Rick. He was gone. But Sean...Sean was here.

"Are you wet, honey? You used to get wet just looking at me. Is it happening now? Do I still set you on fire?" His voice was low and husky, and she could swear there was a note of pleading in it.

His questioning gaze roamed her face as if searching for his own answers. She should stop him, pull his hand away, gain control of the situation and her emotions, but it was already too late.

"I hope I set you on fire," he murmured. "Cause you sure still light a flame in me."

Her breath caught in her throat as his fingers slid easily under the lacy edge of her panties to tangle in the tight nest of her pubic hair. She answered his question the only way she could -- by spreading her thighs and arching her pelvis ever-so-slightly.

An old, familiar glint shone from his narrowed eyes, and his breathing grew harsh, uneven. He looked like a man who'd been given the keys to heaven and wouldn't waste any time unlocking the gates.

It just wasn't fair. That eight years could go by -- eight long years spent forgetting him. And now he simply waltzed back into her world -- her new world -- and she grew wet at his touch. After what he had said, what he had done, how could she still crave him like this?

“You still want me, Jen. You still want me as much as I want you. You’re dripping on my fingers. Should I make you come? I could, couldn’t I? Why don’t we --”

“Let’s see. We have a martini, straight up, three olives, for the lady, and one bourbon on the rocks.” With a flourish, the waiter placed their drinks on the white tablecloth.

Turning casually, Sean removed his fingers but left his hand under the edge of the tablecloth. He spread her sticky juices on her inner thigh, and Jennifer closed her eyes, mortified at what the waiter might have witnessed. She tried to level her breathing, but it wouldn’t disguise anything, not when she must be six shades of scarlet. She hadn’t acted so irresponsibly since...since...the last time she’d been with Sean.

Sean nodded and the waiter melted away. With his other hand, Sean lifted his drink and took a swallow. His hand shook as he lowered the glass, and she couldn’t help giving him a knowing smile. So, he wasn’t immune to her either.

“It was always good between us, wasn’t it? You remember that part, don’t you? Tell me you haven’t forgotten.” His voice was low, almost pleading, and she saw again a wisp of the carefree surfer who had turned her world upside down every time he smiled at her.

She lifted her glass, and a small amount of liquid sloshed over the brim, darkening the tablecloth. She sipped a bit of the smooth gin without taking her eyes from his. It had been a long time, and there had been other men after him, but no, she hadn’t forgotten a single moment she’d spent in his arms.

He squeezed her thigh and a devilish smile touched his lips. Heat coursed through her blood, sending a pulsing wave of lust to flood her veins. She’d seen that smile many times before, and she hadn’t forgotten what it meant. The sorrow and anguish he’d put her through couldn’t compete with the surging need she felt for him now. The hunger of his voice countered the nonchalance of his smile and served to increase her desire. She let out a long, slow breath to give her the courage she needed. Wondering what the hell she was doing, she answered his smile with a willing smile of her own.

Sean's grin broadened, making his eyes crinkle slightly at the corners. "I'm glad to see we still think alike." His voice was low and sexy and contained just the right amount of wicked anticipation.

Chapter Two

Sean tossed a fifty onto the table and hustled Jen from the booth. This was absurd. He was the owner of a multimillion-dollar corporation, not some surf bum trying to score with a beach bunny. What the hell was he doing? They looked like two teenagers with raging hormones, but somehow it didn't matter. Her acquiescence to his unspoken question sent a wave of raw lust shooting through him, stripping him of any choice, any will to be sensible.

He rested his palm against the small of her back as he steered her through the restaurant. Dipping his head, he drank in the scent of her perfume. Orange blossoms. It had almost driven him mad sitting next to her, playing with her, but that scent had made him want to bury his face in the crook of her neck and inhale her into his very being.

They passed their waiter, returning with a bread basket and two menus. He gave Sean a knowing wink and a thumbs-up sign. Sean sucked in a deep breath. Yeah, he and Jen were that obvious, but somehow he wasn't concerned about subtlety at the moment. His only concern was wrapping his arms about her, kissing those lips that were driving him crazy, and feeling her hot, wet pussy milking his aching cock.

Night came quickly to the city, but it was as bright outside as if it were noon -- only it wasn't sunlight but neon and fluorescent that provided the stark glare. His hand shot in the

air the instant they hit the sidewalk. Please, let the taxi-god smile down on him and deliver a cab.

The crisp October air with its undercurrents of city bus exhaust and grilled onions filled his lungs. He pulled Jen tight to his side. Her conservative gray suit and thin white blouse offered little protection against the chilly night. He nuzzled her hair, anticipating the moment he could ease the clips from it, lace his fingers through the soft strands, and revel in them tickling his chest.

A cab screeched to a stop, and he helped her in. She slid to the opposite side, and he followed her across the seat, crowding her into the corner. "Where's the nearest hotel?"

"No, no hotel. My apartment." Her voice was breathless, no more than a whisper. She rattled off an address. The driver nodded and plunged back into traffic. "I must be crazy to be doing this after what you did." She let out a deep sigh. "But I can't stop myself from wanting you."

For a split second, he wanted to argue that it wasn't what he'd done but what she'd done. He opened his mouth, but then the rest of her sentence registered, and one look at her passion-glazed eyes silenced him. Now was not the time for recriminations.

"Don't think, Jen. There's no past. Only now, the present." And Lord help him, could he finally believe in a future? He pulled her onto his lap, ignoring the driver's ogling eyes in the rearview mirror. When she wrapped her arms around his shoulders, a surge of possessiveness he hadn't felt in years surged through him. She leaned back, her unblinking gaze studying his face. The glow from passing store windows highlighted the questions in her eyes.

He wished he had answers for her, but he didn't, not right now. Only a deep sense of relief at finally finding the missing part of himself hovered over him. Lowering his gaze to her mouth, it was suddenly all clear. He touched the nape of her neck; the smooth, warm skin seemed to tingle beneath his fingers. "Kiss me, Jen. For the love of God, kiss me."

When she didn't move, his gut dropped to his feet. Had she changed her mind? He applied the slightest pressure to her neck. As if in slow motion, her lips lowered to his. The first whisper-soft touch intoxicated him. He didn't move but breathed the short pants of air she exhaled, filling himself with the memory of loving her.

The taxi slammed to a halt, and the driver bellowed a New York greeting out the window. With the force of the cab's stopping, their mouths met in a wild clash. That was all he needed. Cradling her head against his shoulder, he anchored her lips to his. Their softness turned demanding as her fingers rose to tangle in his hair. She held him and opened her mouth. He plundered her like a dying man taking his lover's last kiss. Too long, it had been too long. Their tongues dueled in a match that could have no loser. She tasted fresh and clean and right. All the things he hadn't tasted in a long time.

The cab resumed its journey with a sharp jolt. Its darting motion through traffic imitated the darting motion of his tongue through her delicious mouth. She wiggled in his lap, and he thought his cock would explode with sheer longing. He was so hard and so ready he had to delve deep into his self-control, reminding himself he'd waited this long. He could wait awhile longer. He broke the kiss and trailed his open mouth down her throat to a pulse point he needed to become reacquainted with. She answered with the slight pressure of her nails on his neck, holding him in place.

The cab came to an abrupt stop, and an accented voice mumbled the fare.

Jen wiggled off his lap, straightening her clothes as she slid from the cab. Sean found his wallet and handed the driver three twenties before following. He glanced around. Old three- and four-story brownstone houses that had been converted to apartments and condos lined the street side by side. An apparently safe neighborhood complete with the occasional fenced-in tree and dim light fixture illuminating a shadowed entrance.

Jen hurried up a stone stoop, rummaging in her purse. "Damn. Where is it?"

He crowded behind her, nibbling at the sleek base of her throat and pressing his erection against her sweet ass as she pulled a key ring from the purse. He rubbed, savoring the wave of heat that rushed through his veins. He'd thought he'd never again feel her soft curves melt into him. She pushed her butt hard against him as she opened the door and stepped into the building vestibule.

"I'm on the third floor." She slipped her small hand into his large one and, with a hesitant smile, led him toward the stairs. Her hand felt delicate and warm in his, and he gave her a playful squeeze as he willingly followed her. She gave him a gentle squeeze in return. He liked the feel -- a lot. God, he'd been a fool to let her get away.

His eyes wandered to her ass. Her jacket covered it, but there was no denying his memory of how firm and hot her flesh had been beneath his fingers, how she would purposely entice him with that sexy little wiggle, usually in public, until his blood boiled and he had to have her and to hell with the consequences. Her curvaceous bottom seemed to be performing that enticing wiggle right now just for him.

Before she reached the stairs, he slowed and backed her against the wall. The single bulb in the vestibule did little more than cast dim shadows, but he was beyond worrying about privacy. Before she could stop him, he tugged her blouse from the waistband of her skirt and slid his hands beneath it to caress her breasts. Her bra had delicate lace edging like her panties, and he traced the soft boundary across the top of her firm globes.

"It's been too long." Jen sighed, dropping her purse and loosening his tie. She made quick work of his shirt buttons and in seconds, her hands were tracing long strokes up and down his chest. For a brief moment, he forgot her breasts and simply savored the feel of her fingers tangling in his chest hair, stroking his nipples. How could he ever have walked away from this?

"More, Sean. More." She thrust her breasts firmly into his palms, reminding him of the treasure he held. In one swift move, he had her bra undone and both his hands cupping her generous breasts. Their heat scorched his last remaining brain cell. He leveled his pelvis

against hers and rubbed her mound with his cock. It seemed they stood there for an eternity, caressing, fondling, stroking. He bent his head and captured her lips, picking up where he'd left off in the cab.

When he thought he'd go up in flames from his need for her, he shifted one hand to her skirt and bunched the fabric until his fingers glided across the naked flesh of her thigh. He stroked higher, finding the waistband of her panties and sliding his fingers inside the scrap of lace. "I love how fast you get wet for me. I always did."

She buried her face in the crook of his neck but continued to caress his chest before circling lower to his abs. A slight sigh sounded from deep in her throat as she clasped her hand over his fly and around his pulsing cock. "And I love how fast you get hard for me."

He hissed his pleasure. "Oh yeah?" He sank his fingers lower. Finding her wet, pulsing clit, he massaged it slowly with his middle finger. He suppressed his own shudder when she leaned heavily against him, melting in his arms.

"I don't think we need these anymore." He pushed her panties to her knees, and she did a little dance to kick them off. He reached into his back pocket for his wallet and the foil-packaged condom.

"Open my pants, honey. I need you...now."

"Just like old times, isn't it?" Her hands fumbled with the button on his pants.

"Better. I promise," he said as his mouth met hers again in a searing, wet kiss.

The light on the second-floor landing blinked on. "Who's there? I have a gun, and I'm not afraid to use it!"

* * * * *

Jen froze, jerked out of the passionate kiss by a voice like a chicken caught in a dishwasher. "Oh for Pete's sake," she murmured, releasing Sean's cock.

His dazed expression met hers. "What the hell...?"

"It's nothing. Just keep quiet," she whispered, putting her finger to his lips for emphasis. "It's my landlady."

In a louder voice, Jen called, "It's me, Mrs. Levitz. Jennifer from 3B. I was just checking my mail and dropped it. Put your starter pistol away before you hurt yourself again." Jen shoved her skirt down and helped Sean fumble with his shirt buttons. Together they refastened her bra and tugged her blouse into place all in a matter of seconds.

She touched her lips to his ear. "We'll get the third degree and never make it upstairs if she hears you. She's a sweet dear but nosy as all get-out." Jen nibbled his earlobe for good measure and stifled a giggle. Sean looked like he'd been caught doing the head cheerleader under the bleachers.

"Jennifer? 3B? Are you sure?"

"Yes, Mrs. Levitz. I'm picking up my mail now, and I'll be up in a few minutes. You can go back to *Wheel of Fortune*. You don't want to miss the big money."

