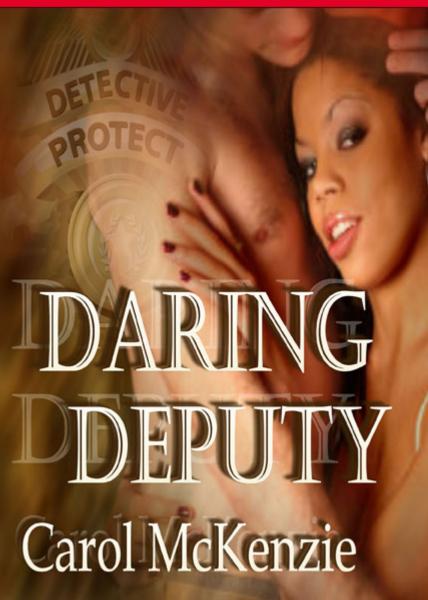
## SIREN PUBLISHING



# **DARING DEPUTY**

## **Carol McKenzie**

**EROTIC ROMANCE** 



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# DEDICATION

Mookie, this one is dedicated to you, honey.

## **DARING DEPUTY**

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### **Chapter 1**

Through the open front door of her house, she gaped at the vase of red roses the delivery man held up for her to take. "These are for a Kenna Smothers."

"I'm Kenna. But uh..." She blinked in disbelief at the note that dangled on a ribbon from a leaf. She tilted her head to read it. *Please forgive me. Let's get back on track. Love Brad.* 

Brad? Hell no. They must go back to where they came from.

Without speaking harshly to the innocent delivery man, she managed to say in a diplomatic tone, "Can you keep them? Maybe just throw them away. I'm allergic to roses. I'm so sorry, but they are so beautifully arranged."

The man nodded, frowned and turned to walk back to the green and white van parked in her driveway.

Oh my God! This is freaking me out! Doesn't this Brad guy ever give up? Two dates and he thinks he can take over my life. Uh-uh, it doesn't work that way with this widow.

From across the road, her neighbor, stopped and peered her way.

She didn't close the door immediately. In fact she enjoyed the neighbor's interest. *I wonder what he thinks about me turning away a couple dozen roses. He's probably over there laughing his tight, sexy* 

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#### buns off.

Kenna didn't know much about her neighbor named Blake McClellan, but she didn't pay him too much attention until a bad guy shot him in the line of duty and the newspapers and television broadcast the story all over the state. She guessed before he was shot, he worked a lot and didn't have time to take care of his house and yard. *It's too bad he limps and has to carry a cane*. She recalled the awe inspiring headlines. They were deputies, partners and best friends. His partner was killed. Blake took a bullet and was able to get a shot off at the bad guy. Fortunately his bullet shot the man dead. *Blake doesn't work anymore. Did the injury permanently disable him? God, I hope not...not a man who looks like him.* 

The van rolled, backed down the driveway and pulled forward, heading toward the cul de sac's exit. Wanting to spy on Blake some more, she began pulling dead twigs from an evergreen bush, taking an occasional peek at him as he spruced up his mail box. His ranch style house as a backdrop, he diligently worked. Someone recently told her that he didn't have a girlfriend. *That's an in-your- face red-flag if I ever saw one*.

When he began daubing the bristles on the steel box she turned her back on him.

*What's wrong with me? I don't need a man.* Why the hell am I looking at him that way.

She screwed the end of the hose to the faucet near the front door and gave all the bushes a good watering. *It's going to be a dry and lonely December, for sure.* 

She reconsidered Blake's appearance, his military haircut, strong build and how it'd feel to have close and warm—skin to skin.

He seems to be a real, upright guy...but he's younger than me, maybe by nine or ten years. What's more, he's Caucasian. Jim, my deceased husband, was white too. God rest his soul. More than a few men, like Jim, preferred African-American women to be their wives and girlfriends. Maybe this guy Blake does too. He'd have to like older women too, if he liked me.

She sighed and coiled the hose on its stand. It's reality check time. That's too much to ask. Frowning, she thought, oh well, it was a sexy thought. Walking toward the door she looked around one last time before grasping the brass knob to go indoors.