"Okay, but be quiet. I don't want to miss the big money." The light went out and a door slammed.

Jen picked up her purse but couldn't see where she'd kicked her panties. Oh well. She'd look for them later. Hopefully, before Mrs. Levitz found them. She took Sean's hand and led him to the stairs. *Quiet*, she mouthed.

As she tiptoed past the second-floor landing, Jan prayed the bonus round would keep Mrs. Levitz occupied for a few more minutes. The last thing she needed was to get waylaid by her talkative landlady when she was leading an incredibly sensuous, incredibly aroused man up to her bed.

At the door to her apartment, she once again searched for the key ring in her purse. Sean was no help as he bent and nuzzled her neck. He found a particularly sensitive spot, and she tilted her head, relishing the intimate moment like so many others they'd shared.

“If you don’t open that door,” he growled low in her ear, “I’m going to bust it down and take my chances with the starter pistol.”

A wave of white-hot desire surged through her. She snagged the keys, opened the door, and then stepped inside, dropping her purse on the hall table. He followed, shutting and locking the door behind him. Not bothering with a light, she grabbed his hand and led him through the small living room to her bedroom. They were there for one thing, and there was no point in wasting time by offering him a beer or a glass of wine.

An unexpected thought caught her off guard. Rick had always liked a glass of wine...afterward. She shook off the wave of sadness. Why the hell was she thinking about Rick when Sean’s hand felt so strong and sure in hers? Rick was gone, and she’d better get used to the idea.

Releasing Sean’s hand, she stepped across the room to switch on a bedside lamp. A warm glow diffused about them, giving the room a seductive mood.

Sean swiveled his head, surveying the surroundings. “Even if I didn’t know where I was, I’d know you lived here. You always were a sucker for...old stuff.”

She’d spent years searching for these perfect pieces -- an oak armoire and matching bureau from the 1920s, a nineteenth-century cane rocking chair, and her pride and joy, a solid brass cannonball bed. Scanning the small room, she chuckled and imagined it through his eyes -- a conglomeration of mismatched pieces of junk. “The word you’re searching for is antiques, and I’m very happy with my selections. Thank you very much.”

He shrugged out of his jacket and dropped it on the rocking chair. “I’m not here shopping for furniture,” he rasped in a voice so husky it warmed her from the inside out. His tie followed the jacket. With a nod, he indicated his wrists and a pair of gold cuff links. “Come here and take these out for me, honey.”

There was that word again. *Honey*. In the years since she’d last seen him, he must have been involved with dozens of women. A man like Sean O’Connell wouldn’t spend too many

nights alone, but just for tonight, she wanted to believe he used the endearment only with her and that he meant the domestic implication it held. She took his lead and dropped her suit jacket on the chair, then reached for him. Sliding her fingers down his arms, she unclasped the cuff links. Again the sense of domesticity overwhelmed her as if she'd performed this small service every night for years. The cuff links made a delightful plinking sound when they tumbled onto her bureau.

Leaning into him, she indulged herself and inhaled deeply. "You smell so damn good." His essence was different now. The salty ocean and sunscreen scents were replaced by the remnants of an expensive aftershave, something with a woody aroma.

"Never mind that. I need you naked...now."

His words rekindled the lust that had consumed her in the vestibule. All thoughts of domestic life, sunscreen, and aftershave deserted her, and in their wake, a deep, longing hunger overtook her. Her fingers ripped at his shirt buttons and tangled with his hands as he tried to undo her blouse.

"Wait a minute." He stepped back, wrestled the shirt over his head, then tossed it on the rocking chair. She tore at the buttons of her blouse and began to unhook her bra.

"No. Let me," he growled, reaching for her.

Her stomach did a flip-flop when he cupped her breasts, circling her nipples through the sheer fabric. "God, you're beautiful." He slipped the bra straps from her shoulders, and she just about dissolved when his lips found that tender spot just below her earlobe. He remembered. She cradled his head, wishing he would play with that bit of skin for a few more hours. Her low moan filled the room, and he nipped her earlobe.

"You liked that. I knew you would. You always did." His hot breath in her ear sent shivers to places she forgot could shiver.

While his warm lips skimmed over her throat, his hands continued to massage her breasts, squeezing them, lifting them, running his thumbs across her sensitized nipples until she thought she would scream for the sheer pleasure of it.

"I need you naked too." Her words came out in a croak, but she had no doubt he understood. Within seconds, he had her as he said he wanted her -- naked, and she had him the same way.

She ran her hands down the length of his torso, feeling the hard muscle, the straining abs beneath her fingers. They were as tight and firm as they'd been when they'd had nothing else to do with their nights except explore each other. Heaven help her. She was going to make herself crazy tonight. Sean. Here. All hers. At least for now.

She dropped to her knees, and her heart sang when he groaned her name. His cock seemed to swell in her hands. She let her hot breath tickle his balls and resisted the urge to suck them. No, he had to want it, want it really, really bad. She ignored the pulsing between her thighs. She could wait...for a little bit...maybe.

"What are you waiting for, honey? You know what to do." His strained voice trembled ever-so-slightly.

"Oh, I know what to do all right," she cooed, wondering where she got the strength to tease. "I want to hear you ask for it." She blew a warm puff of air on the head of his cock. "Better still, I want to hear you beg for it."

"Oh God," he groaned, slicing his fingers through her hair. "Please, please. Is that what you want to hear? Suck me, honey. Now." He urged her head forward, and she gave in to her mounting desire.

The old feelings invaded her body, bringing with them the smoldering craving. He was thick, smooth, and rock hard, and she surrendered herself to both the pleasure she could give and the pleasure she could take. All thoughts of teasing fled, and she feasted on every inch of

wonderful erection. She splayed her hands up his inner thighs and cupped his hot, heavy balls.

Flames of desire licked through her, sending pulsing spasms to her sensitive clit. God, he was delicious. His musky scent brought back more memories, but she didn't need them. Only the reality of the present mattered.

"That's it." His voice was barely audible above the sound of his deep, shuddering gasps. He bent, grasped her shoulders, and hauled her to her feet. "Any more and I'll come before we get what we really want."

His lips met hers in a fierce, wild kiss as he walked her backward toward the bed. Her calves touched the edge. He tumbled her onto the mattress, then followed in a tangle of arms and legs. His mouth never left hers, and with a longing she thought she had buried a lifetime ago, she entwined her arms around his taut, muscled shoulders and spread her thighs. He broke the kiss and angled them both onto the bed, then settled his penis against her mons.

His ragged breathing filled the room. Leaning back on his elbows, he gazed down at her. At the blatant hunger in his eyes, another shiver targeted her pulsing clit. She bent her knees, cradling his hips. She'd go mad if he didn't enter her this instant. "Now, Sean, I can't wait another second," she urged, tilting her hips in invitation.

His back, slick with perspiration, arched as she dug her nails into his hot flesh. "This will be so -- oh shit."

Chapter Three

Thank God he had one brain cell left. “Condom. In my wallet. Be right back.” He took a deep, steadying breath and raised his pelvis before the temptation to say “the hell with it” overtook him. Dammit. Where were his pants?

Jen, eyes wide, shook her head as if in disbelief, then seemed to register the problem. “Nightstand. Top drawer.”

He stared at her for a moment, torn between hating the idea that she had a ready supply, yet knowing she hadn’t lived like a nun. His need to reclaim what he had so callously thrown away all those years ago won out. “What the hell...?”

He yanked the drawer open, shuffled around, and found a familiar-sized box. Flipping the lid open, he fingered out a condom and dropped it on her breast. “Handle this, would you? I’m a little busy.”

Control. He needed control before he came on her stomach. He sucked in three deep breaths and felt a small degree of self-command return, just enough to stop him from making a fool of himself. Angling himself off her, he tangled his fingers in her silky pubic hair, then slid his hand between her thighs. Jen shuddered at his touch. He knew what she liked. Slipping his fingers lower to delve into her sleek, damp pussy, he leaned up to look down the

length of her sun-kissed body. She was so beautiful, so responsive to his touch. He kissed her cheek and smiled. "Hurry up, honey, I'm dying here."

She lifted her hands behind his back, and he heard her struggle with the packet. Bending his head, he snagged her lower lip between his lips, sucking first gently but with increasing enthusiasm. God, she tasted good.

She tore her mouth from his. "Lean back," she whispered, nudging his shoulder.

He did as commanded and knelt between her thighs. The feel of her warm hand as she slid the condom down his cock brought back the passion that had momentarily retreated into the background. A wave of desire hit him, so strong, so intense, he couldn't breathe. Grabbing her ankles, he drew them over his shoulders. "Remember this? Do you still like it this way?"

She didn't answer but contracted the muscles in her thighs and tilted her pelvis. Her sultry eyes issued the rest of the invitation.

He gripped her full, lush hips and brought her to him. Her hands tightened like vises around his wrists. No time for finesse, for technique. Only the overpowering need to possess her, to make her his again. Her body tensed under his hands and then he was inside, thrusting, pounding, as if she would disappear if he didn't drive himself deeper. He closed his eyes, allowing his other senses to gather the sensations that were hurling him over the edge. Her short, shallow pants turned to moans, and each plunge brought a new need to fill her, to stake a claim.

She matched him thrust for thrust, leveraging her calves on his shoulders to allow him the deepest penetration. He opened his eyes to stare into her half-closed, passion-filled ones. Her mouth moved as if to speak but no words came out, only a small cry of desire. He knew the sign. She was close, so close.

Releasing one of her hips, his fingers delved into her wet folds to find her swollen clit. Her small cry turned into a wild outburst as her climax rolled through her. The sight of her

so open and so abandoned to the moment sent him spiraling to his own orgasm. He exploded in spasms of sheer pleasure as her hot pussy milked his cock, wringing out every last drop.

When the last shudder left him weak with fulfillment, he lowered her legs and collapsed on top of her. "My God, Jen."

She wrapped her legs around him and circled his shoulders with arms that seemed to hold him prisoner. If so, it was a prison he'd never want to escape from. All his long, lonely yesterdays melted away, and he buried his face in the crook of her neck. She smelled of orange blossoms and sex -- just like she had so many times before. Any questions about what he'd do if he ever found her again vanished like smoke in the night.

Jen kissed his forehead and ran her nails down his back.

He rolled over, pulling her with him. "You were incredible," he said, tucking her head against his shoulder.

She snuggled closer and threaded her fingers through his chest hair. "You weren't so bad yourself."

He'd dreamed of having Jen like this again but had given up that dream after years of searching and never finding her. Now that he had her here, he didn't want the dream to end. But there were things to be said, answers to be given. He wove his fingers together and cradled them behind his head.

"Uh-oh. What's the matter?" Jen plucked at his nipple, and he almost forgot what he was going to say -- almost.

"Why do you think something's wrong?"

"Because unless you've changed, you only do that 'hands behind the head' thing when something's bothering you."

A slight shiver ran down his back at hearing she'd remembered an idiosyncrasy he had no idea he had. He knew he should keep his mouth shut and bask in the moment, but the

words were out before he could stop them. "Don't you think I should be a little bothered? After all, I'm not the one who couldn't behave like an adult. I'm not the one who ran out."

Jen pulled away and sat up. Her eyes widened and her mouth dropped open.

"Wait. That didn't come out right." How could he be such an ass? "What I meant was we have things to talk about."

A steel door closed over her face, shutting him out like Adam from Eden. "You know, this was a huge mistake. Thank you for a lovely evening. It's a shame you have to rush off." She swung her legs off the bed. "I'm sure you can find your way out."

He made a grab for her arm, but she slipped away. "Please, honey, I didn't mean that the way it sounded."

She opened a door and reached behind it. An emerald silk robe the exact color of her eyes appeared in her hand, and she quickly enfolded herself in it. Her throat had turned a deep crimson, and she wouldn't meet his eyes. Her arms, wrapped tightly around her, seemed to provide a protective barrier against anything he might say.

It was not going to end this way again. He leaped from the bed and crossed the room in two strides. "You can't run this time. Dammit, I won't let you."

Her chin tilted up. "You didn't do anything to stop me the last time."

"How the hell did I know you were going to bolt? I came by the next morning, but you'd disappeared." He reached for her, but she sidestepped him.

"I told you I couldn't take it anymore. You made your choice. End of story."

Dammit. He was in for it now. He should never have opened the floodgates. Her body tensed as if waiting for another stab. He captured her blazing eyes with his own. If they were ever going to clear the air it had to be now.

He lowered his voice. "I wasn't the one who invited your roommate into our bed in the first place. If you hadn't been so eager for her to join us, none of this would have happened."

Her eyes flashed as if he'd slapped her. The sharp intake of breath confirmed he'd stepped into it big-time.

"Right. It was all my fault. Becky suggests a little ménage à trois. I agree because you really want it. I figured it was for one night, but three months later there's still a crowd in my bed."

She waved toward the bed they'd just left, emphasizing her words. He tried to grab her hand, but she pulled it back as if a piranha had attacked. If only he'd kept his mouth shut, or better still had held on to her tighter when he had her lying next to him. If she were in his arms, this discussion would have taken a whole different turn.

"What about all those times I told you I wanted to go back to just the two of us? That I wanted only you in my bed? How many times did you nod and smile and say you'd take care of it? But you never did, did you?"

Sean froze, acknowledging the truth of her words. He'd tried to tell Becky, well, once anyway, but she'd cried and said she loved him, couldn't live without him, and truth be told, he really like having the two of them. From then on, whenever Jen complained about Becky, he *had* smiled and ignored her.

As she spoke, Jen inched backward, not a conscious movement but one that showed better than words her retreating feelings toward him.

"I didn't want to hurt her." His rationalization, which seemed so noble at the time, brought a sour taste to his mouth as he uttered the words now.

"But it was okay to hurt me?" The pain he'd caused her rang clearly in her wounded tone. "You know, I told her it was over and to get out. You know what she said?"

"You told her to get out?"

"Of course I did. Hey, I couldn't let my man go without a fight. Becky said it didn't matter what I wanted because you wanted her." Jen's lip trembled, but she lifted her defiant little chin and continued. "I didn't believe her. I told her she was delusional, that you and I

were together, and you wanted me.” Her lashes glistened with unshed tears, and she blinked her eyes.

A crushing weight settled in his chest, and he shook his head. My God, he’d been a bigger ass than he’d thought -- and he’d thought he’d been a humongous ass. “Oh, Jen --”

“And when I came to you and told you I couldn’t stand sharing you anymore, and I wanted her out of our bed, what did you say?” Her voice grew soft and her eyes narrowed, a sure sign her anger bubbled white-hot just below the surface. “You said you didn’t want to be pushed. That’s what you said.” She hugged herself, her body language reflecting the anguish on her face. He wanted to kick himself -- hard -- for resurrecting the old pain.

“I asked if you loved her, but you just hemmed and hawed. What was I supposed to do? Hang around and watch the man I loved fuck another woman?”

He hung his head. How could he have treated her so callously? After what he’d done, how could she stand to be in the same room with him? What could he say? *Sorry* seemed so lame, but it was all he had so he gave it a shot.

“I’m so sorry. I was young. I was stupid. I have no excuse.” He scrubbed his hand across his chin. How could he get her to understand? He’d screwed up then, and he was screwing up now. It didn’t matter that they still hungered for each other. He’d always thought she didn’t care enough about him to stay. Now the truth came crashing down on him.

She cared too much to stay.

He tried an exploratory step toward her. She didn’t back away, but her ramrod-straight posture left no doubt she wouldn’t welcome his touch. Still, he continued until he was mere inches from her. He wanted to draw her into his arms, hold her until that destitute look in her eyes disappeared, but instead he fisted his hands at his sides. Maybe if he explained...?

“I was starting to make some bucks at my uncle’s marina.” He kept his voice low and matter-of-fact. “I was moving up. Hell, I was only twenty-five. I had the whole world in front of me. I didn’t want to be tied down.”

“I wasn’t trying to tie you down. I just couldn’t do it anymore.” She bit her lower lip, and the sight sent a sharp stab of guilt to his gut, but he couldn’t stop himself. He had to make her understand how trapped he’d felt.

He let out a long breath. “I’m sorry, but I wasn’t about to listen to an ultimatum from you or anyone else.”

She lifted her chin in a defiant move he remembered so well. “I didn’t give you an ultimatum.”

“It may not have seemed like it to you, but I heard ‘either she goes or I do.’ I didn’t like being backed into a corner.”

Shouldering past him, she walked to the cane rocking chair and sat, tucking one leg beneath her and crumpling his custom-tailored suit. He knew better than to comment on it. The cold, leveling stare she gave him must have frozen dozens of witnesses in the courtroom. It sure sent a shiver down his spine.

“I didn’t back you into a corner. How would you feel if I wanted another man to join us in bed? Would you like it if another man fucked me while you watched?”

The thought blindsided him. In his mind’s eye, he saw another guy straining against her, driving into her while she lifted her pelvis, meeting him thrust for thrust. Sean watched as Jen’s half-closed eyes glazed over with ecstasy, and she turned her head to gaze into his heated stare. She reached for him and circled his cock with her soft fingers, guiding him to her mouth. Her delicate, pink tongue flicked out and teased his engorged flesh. Sean leaned closer and rocked his hips as she took his cock deeper and deeper into her mouth. All the while, she kept pace with the unknown man. An unexpected heat rose in his groin, and his cock swelled.

“Oh, so that idea appeals to you?” Sean hurled out of his fantasy to find that Jen had zeroed in on his growing erection. “Well, maybe we should give it a try. From the look of things, you would probably enjoy it.”

“Maybe I would -- Hey, don’t change the subject. That’s got nothing to do with your leaving without a word.”

“It has everything to do with it.”

Hell. This was going nowhere. From the minute he first saw her in the conference room, he’d assumed she was the same sweet person he’d fallen in love with. And ten minutes ago in bed he would have sworn it, but now he could see she’d changed. There was an edge to her, a sharp, more mature, questioning edge. Had he done that to her, or was it the result of eight years of growth? Whatever it was, he had to get through that brittle shell and find his Jen under the layers of hurt and accusation.

He slumped on the bed across from her, searching her face for some softening toward him. Claspings his hands, he rested his forearms on his thighs. He’d dreamed of her for so long, wondered what had become of her, wondered if he’d ever see her again. Now that he’d found her, he didn’t want to believe it was all over, that there really was no future for them together. He tried to read her expression, but it was as closed as his marinas on Christmas Day. In a courtroom, he could easily see that look sending a river of sweat running down the spine of opposing counsel.

But he couldn’t give up yet, not without making a last stand. “Like I said, I’ve regretted a lot of things that happened that day. But I’ve not regretted anything more in my life than losing you. I was a fool to think there could be anyone for me but you.” He wanted to reach for her, to hold her, anything to get some reaction, but her blank expression stopped him.

Her gaze moved from his face to his chest, past his abs to his cock. It lingered there for a moment, then continued its downward path. He couldn’t help but feel he was being appraised, and from the slight pursing of her lips, that he was coming up short.

Those emerald eyes appeared to study every inch of him as they worked their way back up. It was then he noticed her lip quiver.

“Sean O’Connell, you don’t know how many times I’ve dreamed of you saying that.”

* * * * *

He may have broken her heart. His reasons may have been selfish. His apology may have been lame, but she wasn't stupid. Her heart swelled at the sight of his remorse-riddled expression. She'd never stopped loving him, and she wasn't about to throw away this second chance simply because he hadn't flung himself groveling at her feet, begging for forgiveness. Who'd want a man like that anyway?

Sean had never been anyone's doormat, and he never would be. That was part of his appeal, what had attracted her to him in the first place -- his single-mindedness whenever he wanted something. He had focused that attention on her when she'd first met him on the beach in Atlantic City, and now she could feel it surrounding her. Slowly she shook her head. She couldn't resist him then, and she didn't want to now. His expression held such hope, such relief, she fell in love with him all over again.

Rising from the rocking chair to go to him, she stopped midway. He'd gotten the answers he wanted, but she needed a few more. When he moved to pull her into his arms, she held up her palm and sat again.

He sank back onto the bed. A shadow of fear crossed his handsome face. She wanted to ease his concern but couldn't, not until she knew. He again rested his hands on his knees, poised as if readying for an attack.

The sight of him naked, his cock hardening as each second ticked by, almost made her forget her own need for closure. She shut her eyes and took a deep, cleansing breath. There were a few things she had to know before she could believe this dream was true. As perfect as this whole scene seemed to be playing, she wasn't about to set herself up for another heartache. Difficult though it might be, she would walk away if things hadn't changed.

"Did you stay with her long?" It was petty, but she had to know.

His brows knit together. "Stay with who?"

She blew out an exasperated breath. “Becky, my roommate. Did you stay with her after I left?”

He shrugged, and the sight of his rippling muscles sent a trembling wave of desire to her belly. She’d better do this quick, or she’d never get her answers. She’d be too busy melting in his arms.

He grimaced, as if trying to remember. “A couple of weeks, I think. It was mainly out of anger. I guess I figured I’d show you. I thought you’d come back. I kept hoping. It didn’t take long before I knew it was you I wanted. Nothing was any good anymore ’cause you weren’t there.”

She gulped and choked out the one question that had brought her unbearable sorrow for eight years. “Did you love her?”

“I never loved her, and I never told her I loved her. I’ve only said those words to one woman.” His rapid-fire response left no doubt her years of heartache had been wasted. His eyes drilled into hers as if they could make her see the truth of his words.

His answer sent a warm glow wrapping around her heart. He seemed so sincere, so regretful, yet so filled with promise. The inner glow faded as an image of Rick formed in her mind. She’d thought she’d finally gotten over Sean when she’d met Rick, but now Rick was gone and Sean was back. Is that what she wanted? Could there actually be some grand scheme in the universe? If Rick hadn’t left, she never would have let Sean touch her no matter how much she may have loved him. She had loved Rick just as deeply, but his leaving opened the way for her to let Sean back into her heart, into her life, again. Was that what she wanted?

Sean’s eyes seemed to smolder with a hunger that had her pulse racing and her temperature skyrocketing. She could feel the heat emanating from his tight, sculpted muscles, leaving her no doubt about the sincerity of his words.

“If I have you, I won’t ever need anyone else.” He held out his hand, palm up, imploring her to take it. “Come back to bed, honey. We’ve a lot of time to make up.”

If someone had written that line for him, he couldn’t have said the more perfect thing. Without taking her eyes from his, she placed her hand in his large outstretched one and rose from the rocker to stand between his knees.

“What are you saying?” She was done trying to read between the lines. She needed to hear in plain English what he meant.

He placed her hand on his shoulder, and she instinctively grasped his other shoulder. Their firm contours held a damp sheen of sweat. A holdover from their lovemaking, or was nervous tension the cause? Did it matter as long as the skin beneath her palm was heated and supple and slick with his essence?

He undid the sash of her robe, then circled her naked waist with his hands and leaned in to place a soft kiss on her navel. She clutched at his shoulders in a vain attempt to steady herself as lightning shot through each and every nerve in her body.

“What I’m saying is...” He kissed her again, slightly lower, causing a quaking deep in her core. Her excited clit tingled at his touch, and she wanted more, oh-so-much more.

“I know we’ve both changed a lot since we were kids down the shore and...” His mouth edged lower, and his tongue flicked against the heated flesh below her navel. Instinctively, she widened her stance, praying he wouldn’t veer from his enticing path.