I've got to wash the dishes and get ready for Bette and my Friday afternoon game of Scrabble.

She went into the house and closed the door, still feeling Blake's gaze scrutinizing her backside from across the cul de sac.

\* \* \* \*

An hour later, Bette sat across from Kenna at the table. She picked up a wooden square from her rack and put it down. Her diamonds caught sunshine coming in the window and scattered bits of light on the walls of the dining room.

"I enjoy doing this."

Kenna nodded and smiled. "I do too. It's good for the brain."

While looking at the seven letters in front of her, she considered putting down the word 'skunk.' *Would it be best to put down 'hunk' and use the* H *that is on the board?* 

A devilish grin spread on Bette's lips as she beat her to the H space when she put down the word *hurt*.

"Awwww, no. You took that *H*. I was going to put down the word 'hunk.'"

"Hunk's not a word, right?"

"Yes, it is. As in the *hunk* lives across the cul de sac."

Bette's voice took on a higher, odder tone. "Just kidding. I'm a retired teacher, remember?"

They laughed uproariously.

Bette added, "It can mean gob, wad or block...as in a block of cheese."

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"It also means a well-developed man." Kenna patted the tablecloth with her fingers, still smiling.

"Oh yeah. It looks like that's what we've got across the cul de sac, eh?" Bette motioned toward the McClellan residence before she started adding up her score. "*Stud*'s a word too."

However, Kenna's eyes didn't return to the tray of letters. She caught sight of him through the lacey curtains again. *Now he is cleaning out his garage. He looks like the type of man who could soothe my tattered nerves. My needs have been neglected.* 

*Chemistry between a man and a woman happens all the time. Am I feeling it now?* 

A half hour passed and Kenna successfully pushed all thoughts about the neighbor man out of her mind so she could win the game of Scrabble with Bette. The score was still close, with no clear winner.

Looking down, Bette blew at her salt and pepper bangs. "I need to get my hair cut before we go to Dallas, tomorrow."

"I should pack a few things. What are you going to shop for?"

"Oh, Christmas gifts for my nieces, I guess. Things are kind of tight this year for me with the recession and all so I won't be spending much."

"Me either. I just thought it'd be nice to get away from Tyler for a while. To get away from home, I guess."

"Call me nosey, but earlier I saw a floral van stop in your driveway. Did he get the wrong address? I saw the delivery man carrying the flowers back to the van."

"He had the right address." It seemed like good therapy to confide her personal matters with Bette. In fact, she trusted her like a sister. They could talk about anything, practically. "Well, Brad sent them and I refused them. As you know, I'm more allergic to them than I've ever been. Besides...he and I, well, it didn't go well. I doubt I'll date him again."

An arched brow rose. After a pause she said, "Oh really? I hadn't talked to you about him since you went out to eat. I was wondering

how things went." Her brows then drew together and her gaze narrowed on Kenna's face.

"Not good. I've heard some not-so-good rumors about his credibility, if you know what I mean. Besides, there were no feelings there between us."

Bette shrugged and put a word on the board when it was her turn. "At least you gave it a try." She drew two letters from the pile.

"Yeah." Kenna frowned as she gazed at four *I*'s that occupied her tray. "There was something else about him. I don't know—I just don't trust him." She shook her shoulders and pursed her lips at the unpleasant thought of continuing a relationship with him.

"That's too bad. I hate to hear it."

"Want some more coffee?" Kenna asked, pointing a manicured fingernail toward her mug.

"One cup is plenty for me. Caffeine keeps me up after bedtime and I want to be bright eyed and bushy-tailed for our drive to Dallas." After a pause she added, "Uh, not to change the subject, but rain is coming, the weatherman said last night. I'd better get the windshield wipers fixed."