“...and I’m not saying that’s a bad thing, but...” His hands slid from her waist to her hips as he planted another whisper-soft kiss at her bikini line. His long fingers molded to her butt, separating her cheeks before sliding between them, teasing her. Her knees buckled, but she braced her hands more firmly against his shoulders. His rasping voice seemed unable to choke out the words, but she wanted him to continue no matter what it cost him. She needed to hear out loud what she already felt in his touch.

“...I think we still feel deeply for each other, and...” Hot breath fanned across her pubic hair. She gazed down at the back of his head, desire and hope clouding her vision.

“...we should explore those feelings and see if we can build...” He nuzzled her mons, and she felt the quick flick of his tongue between her moist folds. She slid her hands from his shoulders up his strong, corded neck to tangle in his silky black hair. *Keep talking. Don't stop now.*

“...a future together.” His voice broke, and he pulled back to gaze up at her. His crystal blue eyes held passion and promise, but a flicker of uncertainty wavered in their depths.

He was right. They weren't the same people they had been when they romped on the beaches down the Jersey shore, but time had done nothing to change her feelings toward him. She'd been crazy in love with him then, and the last few hours had shown her that hadn't changed. Now, it actually seemed possible her secret dream could come true.

When his fingers tightened ever-so-slightly on her hips, it occurred to her that *she* was *his* secret dream, that he'd never stopped loving her either. A wave of tenderness like she'd never known washed over her. How could she ever express how much she loved him? How much she'd always loved him?

“For the love of God, say something.” His harsh rasp seemed to fill the room, although it was no more than a choked plea.

Her throat tightened. No words could make it past her lips. It didn't matter. She lowered her hungry mouth to his and showed him how much she wanted their futures linked. His fingers tightened, then slid up her back. In one swift move, he flipped her onto the bed and covered her without breaking the kiss.

He nibbled, he sucked, he delved deeply between her eager lips to stroke her tongue with his. His hands burned her with their touch, caressing as if each contact would brand her as his alone. Clinging to him, her naked flesh sizzled with a need to possess and be possessed.

He broke the kiss to blaze a scorching trail across her jaw, then to her ear where he gently sucked her soft lobe. Flicking his tongue lower to that sensitive piece of flesh just below her ear, he sent her senses reeling. She clutched his shoulders and arched her pelvis against him, wanting him, needing him. He licked his way down her throat and found her flushed breast. She shivered in anticipation as his mouth hovered for a breath of a second before he lowered his fevered lips to her rosy areola and began to rhythmically suckle.

“Oh God, this is just like...like...”

He nibbled his way to her other breast. “Don’t talk. Just feel. Just go with it.” His teeth gently scraped the tip of her distended nipple, and all her thoughts vanished.

He toyed with her nipple, alternating between teeth and tongue until she writhed beneath him. Her fingers tangled in his hair, urging his mouth tighter against her, but he would not be rushed. He licked and softly bit her. When she thought she would scream from sheer frustration, he slid to her side and splayed his hand across her belly.

“Are you wet, honey? Of course you are. You’ve been wet from the minute you laid eyes on me.” As if to prove his point, he skimmed his fingers across her silky thatch and eased them between her welcoming folds. “And do you know why I love it?” He placed a soft kiss on her nipple. “I love it because you do about the same thing to me. I get hard just thinking about you. But then, you were always able to do that.”

Her eyes fluttered shut, and she gave herself over to the exquisite sensations coursing through her body. There was no searching, no guessing. Sean knew exactly how to tease her clit to bring her the greatest pleasure. The pressure built, narrowing her world to Sean, his fingers and his hot, wet mouth on her breast. He sucked deep and hard, pulling her taut nipple with his teeth until she arched off the bed.

Leaving his thumb to toy with her clit, he extended his fingers, sliding them through the silky fluid, coating them with her essence. Tight, tiny shivers raced through her pussy, and she thrust her hips up, begging for more. In answer to her silent plea, he plunged two

fingers deep inside. The slow flame that had been coiling within her spiraled out of control. She writhed against his hand as he relentlessly played with her, drawing out her climax until she collapsed, panting from the sheer beauty of it.

“That was only the beginning, honey.” He shifted and lay so that his head pointed toward the foot of the bed. Leaning up, he kissed her inner thigh, then nuzzled his face into her pubic hair.

“God, I’ve waited years for this.” Sean grasped her hips, lifting her, guiding her knees so that she straddled his shoulders.

She braced her arms on either side of his powerful, muscular thighs and gazed down at his beautiful, thick cock. Her head swam with the intimacy of the act, and she licked her lips in anticipation.

Evidently, Sean had no intention of savoring the moment; he separated her folds with his thumbs and urged her hips lower with his fingers. The first contact of his mouth was a long, slow kiss to her tingling clit. She almost wept at the tenderness of his lips and tongue as they slid over her in a velvet-soft whisper.

His hips arched, reminding her of the delicious jewel awaiting her attention. She leaned forward onto her elbows to curl her hand around his cock and placed an equally soft kiss on the smooth tip. It wasn’t enough. She trailed her lips down his length, kissing every solid, engorged inch before licking her way back to his swollen head. A milky drop of fluid leaked, glimmering like a precious gem. She held his penis steady and spread the liquid on her upper lip, then flicked her tongue to savor him. How quickly the memory of his luscious, salty taste returned. No, she could never forget the heavenly taste of Sean.

A low moan escaped her just as he circled her slit with his tongue. He toyed with her, circling and circling until finally delving inside. She bucked at the exquisite sensations his invading tongue elicited, and sought to return the pleasure by taking his hot, swollen cock deeply into her mouth.

She sucked him hard, lightly grazing her teeth down the length of him. His hips took up the motion, thrusting in time with her mouth. Shivers of excitement raced up her spine, and she inhaled deeply, reacquainting herself with his thrilling, masculine scent.

A strangled growl filled the room, and he dug his fingers into her butt, separating her cheeks. He drew a finger down the length of her crack, stopping to toy with her overly sensitive opening. As his fingers massaged her, his tongue began long, leisurely licks, lapping and concentrating once again on her clit.

Still maintaining her relentless attack on his cock, she reached lower to cup and massage his balls. A sudden jerk of his hips and a light nip to her clit let her know how much he enjoyed her touch. It warmed her to know that she had pleased him, and the desire to satisfy him even more overcame her. She fondled his soft sac, then with a lingering kiss on the head of his cock, she released it and shifted to place heated kisses on his scrotum.

His tongue began a fevered swirling around her clit, and his fingers once again delved deep inside her, thrusting and retreating. A frenzied desire overtook her. Her belly tightened, and she trembled as an unbearable heat swelled within her. She squirmed, but he gripped her butt, holding her in place. A shock wave of electricity surged through her, dazzling her senses and blinding her to all but Sean, squeezing every last ounce of passion from her.

She collapsed on him, dazed but not yet sated. He rolled to his side, shifting so she lay on her back.

“You’re delicious, honey,” he said, his voice low and throaty. “And I’m not done with you yet.” He rested his head high on her thigh, his five o’clock shadow bristled against her overly sensitive skin. His breath whispered across her moist pussy seconds before the tip of his tongue flicked against her trembling clit.

From somewhere in the recesses of her muzzy brain, she heard what sounded like a faint cough.

“And here I thought it would take at least a month to replace me.”

Chapter Four

At the first words, Sean jerked his head from Jen's thigh. "What the hell...?"

A tall blond man in jeans and a New York Giants sweatshirt with the sleeves pushed to his elbows leaned against the doorjamb, twirling a pair of lace panties on his index finger.

"Good thing I found these before Mrs. Levitz." The guy's eyes narrowed and traveled the length of Jen's flushed body. They flicked for an instant at Sean, still lying on his side, his lips mere inches from her pussy. The man's hard gaze shot Sean a threatening glare before they wandered back up her body, as if assessing her state of arousal. He fixed her with a disappointed grimace. After flipping the panties into the air, he caught them and balled them into his fist. "You know how she hates to find them in the vestibule."

"Who the hell are you?" Sean heaved himself up, grabbed the sheet from the bottom of the bed, and threw it over her.

The guy ignored Sean and continued to stare at Jen. His belligerent look faded into one of sadness. "I had planned to do some major groveling, but I guess it's a little late for that."

Sean cut his eyes to Jen. Her dazed expression reflected a hint of yearning before shifting to panic. "Rick! Oh God." Her voice cracked, and she closed her eyes.

"Hi, Jenny. I guess my timing is a bit off...as usual." The man took a step into the room.

“Stay where you are,” Sean ordered, bracing himself against the headboard and gathering Jen in his arms.

For a moment, the guy looked perplexed, as if he’d forgotten there was another man in Jen’s bed. He shifted his gaze to Sean. A world of pain seemed to spill from his eyes as understanding dawned. “Crap, I really screwed up, didn’t I, baby?”

Confusion, incredulity, and outrage warred with each other until a light flicked on in Sean’s brain. Rick. Where had he heard that name? His turbulent thoughts slowly leveled out as he put the puzzle pieces together. What he found sent a blinding rage rampaging through his very being, demolishing everything in its path until it threatened to consume him.

“Look at me.” He cupped Jen’s cheek, forcing her to open her eyes. “What the hell is going on? You said it was over with this guy.”

“It was -- is.” Jen’s fist crumpled the dark blue sheet between her breasts.

“Funny.” Sean jerked his head at the newcomer. “He seems to think differently.” Releasing Jen, Sean threw his legs over the side of the bed away from the intruder and sat, fisting his hands and shaking his head. Wasn’t this a kick in the ass? It wasn’t every day a man got handed his heart’s desire only to have it ripped away and find it was all a macabre practical joke.

“Please, Sean, listen.” She reached out a hand, as if imploring him to see it her way. As if mocking him, the faint scent of her orange blossom perfume drifted to him.

He stared at her outstretched hand, wanting to grasp it and pull her to him, but he hesitated, caught between wanting her and wanting to know where he stood with her. And even more, where did this guy stand with her?

Rick stepped close and grabbed Jen’s outstretched hand, entwining his fingers with hers. “But it’s not over, sweetheart. Please, give me another chance. I was an idiot. We’ve built too much together to throw it away.”

Jen pulled her hand back, but Rick clung to it. “Jenny, please. Get rid of this guy. He can’t mean anything to you. I know now that what we have is too special, too amazing, to ever happen again.”

The words hit Sean like a right to his jaw. *Not mean anything to her? Think again, asshole.* His heart’s desire was *not* going to be ripped away. He did not find Jen again to just walk away because some jerk decided he could finally make a commitment. Not after the way she responded to his lovemaking. She wanted him; she’d made that clear. No, the jerk had to get lost and stay lost.

“Let go of her hand before I break your arm,” Sean hissed, keeping his voice low but making the promise of his words clear.

Rick hesitated, then released her hand. He leveled his eyes at Sean and spoke through pursed lips. “Look, buddy, this doesn’t involve you. So why don’t you put on your pants and get the fuck out?”

Sean returned the stare and squelched the desire to break the jerk’s arm just on principle. “I think you’re the one who needs to get the fuck out.”

“Sean. Rick. Stop it.” Jen’s gaze darted between the two men. “Oh God, I don’t believe this.” She slid off the bed and sped to the other end of the room, rearranging the sheet tightly around her and tucking in the corner to secure it.

“I take it this is the guy who walked out on you? The one who didn’t have the balls to make a commitment?” Sean grabbed his pants and pulled them on, but he had no intention of leaving. He caught the flash of pain in the other man’s eyes and congratulated himself on the bull’s-eye. His conscience might bother him later, but right now his only thought was to keep Jen for his own.

Jen nodded at his question.

Sean openly sized up this Rick character. The guy was about his height with maybe a more slender build, but the tight, sinewy forearms extending from the sweatshirt probably

matched a tight, sinewy body beneath the shirt. Steel gray eyes, a nose that had been broken and not quite reset right, a crooked mouth that some women might find attractive, and a square jaw that had probably taken a few fists along the way.

"You had your chance, pal. It's over. Hey, how the hell did you get in here in the first place? I locked the door."

Rick shot Sean a disgusted look. "I have my own key."

That simple statement sent a brutal stab of pain through Sean. Somehow, he'd wanted Jen to have no past since he last saw her. Unrealistic, but a wishful thought.

"Which you should have given back when you left," said Jen. "You have no right barging in here."

Rick shifted his attention back to Jen as if Sean had suddenly evaporated. "I was a fool. I'm only half a man without you. I should have told you how much I love you, how much I need you." Rick took a step toward Jen, but Sean blocked him.

"You didn't lose her. From what I hear, you threw her away. Well, it's your loss. I found Jen, and she's mine...again. So why don't you leave that key and get out?"

"Go fuck yourself," muttered Rick, looking past Sean. "Jenny?" The pain in that one word rang loud, and Sean ignored the clench in his belly at the all-too-familiar tone. He'd experienced firsthand the gut-wrenching feeling of knowing he'd screwed up and lost the most important person in his life, the only woman he could ever love. Yeah, he could feel for the guy, but he wasn't about to let him have Jen. He threw a glance at her over his shoulder.

She wasn't looking at him but at Rick, and the expression in her eyes was pure anguish. "Oh God, Rick, why did you have to wait so long to say it?" Jen gripped her sheet with one hand and ran her other through her hair.

An iron fist wrapped around Sean's heart. What the hell? Was she going to forgive that loser and take him back? He turned and took a step toward her. "Jen?"

At the sound of his voice, the tortured eyes shot to him. "This isn't happening. Oh Sean, I -- Oh God, I don't know what to do."

"Well, I do." It had taken years to develop his steel-belted self-control. He'd worked at it -- hard. It was a matter of pride that he could face any situation without revealing his thoughts either by eye movement, muscle twitch, or expression. Those years of discipline unraveled now as if he had no more restraint than a savage beast. Sean whirled on Rick and shoved him toward the door. "Get out."

Rick's arm flew, blocking Sean's next push. "Not so fast. I'll leave only if Jenny tells me to." Rick raised his other fist and caught Sean in the shoulder.

"You want a fight, asshole? You should have fought for her instead of dumping her." Sean landed a solid shot to Rick's gut. Rick came back with a jab to the chin. Sean swerved, missing the full impact but still catching a piece. It had been a long time since Sean had been involved in a brawl, but if that's what it took to keep Jen, then that's what he'd do. He pulled back his arm.

"Stop it! Both of you!" She wedged herself between the two men. "Stop it. You're behaving like Neanderthals."

Her pleading tone halted Sean's next punch, and he stepped back. Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath and blew it out. What the hell was he doing? This wasn't some back alley in Newark. "Look, I'm sorry. Just tell him to get out." Sean looked down at his hand and rubbed his knuckles. Damn. He hated losing control like that. The stillness of the silent room was broken only by the labored breathing of its occupants.

"Jen? Tell him to leave." Sean opened his eyes and fixed her with a commanding stare.

Rick had moved closer to Jen and wrapped his fingers around her arms. The sight of him touching her brought a new surge of anger racing through Sean's veins. He took a step toward her, but the look of love shimmering in her eyes stopped him.

"Please, Jenny, let me stay. Oh God, how I love you," Rick pleaded, pulling Jen closer.

"I said get the fuck out of here." Sean's gut clenched in a knot so tight it threatened to reach up and suck the life from him. After what they'd shared tonight, was she actually going to listen to this clown?

"Please, give me a minute to think."

"I'm warning you. Get rid of him." Desperation crept into Sean's words, and they came out all wrong.

"Will you settle down?" Jen shot back, not taking her eyes from Rick. "The least I can do is listen for a few minutes."

Sean pushed aside the despair that followed behind his rage. The look in her eyes, the tone of her voice, he didn't need to be Einstein to figure out he'd been a convenient substitute. Now that her lover had returned, she didn't need him anymore. He'd been a fool to believe that after all these years she still loved him. What an idiot he'd made of himself tonight. Well, maybe he could salvage a little self-respect. Lord knows, she'd ripped his pride and masculinity to shreds. He'd be damned if he'd let her know how much her betrayal affected him.

"Well, I can see three's a crowd here. Good to see you again, Jen." He turned, picked up his clothes and shoes, and strode into the living room.

"Sean. Wait."

Shrugging into his shirt, he stuffed his socks and boxers into his pockets, draped his tie around his neck, then slammed his feet into his loafers. A deep yearning grew in his belly, an overflowing ache that took hold of his chest and threatened to smother him. A small doubt trickled into the back of his mind. Was he making the second biggest mistake of his life?

"Sean..." Jen appeared in the doorway. "I just need to talk to Rick. Please. Don't --"

Rick moved up behind Jen and put his arms around her. "Don't let us keep you."

"Sean. Don't --"

No, he'd seen the way she'd looked at Rick. He was only deluding himself thinking she'd looked at him the same way. There are times when a guy forgets who he is, what he stands for, what really matters. Tonight overflowed with things he'd regret later, things he'd wish he hadn't said or done, but for now, he may as well make the night of his dreams really explode around him.

"Look, Jen...we tried, but things just aren't the same, are they? It was fun, but there's no point in fooling ourselves. We're not kids anymore. People change. They develop different...needs." Sean sucked in a deep breath. "It's obvious he needs you and you need him," he choked out, then turned toward the door, hoping he hid the anguish his words caused him.

"But, Sean, you said you needed --"

"I thought you knew." He tossed her a rueful smile. "I don't need anyone." He ignored the pain that welled up from the pit of his stomach. Well, he'd be jogging on fiery coals in the afterlife for that whopper. Hooking his jacket over his shoulder with a crooked finger, he opened the door and left without a backward glance.

* * * * *

Jen stared at the door. He'd closed it so quietly just a faint *click* sounded. At the very least, she'd expected a reverberating slam. The old Sean would have brought the roof down. This new Sean frightened her with his icy intensity.

The finality of his parting shot rang in her ears. He'd always had a way of cutting right to the point but had usually tempered his comments. Tonight, his chilling remark inflicted a different type of pain than when she'd left him all those years ago. All his lovely words about their future together were just that, lovely words with no emotion, no substance behind them. She took a step toward the door, not really believing he'd left her again. She wrapped her arms around herself to ward off the words echoing in her mind. "*I don't need anyone.*"

Rick came up behind her. The smell of his familiar minty soap tinged with his own unique masculine scent surrounded her. Resting his hands on her shoulders, he began a slow massage, kneading the tension-laden muscles. "Who was that?" His lips brushed her ear, and his warm breath stirred the mussed tendrils at her temples.

"No one." Her very soul ached as she muttered those words. No, he was no one she knew, just someone she thought she knew.

Rick's arms came around her, and he nuzzled the crook of her neck. "I was a fool to leave. I swear, you'll never regret taking me back."

She stiffened at his words, at the feel of his embrace.

"What's the matter? Look, I know you're mad at me for leaving. I'm so sorry. I'll make it up to you."

Oh God, how could this be happening? Two men, in the same night, saying things she'd longed to hear from them, touching her in ways she thought they'd never touch her again.

"I know you're upset that I barged in and interrupted your night, but I'm not sorry I did it." He gently nipped her neck. "We have a history. We've always been good together. You couldn't possibly have known that guy long enough to have what we have."

Jen shivered at those words. How could he know that her history with *that guy* ran just as deep, maybe deeper, than what she had with Rick? A few hours ago, no one cared whether she got up in the morning, perhaps with the exception of Chapman, Hart, and Associates, she thought wryly.

Why did both the men from her past pick this particular night to parade back into her life? Why couldn't she have had some time to adjust to the thought that one of them wanted her back before the other marched in...and the first marched right back out? She tried to pull away from Rick, but he eased his hold only enough to allow her to turn in his arms.

He searched her face, and she couldn't help but feel the concern and love in his eyes. It washed over her in waves mixed with joy and guilt. Yes, she did still love him.

She closed her eyes and made a colossal effort to stop the tears that threatened to overflow the corners of her lids. She almost succeeded, but one determined sucker slid out and trickled down her cheek.

Confusion so intense it became physically painful racked her body. How could she love two men so intently, so completely? How could the timing be so screwed up? Just when she thought she'd found Sean again, he was gone, leaving so many questions unanswered, so much left unsaid between them. She squeezed her eyes shut tighter in the hope of stopping the flow of tears. It didn't work. One after the other, they escaped and left a salty trail down her cheeks.

Rick's comforting arms gathered her in and held her close, cushioning her head against his firm chest. "Go ahead, baby, let it out." He stroked her hair as if gentling a frightened animal...or a near-hysterical female.

She wept for the emptiness of those lonely years without Sean, for that horrible month without Rick, for the short-lived ecstasy of being one with Sean again, for the all-consuming relief of being in Rick's arms. She wept for her lost loves, for her found loves, and most of all, she wept for a future that could never be and one that might be.

Through it all, Rick held her and stroked her back, caressed her hair and muttered inconsequential nonsense that meant the world to her.

When she'd cried about everything that brought her to this moment, she snuffled and wiped her nose on his tear-soaked sweatshirt.

He leaned back and gave her a weak smile. "Better?" he asked, smoothing a finger across her cheek.

She nodded. "Sorry. I don't know what came over me."

"I can guess." He combed his fingers through her hair, pushing it from her face.

“Huh?”

“That guy. He wasn’t just someone you met recently, was he?”

She wanted to hide, to nuzzle back into the comfort of his broad chest, but he deserved a straight, honest answer. Fixing his loving face with a steady look, she slid her palm across his whiskered jaw. “No, he’s not. That was *the* Sean.”

“Ah, the mystery man from your past. I figured. Have you been seeing him long?”

She shook her head but didn’t elaborate. Rick didn’t need to know that her attraction, her need for Sean, was so great she’d jumped into bed after meeting him only a few hours ago.

Rick held her gaze, and in that moment, she could see into his very soul. She read the fervor of his love for her, his regret at having left her.

“Do you still love him?” His husky words were barely audible yet seemed to fill the room.

Flippant remarks crossed her mind, along with a few denials and segues to change the subject, but the intensity of his gaze made them die unsaid. Even though Rick had walked out on her, he was right. They did have a history, a loving, caring history. Three years together deserved more than a casual repartee.

She swallowed, but it did nothing to ease the dryness in her throat or make her any more willing to answer his question. “I’ve never stopped loving him,” she blurted out, unable to think of anything else to say.

The pain in Rick’s eyes cut to her core, oddly reminding her of the feeling she’d had when he told her he was leaving. She hurried on, not willing to analyze her thoughts just now. “And I love you just as deeply. I don’t understand it, and I don’t want to hurt you, but there it is.”

Rick’s eyes searched hers; then he crushed her to his hard chest. “Oh, Jenny. We’ve got a problem.”

Chapter Five

Sean sipped his bourbon and stared at his wavy image in the crackled mirror behind the bar. He hadn't been able to flag a cab to take him back to his car, so he'd wandered into the corner tavern. Dim lights. Local patrons. A smoky odor no clean-air legislation could blow away. An invisible bartender to keep his glass filled.

He wondered for about the hundredth time what the hell had happened. How could such a fantastic night turn into such a fiasco? Who the hell did that guy think he was? Aside from the ex-lover who wanted to make a comeback. Sean grimaced. The guy was probably thinking the same thing about him.