"It's just a dreary ol' December this year. I miss Jim, God knows. He could make Christmas seem so special for me. I just wish I could find someone who could fill the black hole in my life that he left. Know what I mean?" Kenna put down the word zoo on a trip word square and hooted with joy, narrowly escaping an unwanted flood of tears. *When am I going to get over his passing?* 

"You're going to win this game for sure." After Bette wrote her score down, she brought a hand to her mouth and whispered, "I know what would make life a lot brighter and it's not just a good dose of sunshine. It's the same with me. We need a man. A good man. Since Jack died I've wanted someone to fill his shoes, too. So I guess we're having the same problem."

"We'll just have to see what our future brings then."

"Yeah, you're right."

### Chapter 2

Fifteen minutes early, Blake stepped down the shiny hallway and made a right. He stood in front of the outpatient desk. The hospital smelled of antiseptic. The halls shined. A woman who sat behind a glass window penned a few words on a paper. Soon he checked in five minutes early for his appointment with a woman who wore a name tag that read Miss Hersch. The auburn-haired receptionist said, "Please have a seat," and returned her attention to her work.

Blake said, "Thank you," but he doubted that she heard because she didn't look up.

During the next half hour, Miss Hersch led five patients to an examination room while he read three articles from two *Better Homes and Gardens* magazines. With all the patience he could muster, he waited to see a bone specialist.

Miss Hersch stood up for maybe the seventh or eighth time since he'd arrived, Blake looked her way hoping she would call his name.

"Blake McClellan?" she asked, much to his relief. She picked up a clipboard and touched the first page with an extended index finger.

"Right here," he said and signaled his presence by raising his hand.

"This way, please, Blake."

God, he disliked hospitals and doctor offices. "Yes, Ma'am."

"Sorry you had to wait."

"That's all right." He put a magazine back on the rack and joined her at the door.

"Doctor Bronson won't be the one who'll see you today." She pointed down the corridor. "Room two, on the right, please. Doctor Jagger is his name. A new one here at the V.A."

"All right. Thanks." Knowing Miss Hersch was busy, he didn't ask questions. The rubber end of his cane tapped the tiled floor as he walked down the corridor. He went into the clean-smelling doctor's examination room and sat on a cushioned chair.

A nurse leaned in, grasped the door knob and pulled the metal door closed, leaving him to wonder what they'd do to him that day.

A few minutes later, a man dressed in a white uniform shirt entered and closed the door behind him. He was a light, almost beigeskinned man who had white hair. Peering over gold-rimmed spectacles, the man said, "I'm Doctor Jagger." He held out a spread hand and they shook. "Doctor Bronson is no longer here." He rolled a cushioned stool to a metal desk. On the desk's surface, a computer screen switched images and various Post-It notes. A small calendar dotted a nearby bulletin board. Blake stared straight ahead at the table which held foot stirrups.

"I'll be taking care of you from here on in."

"That's great. Did he quit? The other doctor, I mean?"

"He retired." Doctor Jagger settled before the computer screen that displayed an image of the hospital's entrance. He moved the mouse and the screensaver disappeared. Holding his chin with one hand, he pecked the keys and began accessing Blake's record with the other.

"That's good, if he was ready."

"I believe he was. The last I heard he goes to the country club almost every day, enjoying his free time."

A bout of nervousness threatened, so Blake brushed it off with a chuckle. He looked around, hoping he wouldn't be permanently released from the department. Leaning forward, he twirled the walking stick between his jean-clad lower legs and Nike tennis shoes.

A couple of dozen mouse clicks and mumbled readings later, Dr. Jagger stopped and glanced his way. "So how does it feel? Your leg, I mean."

"Some days, it hurts like hell. But, not like it used to." He

remembered sitting up agonizing over sharp pains in his lower leg, just below the knee.

"A gunshot wound."

"Right."

"And you're a cop?"

"Yep. Actually, I'm a Deputy for Smith County. On medical leave."

Doctor Jagger peered back at the computer monitor and raised his forefinger. "I think I read about it. It happened a year ago."

"Uh-huh."

"Your partner died. But was it you who shot the bad guy?"

"Yeah. I got him." Blake tensed, remembering how he'd fired the bullet that brought the crazed killer down. Grief hovered in the back of his mind, a lump formed in his throat and just speaking about it proved difficult.

The doctor noticed Blake's distress over the issue. *My grief shows, damn it.* "Oh, I'm sorry. Didn't mean to bring up bad memories. But you're a hero."

"Not really. And don't worry about mentioning it. I've had to talk a lot about it over the last few weeks."

Blake swallowed hard. "I-I just wish John could have survived."

"You did your best. It's called survivor's guilt. Don't let it get you down."

An image of his partner's friendly face flashed in the back of his mind. He remembered their long conversations and jokes. "John was not only a damned good cop, and my best buddy."

"I saw his photograph on the news." The doctor's gaze left the computer screen again. "Are you taking the Vicodin that was prescribed?" His eyes returned to the screen and he tapped the enter key several times.

"No."

He pecked a few keys on the keyboard. "Okay." He sniffed; his eyes returned. "Why not?"

"I don't want to get addicted."

"If you take it like it's prescribed, you should be fine."

"I'll think about it." The pain would have to be very bad, if I took

it.

"What branch of the military were you in?"

With deep pride, he stated, "Marines. Special Forces. It's classified."

"A tough damned bunch."

"Yep. A good hearted bunch, though."

"I'll bet it scared your wife."

"I'm not married." Someday I do want one special woman, like Kenna across the cul de sac.

"I see." The doctor rose from the stool and gazed down at Blake over the rims of his glasses. "Okay. I'm going to send you down to radiology and have another x-ray taken. Hopefully, the shattered bone is healing nicely. The surgery went well, I see. If it's as I suspect, then I'll have you start with physical therapy next week. You'll come maybe three times a week. How're you getting along with a cane?"

"It's a far cry from the wheelchair," he said, wanting to sound positive. "At least I'm getting around now."

"That's good." The doctor shook his hand." It's guys like you who protect us. Thanks."

He cursed and tamped down the unwanted emotion threatened to unleash.

The doctor patted his shoulder. "Any questions before you leave?" "Will I be able to go back to work?"

"I don't think you'll ever go back to sprinting around a track like an eighteen-year-old track star, but I think we'll be able to get rid of the cane. With physical therapy and lots of work, I believe we'll get you back into shape. Within the next couple, maybe three months, light duty, hopefully. The therapy will do wonders."

Blake smiled. *That sure the hell is music to my ears. I absolutely don't want to return to a damned desk job.* He sighed long and loudly.

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If I have to, then I have to. "Great."

"Do you know where radiology is?"

"Yes, sir. Thanks." They shook hands again and Blake limped out of the examination room and down the hallway.

"No, I want to thank you, deputy." A few seconds later, Blake heard the doctor tell a nurse, "The man's a hero."

### Chapter 3

Rain greeted Bette and Kenna once they left their hotel. A baggage boy helped them load their luggage and sacks into the back of Bette's Blazer.

Bette began driving away from Dallas via the interstate, en route to Tyler. For a while, they discussed the art they saw in the hotel's lobby.

"This weather's crazy."

"Is the whole state of Texas raining, I wonder?"

"I believe so." Kenna brought a travel brochure from her purse and slipped it into the side pocket of her carry-on bag, vowing to throw it away when she got home.

"I'm so glad I took this year off," Bette said, as she merged into traffic a half mile from the hotel. "I needed that trip. With Jack's death and all, I was down. Thanks for putting up with me."

"I guess I needed to get away too." It touched Kenna's heart that Bette apologized for her kookiness.

They neared the University of Texas campus. Bette sniffed and caught Kenna's attention by saying, "I think he's nice. Looks good too."

The conversation about the deputy had died a long time ago. Kenna blinked and swiveled her head and turned her gaze out the gray, rain-dotted windshield. *Leave it to Bette to bring him up. She's just trying to make me laugh and she's getting the job done.* Kenna smiled then said, "What made you bring him up? We weren't even discussing him."

"It was quiet. I thought I'd liven things up."

"You certainly did."

"So? At least I got a rise out of you."

"Jeez, did you ever!" she exclaimed, the moment they turned south and were within six miles of their cul de sac. Bushes and trees undulated in the wind, like holy rollers on Sunday.