Everything had been going great until Rick showed up. Well, maybe not everything. Sean probably shouldn't have accused Jen of running away; then she wouldn't have brought up the ménage thing with Becky -- or mentioned doing it with another man. How *would* he have felt if there had been another guy instead of another woman? He hated to admit it, but the thought had excited him when she mentioned it. Hell, it excited him now. That same image of Jen lying on her bed with another man between her thighs flashed through his mind, only now that man had a face.

And that man was still in her damn apartment, that man was probably making love to her right now while Sean sat in this loser bar. Why hadn't he stayed? Why did he have to pretend to be noble and bow out? He took another sip of bourbon, then stared at the glass as he swirled the amber liquid in the dim light. He knew why. It was the adoring way Jen had looked at Rick, like he was the only man she'd ever wanted.

He closed his eyes and imagined the expression on her beautiful face. It didn't make sense. She'd looked at him with that same desire in her eyes. Maybe she was just overwhelmed with both of them returning on the same night? Had he been too hasty? Had he given up too easily? Why hadn't he made the other guy leave?

Okay, he had tried that. He should have tried harder. He'd spent eight years without Jen, eight years comparing every woman he dated to her, eight years wondering if being with her was as good as he remembered or whether time faded the edges of those memories into something better than the reality.

A little more patience, a little more analysis of the situation, wouldn't have been out of line. But no. He'd let things get out of control. He not only let them get out of control, he forced them. Listening to that guy tell her he loved her, seeing the adoring expression on her face when he'd said it, had thrown all Sean's self-control out the window.

He downed his bourbon and slammed the glass on the bar. The bartender appeared, refilled his glass, and vanished.

The image of Jen's beloved face at that moment etched itself on his memory, and he knew it would be there until the day he died. It was the same look that had melted his heart when he'd told her he thought they might have a future together.

Might have a future? For God's sake, what kind of a lame-ass declaration was that? Why in hell's name didn't he come right out and tell her he loved her? That he had always loved her and always would love her? No, he had to let his fucking ego get in the way and

tell her he didn't need her, he didn't need anybody. Where the hell did that crock of shit come from? He needed her. More than anything in the world he needed her.

He took another swallow of bourbon, taking a perverse pleasure in the fiery path it blazed down his throat.

And now, that Rick guy was only doing what Sean himself would have done -- should have done -- staked his claim on a talented, intelligent, giving woman who he never should have let go in the first place.

Sean sucked in his breath and stared at his image in the mirror. Did that guy have a greater claim on Jen than he did? After all, Rick had come to his senses after only a month. It took Sean eight years. No, he'd come to his senses within a month, but she'd disappeared. The eight years weren't his fault.

So what was he doing whining into a watered-down drink when he should be staking his own claim? He needed her, and he needed to make sure she knew it.

Sean threw a twenty on the bar and strode to the door. In less than five minutes, he was outside Jen's apartment. It only took another five for someone to exit the building so he could gain access. He jogged up the stairs to the third floor, taking care not to make any noise outside Mrs. Levitz's door. Taking a deep breath, he knocked on Jen's before he could change his mind.

He waited and heard, "Fuck. Now what?" muttered on the other side. The lock clicked. The door swung open. Rick crossed his arms but didn't say a word. He'd shed his sweatshirt and shoes, and looked like he was about to get rid of his jeans.

Sean stuck his foot inside the threshold in anticipation of the door slamming in his face. The sight of the half-naked man brought a surge of rage coursing through Sean's veins. He reined in his emotions. He'd let his anger govern his actions before, and it'd only brought disaster. Taking another calming breath, he addressed the man as if he were a business

associate vying for a choice piece of property instead of as the man who seemed about to have sex with the woman Sean loved.

“Look, I know you want her. I want her too. I know I made a crack about you walking away, but I’m just as guilty. Only I did it a long time ago and have been looking for her ever since. I finally found her, and I’m not going to let her go.” Sean waited for Rick to pull back his fist for a solid punch. It’s what Sean would have done if he were in Rick’s shoes.

A long minute passed; then Rick stepped back, indicating Sean should enter.

Sean gave him a wary glance and strode past him into the apartment. The door clicked closed behind him. The lock sounded loud in the still living room. Sean turned to find Rick leaning against the door.

“We had a long talk after you left. She told me who you were.” Rick raised his eyebrow, evidently needing confirmation of the statement. Sean nodded.

Rick bit his lower lip as if deciding whether to say something. After looking Sean up and down, Rick appeared to come to a conclusion and lifted his steel gray eyes to Sean’s in a measuring stare. “So, I guess you didn’t mean all that heroic crap about me needing her more, and you not needing anyone, did you?”

Sean closed his eyes. Pain and humiliation swept over him at Jen’s expression when he’d said he didn’t need her. He shook his head. “It was all bullshit. I’m no hero.”

“I didn’t think so.” Rick let out a long breath. “Well, it looks like we’re in the same boat. We both dumped her, and we both want her back.”

“I can’t give her up.” Sean hoped his voice didn’t sound as pathetic to the other man as it did to him.

“I figured as much. Neither can I.”

“Looks like we have a problem.” Sean couldn’t believe he was standing there calmly discussing Jen and their entire future as if it were some inconsequential marina problem.

“Yeah, I figured that too.” Rick wandered farther into the living room and picked up a glass paperweight from an end table. He sat in an easy chair and began tossing the paperweight into the air and catching it like a baseball.

Sean did a double take. He’d given Jen that paperweight on the day they’d met. She’d kept it all this time?

It had been an unforgettable day. He’d almost crashed his surfboard into hers. She’d laughed and dared him to keep up with her. An unrelenting ocean had delivered perfect wave after perfect wave; only when they were near exhaustion had they taken a break from surfing and strolled along the boardwalk. He’d been smitten from the start. Jen was smart, sassy, and her firm, tanned body filled out a bikini better than a *Playboy* bunny.

When some huckster in a game booth challenged him to win a prize for his girlfriend, a primal need to prove his manhood swept over him. Five minutes, a determined pitching arm, and twenty dollars later, he’d finally knocked over the wooden pins to win *his girlfriend* her choice from the top shelf of the booth.

Without hesitation, she’d chosen the glass paperweight with swirls of green buried deep inside. She’d held it up and said it was the exact color of the ocean that day. She was right, but he’d thought it was more like the exact color her eyes would be when he made love to her. Turned out, he was right too.

Rick stopped tossing the paperweight and gave Sean a dark look. “I don’t want her hurt. We’ve both put her through more than enough grief. Lord knows why she does, but she wants you. She says she loves me, but she’s been crying her eyes out over you leaving. I can’t live with that.”

Sean leaned his hip against the arm of the sofa. “Where is she?”

Rick tilted his head toward the closed bedroom door. “She’s lying down, probably fallen asleep by now.”

Sean nodded. She had to be exhausted after the emotional roller-coaster ride tonight. He stared at the bedroom door and beat down the surging desire to feel her pressed against his side as she slept in his arms. What he wouldn't give --

He caught a movement out of the corner of his eye. Rick tossing the paperweight again. "Look, I want to apologize about taking a swing at you before. I was out of line."

Rick shrugged. "Water under the bridge. Hell, if someone had walked in on me with Jenny, I would have done the same thing."

Sean dipped his head, acknowledging Rick's counterapology, then let out a long breath. "So, now what do we do?"

Rick looked away, then back at Sean. "I don't want you to get the wrong idea or anything. I mean, I'm straight as an arrow, but if it would make her happy..." Rick shrugged and leaned forward, seemed to change his mind, then looked down at his feet. "I can't believe I'm saying this."

Sean waited. Huh? Straight as...? Make her happy...?

Rick raised his head and fixed Sean with a piercing stare. "It looks like we both want her, and neither one of us is going to walk away."

Sean returned Rick's unblinking stare and wondered what the hell the guy was talking about. He lifted his hand and gave Rick a confused head shake. "I'm lost. What are you saying?"

Rick scrubbed his hand across his chin. "What I'm saying... What I'm proposing is that...that we both stay in Jenny's life. That the three of us, you know, we become a couple, or a triple, or whatever you call it."

Sean's eyes widened. Had he heard correctly? Had he just been invited to...? Wait. This wasn't the way he'd planned it. Rick was supposed to leave. He opened his mouth to protest but stopped. The garbled words clogged his throat.

Rick wasn't leaving, but he didn't order Sean to leave either. In fact, Rick was showing far more consideration for Jen's feelings than Sean was. He was willing to allow Sean into her life, but he'd come here with the intention of tossing Rick out on his ass.

Sean ignored the ache in his heart as reality settled over him. He wasn't going to get Jen back all to himself. Rick was not going to give her up, but he had given Sean a choice. Could he live with that choice? How badly did he want Jen back in his life?

Sure, he'd done threesomes before. He hadn't pursued a steady diet of them, but he had enjoyed them on occasion. Could he do this with Jen? He stared at the other man. Two crimson patches rose on Rick's cheekbones, and he continued to stare at his feet, avoiding Sean's gaze.

"It's not like you and I would..." mumbled Rick. "Hey, if you've got a better idea, I'm all ears."

"I don't..." Sean cleared his throat. His mouth felt like he'd eaten a bowl of kitty litter. Hadn't he just fantasized about this very thing? Hadn't he become aroused at the thought of sharing Jen? But when presented with the possibility of his little erotic dream coming true, he wasn't sure he wanted the reality. It seemed so strange, so foreign, he couldn't get his mind around the concept. The thought was ridiculous. Him and Jen and...another man? "I don't --"

Rick raised his head and shot Sean a piercing stare. "The way I see it, it's either that or we go back to fighting over her. I don't want to hurt her more than we already have."

Sean held Rick's gaze. He hated to hear the words, but he could see the logic in Rick's point and the determination in his eyes. The guy would not slink away no matter how Sean pressed him. Rick would come back and keep coming back just as Sean would if the situation were reversed. And what would be the outcome? In the end, Jen would suffer, and they'd gain nothing. "Shit. I can't come up with any other way out of this." Sean closed his eyes and rubbed the back of his neck. "Okay, if that's the way it has to be, I guess I can share her."

“Oh really?” The soft, feminine voice held a hint of anger. “Don’t you think you should ask *her* before making a decision like this?”

* * * * *

Jen stood in the bedroom doorway, hands on hips and ready to spit nails. What did these two jokers think they were doing? It sounded like they were splitting a piece of apple pie, and they both wanted it à la mode.

Rick flopped his head against the back of the chair. “Crap. How much did you hear?”

Sean shot off the couch arm and went to her.

She held up her hand to warn him off. “Not so fast, O’Connell.”

Sean stopped but didn’t retreat. “Look, Jen, we were just trying to be civilized, but if you want us to revert to cavemen, we can go that way too.”

After allowing herself another crying jag, she’d drifted off to a restless sleep haunted by the wonderful and horrible events of the evening. Soft kisses sprinkled across her cheek, and strong arms cradled her against a warm, firm body, but she couldn’t figure out if they belonged to Rick or Sean. In her dream, they snuggled and coddled her, making her feel secure and loved until an annoying buzz took hold in the background. People talking. First soft, then loud, then soft. Enough to interfere with her comforting dreams. The sweet visions drifted away, leaving a sense of loss and irritation.

She awoke to the sound of Sean’s voice, or at least, she thought she was awake. But she couldn’t be. Sean had left, walking out of her life as casually as he’d walked in.

The buzz continued until it all but demanded she investigate. She’d gotten out of bed and pressed her ear to the door. There was no mistaking it. That *was* Sean’s voice. Her eyebrows shot up as she listened to what he and Rick were discussing. Was Rick actually suggesting that they *share* her? Was he out of his frickin’ mind? She grasped the doorknob,

intent on crashing into the living room and throwing out both their sorry asses. As her hand settled over the cool brass knob, she stopped.

Rick's words were so logical, so sincere. Her heart swelled with love when he said he wouldn't leave her. Sean echoed his words. My God, they were all caught up in emotions and feelings they had no control over. For herself, she couldn't deny her love for either of them.

She'd slipped out of the bedroom and waited to be seen. The two men in her life were too intent on each other to notice her, but it gave her an excellent opportunity to observe them. Sean's intensity would have overpowered the room if Rick's presence hadn't dominated it.

Now, they stared at her, their expressions defensive, resigned, hopeful, and she wrapped her arms tightly around herself, hugging her robe to her. "To answer your questions, I heard an earful. It sounds like you two have concocted quite a plan. And no, I don't want you to revert to cavemen."

Rick rose from the easy chair and stood next to Sean. "It's not like we were plotting behind your back, sweetheart. We were trying to work something out."

"What do you think?" asked Sean, stuffing his hands into his suit jacket pockets.

"What do I think?" That was easy. She'd fallen asleep crying over the impossibility of being in love with two men at the same time. Now, it didn't seem so impossible. They'd resolved their differences and were offering her the opportunity to be with both of them.

There were sure to be a lot of issues and emotions to be worked out, but for now...for now she would take what was offered and leave any worries for another day. She couldn't stop her lips from lifting in a small smile. "What do I think?" Images of her body entwined with the two men she loved, of being enveloped in their caring, tender arms, of giving herself and receiving their intimate caresses, swirled through her mind. Yes, she could handle the arrangement. With Sean and Rick, she could handle anything. A twinge of uneasiness tweaked her mind. Now what?

Rick shifted from foot to foot while Sean shoved his fists so far into his jacket pockets, he was going to do major damage to that custom suit. She loved them both all the more for their show of awkwardness. So they didn't know what to do next either.

Well, it looked like it was up to her. She untied the belt of her emerald green robe and shimmied until it pooled at her feet. "I think I could use a shower right about now."

Smoothing her palms over her thighs, up her belly, and past her breasts, she stretched her arms over her head and sighed. With a sultry smile, she turned and sauntered to the bathroom, swinging her hips. A quiver of satisfaction ran through her knowing four eyes were popping from two incredibly handsome heads.

She turned on the water full force and leaned her head back to catch her hair in the spray. And waited.

Grabbing the scented soap, she ran the smooth cake across her belly. And waited.

She lathered up her hands and stroked the bubbles across her breasts. Did they change their minds? Had they gone into caveman mode? She listened but didn't hear any furniture breaking or lamps being thrown.

Stepping back under the water, she allowed herself to drift under its hypnotic massage. The spray felt like gentle needle pricks, bringing her skin to life and soothing her tight muscles. With each drop of water, the tension of the evening seemed to wash away, leaving her renewed, exhilarated, and ready to set out on this new adventure. Closing her eyes, she bent back and angled her face under the cascading water. And waited.

Chapter Six

The door to the shower stall slid open. “Sorry for the delay, Jenny. We needed to work out a few things,” the familiar voice rasped in her ear. Taken unawares, she stumbled against Rick as he stepped into the shower stall. His solid form supported her unexpectedly wobbly legs as he grabbed her from behind. He steadied her against the length of him, then slid his hands higher to cup and weigh her soap-slicked breasts.

“Hello, honey.” Sean edged into the shower stall and captured her chin between his thumb and forefinger. He took her mouth in a warm, teasing kiss, a kiss that lingered, a kiss that promised he was real. Her pulse thudded loudly in her ears as the full impact of what was happening hit her. She was going to make love with the two men in her life.

“Relax and enjoy yourself.” Sean’s voice held a warm, conciliatory tone, as if he was trying to make up for his earlier remarks. “You know we both love you...and we both want to please you. This is all about you. Live in the moment. We’ll worry about the details later.”

Rick stroked her breasts, lingering at the gentle slopes as the stream of water washed off the last remnants of her scented soap. “Don’t think, Jenny.” He nuzzled the nape of her neck, all the while scraping his thumbs over her hardening nipples. His soft, wet hair

skimming across her shoulder reminded her of other sensuous times with him in this shower. "Just feel, baby."

Moisture pooled between her folds, and a shiver ran from her belly to center in her clit. There was no denying it. She loved them both. The thought of giving up either had brought an unbearable pain to her heart. How incredible was it that they had arrived at a similar solution. Would they really be able to do this? She stared at Sean, searching for a hint of his belligerent possessiveness, yet she could see nothing but an open willingness in the hopeful look he returned.

She twisted to study Rick's expression. His heavy-lidded eyes shone with a passion she'd longed to see again over the last month. But also in their depths dwelled a hint of sadness. "Rick...?" Never for the world would she want to hurt him, no matter that he'd broken her heart when he walked out. She still loved and cherished him. If he didn't want this, she needed to let him know he could stop it.

"It's okay, baby. I'm good with it. This is about you. Go with it." He caught her lips in a tender kiss. He didn't rush but sipped and grazed his lips along hers. Her eyes drifted closed at the love and tenderness contained in that kiss. Rick's hand slipped from her breast to rest on the curve of her hip. The firm squeeze reassured her that he was a willing player there tonight.

Sean's lips replaced Rick's hand on her breast. He circled his tongue around her distended nipple, toying with it, flicking the tip back and forth, up and down, until she would promise anything as long as he suckled her. Rick's hand, or at least she thought it was Rick's, continued to knead and caress her other breast. A ripple of pleasure shot up her spine as Sean surrounded her taut nipple with his mouth. The scrape of his stubble against her delicate flesh had her yearning for more.

Even as shivers of anticipation ran through her, small doubts continued to surface. Could the two of them really share an experience like this without one trying to dominate the other?

Sensations ricocheted within her, each one more powerful than the one before, making it impossible to determine which man elicited which glorious reaction. Rick nibbled at the corners of her mouth while Sean trailed his fingers in a path of fire between her breasts, down her abdomen, across her belly, to tangle in the silky hair of her mound. She squirmed at the first touch of his callused fingers tunneling between her heated folds and flinched when he found her aroused clit. He began a slow, sensual massage as if he had all night to do nothing but that. My God, his fingers were magic.

Rick rubbed his pelvis against her butt until his cock lay nestled between her cheeks; then he gently rocked himself against her. She arched her back to provide him with a tighter fit and increase his pleasure like she'd done so many times before. He shifted his other hand from her breast to her hip, gripping both hips now and guiding her in a rhythmic dance against his pulsing cock. "That's it, baby. Stay with me." She leaned her head back, and he took her lips in a devastating kiss, staking his claim, even as Sean increased the intensity of his mouth on her breast.

The warm spray of the shower lulled her into a dream state as it splashed over her heated flesh. With a tug of her lips between his teeth, Rick freed her mouth. Sean's mouth immediately replaced Rick's, working her into a frenzy of desire. She raised her hands and draped them around Sean's neck, pressing herself flush against him, demanding more from the kiss.

No matter how many men she'd kissed over the years, no one's kiss would ever be more familiar or easy to recognize than Sean's. His lips had always claimed hers with a primal need that totally possessed her.

As if he'd been waiting for the right moment, his tongue plunged into the yearning depths of her mouth and made that possession complete. He slid his other hand around her neck, under her thick, wet hair, and anchored her in place as he continued to caress the silky hairs of her mound. His heavy cock pressed into her pelvic bone, and she cried aloud between his kisses when he shifted to position his thick shaft at the apex of her thighs. His

hands moved upward to stroke the sensitive sides of her breasts, and she would have sighed at the sheer pleasure had his tongue not captured hers in a decadent duel.

Rick's mouth thoroughly explored her back from shoulder to shoulder. He took a short step away and glided his lips downward, toying with each vertebra of her spine. Despite the warm water from the showerhead and the steamy fog in the stall, she shivered as his caressing fingers worked their way down. His large hands cupped her bottom, each hot palm massaging a rounded cheek. Her mind reeled when he dropped to his knees and replaced one hand with his hot, wet mouth while his other hand continued to caress and knead her flushed cheek. She gave herself over to the pleasure she knew this man could give her, letting her love for him flood her senses.

A spasm of delight shot through her, and she pushed her hips firmly against Sean's bulging erection as Rick's tongue found its way to the sensitive fission between her cheeks. She broke the kiss as white-hot lava roared through her veins. "Oh my God. Rick. Please." Her mind reeled with sensations and memories of Rick going down on her like this. So many times, so much pleasure.

She rested her head against Sean's solid pec, nuzzling his hard, male nipple with her lips and praying Rick understood her incoherent plea, that he hadn't forgotten how much she loved to feel his tongue on her.

He hadn't. "You're beautiful, Jenny. In every way."

Her legs buckled, and she melted against Sean as Rick's strong fingers separated her cheeks. A hot tongue ran the length of her seam, then returned to probe her back hole with a delicacy that seemed impossible for such a large man. His hands continued to caress her bottom as his tongue performed its magic. God, how she had missed this, missed his skillful touch, his slow, practiced movements. Rick's hot breath fanned across her bottom, sending a rhythmic pulsing to her sensitive clit.

Sean's hand lifted from her breast, and she whimpered at the loss of his touch. A muted *thud* sounded when he hit the knob, and the shower dwindled to a drizzling stop. Sean's other hand never ceased its hypnotic caresses of her clit but continued to stroke and pinch her sensitive nub until she thought she would scream from the sheer joy of it.

She fastened her lips over Sean's nipple and sucked in earnest, drawing the distended nub into her mouth and swirling her tongue to match Rick's movements on her ass. An incredible rippling sensation rolled over her, sending shivers deep into her very bones and generating an exquisite sexual hunger for both men. Her love for them welled up within her, and she knew that any second now she would explode in total ecstasy.

Sean wedged his large feet between hers, directing her to step her feet apart. With small rocking movements from foot to foot, he widened his stance, forcing her to step farther and spread her legs wide. She heard a strangled groan from behind her and Rick's finger followed the path between her cheeks and didn't stop until he'd found her creamy center. "Oh God, you're so wet, so ready," Rick growled. "God, what you're doing to me."

A long, slow shudder passed through her body as he thrust first one, then another, solid digit into her dripping slit. She released Sean's nipple and gasped as he continued to massage her clit while Rick's talented fingers fucked her.

"Go with it, Jen."

"You like that, don't you, Jenny?"

She heard the satisfaction in their deep voices and could now believe that they weren't competing for her but were both only concerned with pleasuring her. Sean lowered his head and sucked deeply at the tender flesh at the curve of her shoulder.

Her body thrummed with an excitement she'd never before known. It was a dream, an impossible fantasy. The two men she loved, the two men who had left her, both of them, here, now, driving her wild, each in harmony with the other.

Rick removed his fingers, but before she could protest, he slid his middle finger into her anus, using her own juices to ease the entrance. She bucked at the burning sensation, but he didn't stop. "Hold steady. It'll pass. You know it will. And then comes the good part. The part you love." Rick's words sounded loud bouncing off the tiled walls.

"Breathe deep, honey," said Sean. "Relax."

She did as they instructed, taking in a large gulp of air and willing her muscles to welcome the intrusion. When she slumped against him, Sean shifted his hands to her hips.

"I think we're going to need some of this." With his free hand, Rick fumbled in the hanging basket of shower supplies. She felt the heat creep up her body, knowing what Rick was searching for. Excitement mixed with a tinge of embarrassment. She buried her face against Sean's chest. She was being ridiculous. Who cared if Sean saw that she and Rick had kept a tube of lubricant readily available? Hell, she should be grateful she hadn't tossed it out when he left.

Rick had introduced her to anal sex years ago, and they both relished the intimacy and satisfaction they gave and received from the act. It seemed only right that he would take her this way after being apart so long.

"Here we go." Rick eased his finger from her ass. She would have felt a degree of regret at the loss of the trembling pleasure, but the *splurt* of the tube and the oozing lube between her cheeks made her tingle with anticipation. She glanced up at Sean, who was looking over her shoulder. She turned to see what held his interest. His gaze was fixed on Rick's thick cock as he slathered a generous handful of lubricant over his erection. The sight of the engorged penis made her greedy to have it inside her, and she fleetingly wondered what Sean felt as he watched Rick readying himself to enter her.