Bette pressed the brake pedal and sighed while waiting for the truck ahead to move. Two men hopped down, grasped garbage cans and shook the contents into the bed of a truck. They tossed the cans onto the yard and hopped onto the rear.

"Why can't they just set them down in place where they were?" she asked in her infamously bitchy and unique way.

Kenna shrugged. "I dunno. They like 'em to roll out in the street on windy days, I guess."

"They enjoy pissing off the homeowners," she said, and stepped on the accelerator when the truck moved forward. "It's like their revenge for stinky garbage."

A minute later, as they traveled down a highway, rain vigorously beaded on the windshield, and Bette turned the windshield wipers and defrost on and up a notch. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bitch."

"It's all right. No biggie. You always get so close to the truth."

"There's a neighborhood cocktail party next Friday night. Did you hear about it?"

"Yeah."

"I guess everyone's going to get together and welcome the new people in the cul de sac."

"Friday night, eh?" asked Kenna.

"Are you going?"

"I may."

A few feet beyond the rustic sign that read Hickory Creek Subdivision, Bette hung a right and drove through a tree-ridden neighborhood. Seven ranch-style houses lined the road. Bette pulled the Blazer into Kenna's driveway and up to within a foot of the twodoor garage of the beige three-bedroom ranch-style home. Bette shut off the engine, pressed a button under the dash and the back window rose. They stepped out into the icy rain and closed the doors behind them. After walking to the back of the vehicle, Bette opened the door below the glass so that Kenna could get her luggage out and carry it to the front door. She raised a hand and started up the walk.

"Bye. Thanks, Bette."

"See you tomorrow. I guess we can start walking off some of the Dallas barbeque style cuisine?"

"Guess so. Give me a call before you go. We may have to take umbrellas."

"God, I hope not. Had a good time!"

"Me too."

"Bye."

\* \* \* \*

A little before six that evening, in the warmth of her threebedroom home, Kenna padded across the soft carpeting of her living room. She carried an armful of laundry that she'd accumulated during her trip. In the utility room, she stood in front of her washing machine and stuffed the slacks and shirts into the washer, turned the knob and poured a cap full of Tide into the warm, gushing stream, hoping the washer wouldn't use up all the hot water. The clean scent filled her nostrils.

Thinking she'd finish the gigantic wash the next day, she padded a few feet into the bathroom and adjusted the knobs so that medium-hot bath water filled the tub. From the shelf she lifted a bottle of bath oil, flipped open the cap and squirted it into the swirling water until bubbles rose. Leaning in front of the sink, she opened the door below, located and brought out some aromatic candles that a visiting cousin had given her for her birthday three years earlier. Once she lit them and scattered them about the room, she turned on some meditation music.

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#### Maybe all this will get rid of this nagging feeling I have.

With the lights dimmed, she undressed and touched her toe to the water to test the temperature. She stepped in and slid down into the luxurious water until it rose to her neck. She put ear phones in her ears and closed her eyes enjoying the light music. Her body relaxed, and her weariness soothed.

Her eyes opened. *Did I hear ringing?* She sat up a little, her upper body rose from the sudsy water. In her curiosity, she frowned. "Surely it isn't the phone," she muttered and slid back down in the healing, warm liquid. "I'm not getting out for anyone." The machine will get it. She lay back and tried to push the negativity and disappointment of her life out of her mind. They just keep returning.

Most people would say, "Just what problems could a widow woman who had a nice bank account and a paid for house have?"

Actually, she didn't consider herself as having "problems" per se. Kenna had vivid recollections. Loving memories of her life with her husband surfaced and resurfaced. She recalled the best of her good times with him and how heartbreaking it had been to watch his gradual decline after he'd been diagnosed with cancer of the brain. She ached, remembering the head pain he suffered. After the cancer had spread, his chiseled appearance deteriorated until his cheeks appeared caved in.

She raised her hands and let water drip off her fingers onto her throat. The rivulets slid down her heavy breasts and taut nipples as she remembered the sultry night he shaved her pussy. The whole time he had dragged the razor across her skin, he touched her clitoris. Upon completion, her body ached for him. She was ready for him to take her right then and there.