"You ready?" She nodded, then realized Rick wasn't talking to her. His heated gaze held a message of trust and understanding as it passed over her shoulder. She turned to catch an answering expression on Sean's face.

She removed one arm from around Sean's neck and reached for Rick. She kissed him, pouring her love and tender passion into it. "I want you inside me, Rick." He answered with a sweeping, intimate kiss, nibbling the corner of her mouth as her lips released his.

When she turned back to Sean, his mouth caught hers in a searing, branding kiss so different from Rick's yet just as potent. She released Rick and ran her hand down Sean's chest, past his taut abs, and wound her fingers around his erection. "I want you inside me, Sean." The words were the same but held just as much conviction as when she uttered them to Rick.

Sean leaned his shoulders against the wall, bracing his legs and grasping her hips. "I'll go first." His voice was low, almost a growl, and in her blissful state, she realized how hard it was for both of them to share her, but they would -- for her. Love filled her heart at the thought of these two independent, powerful men sacrificing their egos for her. In one motion, Sean lifted her and thrust himself fully into her. She wrapped her legs around him and leaned into him to raise the angle of her butt. Another pair of hands clasped her hips above the first pair and long fingers separated her heated cheeks.

"That's it, baby," said Rick. "Nice and slow."

The bulbous head of his cock probed her, nudging, exploring. She concentrated on Sean's stillness as he waited for Rick to enter her. The hard lines on his face and his gritted teeth were the only signs of his tremendous control. Resting her head against his shoulder, she smoothed her lips along his corded throat, then sucked deeply. He tasted of salt and aroused male, and memories from years ago rushed back to heat her blood beyond boiling. The feel of his cock, long and hard, inside her, his racing heartbeat thudding against her breasts, the pinpricks of the fine, wiry hairs on his chest all came together in a kaleidoscope of past and present.

And then, all thoughts fled as Rick pushed his engorged shaft into her. Even knowing his considerable size, she gasped with remembered pleasure. Anticipation of the joy that she knew would follow filled her. Her lashes fluttered closed, and she lost herself in the moment.

The two men she loved were both inside her, overwhelming her senses, sending her into a frenzy of physical and emotional sensations. And yet no one moved. The men stood frozen in time, allowing her to adjust to the dual penetration filling her so completely. She lay folded around Sean with Rick pressed to her back, both men grasping her hips. The labored sound of their breathing echoed in her ears, and a long, contented sigh escaped her lips. Everything was so right, so perfect.

Rick moved first, easing himself from her. She wanted to cry out at the loss, but in the next moment, his hard erection was filling her again. But even as Rick entered her, Sean withdrew, holding himself so only the heavy head of his cock remained inside her. She clung to him as both men began a slow advance and retreat, advance and retreat, until all thought, all feeling, centered only on their fluid dance. Her mind whirled as her body took in each man in turn until she thought she'd burst from sheer pleasure.

With each passing second, their momentum increased, the rhythm of the dance took hold, and they moved as one, each knowing his part. Sean's heated skin became slick with his exertion, and she reveled in the feel of his damp chest crushed against her aching breasts. His groans came in time with his thrusts and seemed a counterpoint to Rick's answering growls. Exquisite sexual tension hummed throughout her entire being, taking her to unknown heights and mesmerizing depths.

The inner pressure built until she toddled on the precipice of her climax, and for an instant she held it at bay, wondering if her partners remembered the feel of her body when she was on the verge. She opened her mouth to tell them but no sound came out, and then it was too late. She crashed over the side of the cliff, shuddering as an intense orgasm took hold and tossed her into a sea of shimmering sensations.

In her euphoric state, she heard distant shouts. Both men changed their rhythm and plunged into her together. The rush of shattering male climaxes slammed into her. First Sean came with a possessive growl of primal male satisfaction, his fingers digging into her hips as he held her in place for his fierce release.

Then the hot burning sensation of Rick's seed shot through her as he drove himself in to his hilt. His slick body set fire to her back. He buried his head against her shoulder as his hips molded to her ass.

Sean. Rick. Each so different, but each held a tight grasp to her heart, her soul. Time suspended them in that sea of shattering emotions that lifted her on its crest and tossed her helplessly in its vast, churning surge.

As the heavy haze of passion began to subside, Jen became conscious of their sweat-covered bodies meshed as one, the distinct smell of sex -- satisfied, fulfilled sex -- and their harsh breathing bouncing off the tiled walls of the shower stall.

A sense of shared intimacy she'd never before known settled over her, and she knew she could stay here in the arms of these men she loved forever. Rick nuzzled her neck and she, in turn, nipped Sean's throat.

"I hate to be a killjoy," muttered Sean, "but in about ten seconds my legs are going to give out, and we're all going to be resting our butts on cold tile."

Sean's words were like a blast of freezing water, bringing her back to the present in a sharper focus than she was ready for. The magic of their intimacy seemed to melt away, and reality returned with a vengeance.

"Oh, um, right." Rick eased himself out of her and backed away, still gripping her hips.

Sean and Rick both lifted her and settled her on wobbly legs between them. Sean ran his hands up and down her arms while Rick cut a trail up and down her sides as if reassuring themselves she was really there and they had both made love to her. Other than that, no one moved, no one spoke, and if it weren't for the loud gulps of air being sucked in, she would have sworn no one breathed.

She lifted her gaze to Sean's face. His closed eyes and blank expression were in marked contrast to his sweat-glazed body and heaving chest. Turning, she moved and leaned against the shower wall. From this vantage point, she could watch both Sean and Rick. Rick kept his

eyelids lowered and busied himself by turning on the water and soaping up his cock and groin. His flaccid penis lay in a nest of dark hair. His total attention seemed to be centered on his lower body. He lathered his belly, then switched his concentration to his butt. The minty scent of the soap filled the stall, and she was reminded again of other showers there with him.

Sean kept his eyes closed but seemed to be conscious of the splattering water as it deflected off Rick's body and onto the two of them. After what she hoped was a shattering orgasm for him, Sean's penis was no longer engorged either. It hung against his heavy balls, and she had to restrain herself from reaching out to stroke it.

With the excitement of the moment wearing off, she refused to allow any awkwardness to take hold of her two lovers. Her own body hummed with the new knowledge of the heights of pleasure it could attain. But even more, it filled with contentment at the pleasure she could give. Watching Sean and Rick perform their nonchalant yet calculated activities, she knew she had to help her men get past whatever self-conscious barriers they were fighting.

She reached out and grasped each man's hand. Rick's soapy one almost slid from hers, but she held tight. After such spectacular lovemaking, she could not let these wonderful men sink into second thoughts.

Still, they both avoided her eyes. "Look at me, you two. That was really, really nice, so stop second-guessing and just go with the moment." She squeezed their hands, then leaned up and kissed each of them in turn on the cheek. "Thank you." It wasn't much, but she couldn't come up with anything more original to express the happiness she felt at what they had given her.

"So, you liked it?" Rick asked, raising his eyes to hers.

She nodded and squeezed his hand again. "Very, very much."

Rick cast Sean a sidelong glance. Sean caught his look and raised an eyebrow.

“Well, then, honey,” Sean said, nodding his head toward the bedroom. “Why don’t we see what else you like very, very much?”

Epilogue

Three months later

Sean whistled softly to himself as he inserted his key into the outside lock of Jen's -- and now his -- apartment building. That thought always brought a vague sense of pride and contentment. The January wind whipped around him, catching his overcoat and blowing an icy wind against his legs. The smell of an imminent snowstorm hung heavy in the air, and he wondered if he'd be able to find a cab in the morning to take him to his car. God, parking in the city was a pain in the ass, an expensive pain in the ass.

Entering the darkened vestibule, he eased the outer door closed. Then he switched on the overhead light the frugal Mrs. Levitz repeatedly shut off. He wondered, as he had on several occasions, if the woman believed one lonely bulb would save enough money to pay for the lawsuit when one of her tenants broke their neck falling down the stairs in the dark.

Glancing around the tiny vestibule, he smiled and allowed a slight hum of excitement to course through his blood. It never failed to warm him whenever he stepped over the threshold. His entire world had changed since he'd first entered this building. It was as if his

life had been on hold since Jen had left all those years ago, but now he was more alive than he'd ever been. Finding Jen had been the start.

Absently, he wondered if he'd made it home before her. Traffic had been a nightmare even by New York standards. After sitting at a standstill, he'd had to leave one cab and walk a few blocks past an accident before catching another cab. The wind shear as it rampaged down the streets between the buildings could freeze your breath before it hit your lungs. It made you feel like you'd been dropped in Antarctica. No wonder his feet tingled like the early stages of frostbite.

Oh well, he was home now, and if he'd beaten Jen here, he'd have a warm brandy. If she was home, he knew exactly how to warm himself. The thought that she might be upstairs already had his cock hardening and his feet moving, taking the stairs two at a time. He blew out a long breath. God, how he loved her.

He caught himself and slowed his pace, being particularly careful not to make any noise outside Mrs. Levitz's apartment. Jen's assessment of the woman had been on target. Nice old lady, but if you weren't careful, she'd suck you into her apartment and have you rooting for Big Money before you could say, "I'd like to buy a vowel."

Slipping his key into the lock, he pushed the door and stepped inside. The apartment smelled of orange blossoms, a scent that would forever remind him of Jen. He closed the door and inhaled deeply, reveling in the knowledge that this was where he belonged, and that she loved him. He shrugged out of his overcoat and draped it across the back of the couch as he loosened his tie. It had taken him a while, but now her eclectic collection of antique furniture made him feel welcome, made the apartment feel like home.

The room lay in shadows, but a light from the bedroom let him know he wasn't alone. A small muffled sound confirmed it.

Shedding his tie and suit jacket, he began to unbutton his shirt as he strode toward the bedroom door. Hot excitement coursed through his veins at the thought of finding Jen

already in bed, waiting for him. He peeled off his shirt and tossed it on the floor, then came up short at the sight that greeted him in the bedroom.

Jen lay on the tangled royal blue sheets, her dark nipples puckered to hard, turgid points, her plump breasts heaving, her emerald eyes dark with passion. Long, graceful fingers grasped at the sheet as her head flailed back and forth. Sean froze in the doorway, taking in her bent legs spread wide, her flushed skin on the verge of an orgasm...and the blond head of the man holding her butt cheeks as he gorged himself on her pussy.

At the sound of Sean's gasp, the man lifted his head. A slow smile played across his lips.

"You're late," rasped Rick, placing a gentle kiss on Jen's mound. "We waited as long as we could."

Sean nodded and returned the smile. "No problem." He finished stripping off his clothes and bent to kiss Jen's lips. "I'll just have to catch up."

She released the sheet and reached to circle her fingers around his cock, drawing him closer to her mouth. "You know," she whispered, her eyes bright with excitement. "I was hoping you'd say that."

 THE END 

Eileen Ann Brennan

After absconding with her degree in English, Eileen Ann tossed away her mittens and snow scrapers and migrated from New Jersey to Florida where she quickly got sand in her shoes and never looked back. (No matter what anyone says, your butt does look fat in a ski parka.) After successfully climbing the corporate ladder, she decided the rats could keep their race and became a stay at home mom.

She lives with her husband and, occasionally, her son and daughter who are away at school -- or so they say. (They seem to show up for dinner every other night.) When not writing, she is a full-time doorman for her three cats and enjoys reading from her library of over two thousand books.

Eileen Ann would love to spend every minute of every day holed up in front of her computer, writing about sexy heroes, sassy heroines, and scintillating plots but somehow those pesky chores of everyday living (sleeping, dental hygiene, watching the Weather Channel) always seem to get in the way.