How long has it been since I've been kissed by a good man like Jim? How good it'd feel to have a man suckle my nipples. She ran the flats of her hands down her curves. According to the mirror in her bedroom, she still looked sexy without clothes. Her own body felt so slick when she poured scented bath oil in her water. She closed her eyes to the ivory bathroom with its gold chrome accessories and washed herself, enjoying the feel of her arms, thighs and belly. While washing herself below, she slipped three fingers inside. *It feels so good. Mm-hmmm.* 

She reached for her ducky stimulator and attached it to her labia. Reaching, she pulled the waterproof, hot pink vibrator from under a stack of wash cloths. When she inserted the buzzing wonder, it worked with the ducky toy to bring her strong pangs of arousal. They quivered her clitoris until her breath caught and she cried out as if in agonizing pain. So much she wanted her lover Jim to be with her that very moment. Arousal racked her body until she wanted, no, she needed more. Everything around her turned fuzzy and her breathing rate increased as she began arching to the source of her pleasure.

Her pussy spasmed and squeezed the thick length that repeatedly intruded and abandoned her. *I love this so much. How would it feel to have a man fucking me in the ass and the vibrator doing its naughty work to my pussy?* Kenna fantasized that she felt her husband's thrusts. He bit her nipples, increasing her pleasure. His clever tongue lashed the delicate tissue with the tip, so hot and flicking.

"Mm, baby, do it. Oh yeah."

She reached down with her other hand, removed the ducky from her labia and fingered herself, toying with the swollen lips while she stroked herself with the wondrous wand. The vinyl toy worked utter magic under water. The merciless assault continued. She savored the feel of her own aroused flesh. "Yessses."

Whimpering, she envisioned her lewd actions, fucking herself for pleasure. Need hammered and blood coursed through her veins. Mindlessly, as the flutes twittered in her ears, she drew the magic wand in and out letting lust drive her actions. *I'm going to come!* 

Dizzy with desire, she licked her lips and moaned in blissful turmoil. Impaled, she envisioned straddling his accommodating loins, pushing his hardened rod into her lubricated pussy. Still pretending Jim made love to her, she felt her boobs bounce and dance. Jim

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appeared in her mind. He cupped her breasts while she bounced on his lower abdomen like a cowgirl riding a bronco. She rode him hard. *Such obscene behavior. But I need it. Oh yeah. I need to come!* 

Tremors and sensation promised to unleash like a volcano filled with lava. Faster, she rode him, her pussy spasmed and her breath rasped from her lungs.

Then Brad, another face from her past, appeared. His hair was dark blond and his eyes were dark hazel. He was just a figment of her imagination but he threatened to break her concentration. *Why is he here?* Suddenly, her need turned cold. Her lust fell flat and couldn't be revived. *Why does his memory pop up? To torment me?* She stopped bouncing. Masturbation didn't help. Unsatisfied, she imagined his cruel laughter. *He ruined my fantasy.* 

A frustrated sigh left her lips. She washed the vibrator with hot soapy water at the sink a few minutes later, vowing to put it back on its base later. *How can I stop this man invading my privacy?* 

At one time, when he would near, her body ached in need for what he could do. She willingly took him into her bed and body. Now, she cursed with all the vehemence of a scorned demon all lingering thoughts of him. Why did he continue invading her thoughts and life?

Brad, a prescription drug salesman, strayed with other women when they went out together. The man had several intimate relationships with women from several neighboring towns all going on at the same time. It's such a small world, she thought wryly as she put the ducky and vibrator away. A friend of a friend of a friend phoned her one day with the news. He had wined, dined, and sweet talked financially stable black women, according to the source. *The nervy con man takes their gifts and money. He even lives off of them. Then, one day he leaves. Some of the duped women sunk into the depths of depression. A real heart breaker. It'll be a frigid day in Hell before Brad steps foot on my property again.* 

After returning to the tub and soaking for fifteen minutes, Kenna put her sex toys away, stood up and drained the tub. Holding a fluffy towel that smelled of fabric softener she stepped out onto a knobby rug. She swabbed her body. With the towel wrapped around her midsection, her breasts bare, she padded barefoot to the bedroom closet, opened the door and slipped on a floral gown and terry robe. At her waist she tied the belt. Sitting on the edge of the bed she shoved her feet into Isotoner slip-ons. She'd put panties on later. Kenna went into the office, searched the bookcases for an erotic romance novel to read and went to the bedroom.

The phone rang. She glanced at the clock radio on the dresser that read 8:45 P.M. in neon letters.

*Who is calling?* On her side, she plopped onto the tufted bedspread, reached over the nightstand and plucked the handset off the base. She brought it to her ear. "Hello?" she asked, looking at the lamp nearby.

"Sorry to bother you. It's late, I know," a deep, familiar voice said. An awkward, long pause followed. "But, well, anyway, I saw that your lights were still on and uh, well, I need to talk to you. If it's too late I can—"

Twirling a wet lock of hair around her index finger, she sat a little up and a little straighter and said, "No. I'm still up."

"Someone said you just returned from Dallas."

"Yes, I did."

"I hope you had a good time."

"I did." *I hope it's Blake.* "We saw the sights, shopped and ate at nice restaurants." Her heart about skipped a beat when she realized her neighbor sat on the other end of the line. She gazed at the ceiling, flattered that he called. He heart thumped hard in her chest.

"This is Blake, from across the street. If it's a bad time to call I'll—"

"Oh, it's fine."

"From across the street."

"I thought it was. Hi, Blake."

## **Chapter 4**

To get more comfortable, Kenna rested the phone's handset on her right ear. "Did you call a few minutes ago?" *It seems so romantic to get a call from him.* 

"Yes. It didn't answer after the fifth ring, so I called again. I don't mean to bother you. You're probably busy getting unpacked."

"No, not at all." She shifted and turned on her back, leaving one hand draped over her forehead. After switching the phone to her other ear, she said, "I was in the tub, but I'm finished." She vowed to make her voice sound cheery for him. "I'm doing some wash and relaxing a little."

A pause stalled, it seemed forever, on the line. *Are we disconnected?* She considered saying something to him, but stopped short of it. A newscaster on Fox News Channel read sports results in his background.

"I was wondering something..." He cleared his throat.

She raised her line of vision toward the living room, wanting to see his face. "Yes?" She closed her eyes and imagined his sexy gaze and muscular body.

"Oh, do you know a guy named Brad?"

A moan threatened to unleash, but she somehow managed to control it. "Actually, yes, I do."

"He kept going over to your house. He knocked on your door, two, maybe three times a night. An odd character. Maybe it's none of my business, but I walked over and told him that you were gone. That I didn't know how long you'd be gone. I was polite."

"Thanks. Yeah, I do know him," she said with a sigh, unable to

stop the disdain from flattening the tone of her voice. She remembered the disastrous date she had spent with him. Then, when he wasn't forthcoming with his background, she decided against seeing him again. The gossip her friend told her about him cinched the break-up. Besides, some of his ideas seemed weird.

In a quiet voice Blake asked, "He's bad, eh?"

She felt a small smile twitch at the corner of her lips during the resulting pause. "It's probably just me."

The awkward patches of silence lingered too long. It definitely wasn't a simple business call among neighbors. A ripple of applause sounded in his background; a commercial played. Kenna lazily propped herself up on a soft pillow. "I dated him once to be exact." The idea of going out with Blake, thinking of him as a love interest, levitated in the back of her mind. "But it didn't work out. I don't see him anymore. He keeps coming by and I keep sending him on his way. It's no biggie. He has this type of personality that changes. At first he seems nice...then he turns into an ogre."

"He isn't giving up on you, I take it."

"No."

"It must be difficult, being widowed at your age."

"At my age?" She suddenly felt like an antique.

"I didn't mean—"

She shrugged. *Why am I so touchy?* "It's okay. How old do you think I am?"

"Thirty-five?" he asked, with a rare politeness she hadn't encountered with other men in her past.

"I wish." She laughed. He is so polite. "Good grief, no."

"How old are you, then, if you don't mind me asking?"

Her heart fluttered like a field of butterflies. "Forty."

"Well, I'm thirty."

Why is he telling me? Is he interested? Oh dear God! Her heart palpitated at the prospects of it. "You're younger than I am, you know."

"In some ways...not all though." He said in a tone of innuendo. He laughed and added, "I like older women, like you. I like black women too, who are like you. And basically, I wanted to those things out of the way early."

She grinned. "Hmmmm."

"So are you going to the welcome party?"

"For the new neighbors, you mean?"

"Yeah, the Harrises."

"I'm thinking about it." She ran a flattened hand down her thigh.

"Do you have a date for it?"

"Uh, no."

"I'll see you there, then."

"Okay."

"Have a good night."

"I will."

\* \* \* \*

Ever since her husband passed on, Kenna experienced severe apprehension before going to functions that involved dancing, drinking and mingling with single or divorced men. In the past, she entertained the idea of dating Blake. But regarding him, a dark phobia kept its grip on her. On occasion, she still felt a connection to Jim, though he was long gone.

Kenna bathed, applied make-up and whirled her hair to the top of her head in a haphazard do, then clamped it with a rhinestone comb.

Columbus crossed the ocean in a damned rickety boat, so I can go to the cocktail party two doors down and talk to the hunk who lives across the street without sounding like a blathering idiot. After all, I am a widow.

The brown, slinky dress she exhumed from the depths of her closet definitely showed curves and cleavage. That was why she stuffed it so far back. It'd be hard to get to. Trembling, she slipped into it and zipped the back up. She put on a pair of hosiery and shoved her feet into a pair of matching stilettos. She adorned her right ankle with a bracelet. After she brought her ecru coat and scarf from the coat closet, she slipped them on a minute before it was time to leave for the neighborhood welcoming party. With one last glance around the entry hall, she picked up her clutch bag and left, taking time to lock up before she left.

She began walking toward the Hindman's house where the party for the new neighbors, the Harrises, started. The icy air nipped at her cheeks, legs, and hands until she wished she'd worn a knit cap and gloves, even though it didn't match her outfit. Her heels clicked on the sidewalk as she passed Bette's darkened house. *Bette must already be there*. Dogs barked near and far. Frost formed on the grass and her breath rose in ballooning puffs. She smelled exhaust fumes from an idling, junky car parked between houses. *I've never seen it in the cul de sac before. It looks like one of Brad's cars. It surely isn't him.* 

More darkened, parked cars lined the road outside the residence. She stepped up the walk and stopped under the porch light. Holding her wrist up, she read the time. At five minutes after seven, she pressed the lighted doorbell button, put on her prettiest expression and waited while raucous laughter and loud music sounded inside.

The door opened. Bruce Cleveland, an elderly neighbor across the road, appeared and gazed her way. Making her feel welcome, he smiled. The double-jowled man looked odd wearing a suit and tie. She'd always seen him working out on his lawn either wearing bulky knee shorts or faded, torn jeans. His silver hair was combed to one side, in a Donald Trump hairstyle. She bit her lip to keep from bursting out in laughter.

"Hey, hi, Kenna. My wife's by the fireplace. Tell her to take your coat. I'm on my way to get a beer. Make yourself at home. Everyone else is. They're dancing downstairs."

"Thanks, Bruce." Holding her clutch bag to her chest, she stepped farther inside a lighted front entry room and shut the door. Delicious scents of food and scented candles filled the air. People she didn't know stood in the open living room area. Upon seeing three vases of red roses, fearing she'd get the sniffles, she ambled toward the adjacent rooms. The wall paint made the room seem quiet and calm, unlike the tense feelings that pulled and churned in the pit of her stomach. *I'm not used to going out to social get-togethers alone*.

A gaggle of women bid her a warm "Hello." They smiled and chattered incessantly about politics. More at ease, she returned the greetings with a ready smile and a few friendly words. Most people are neighbors, she surmised. "Hey, Kenna. I saw that was you and brought you a glass of wine. That is what you want, right?"

"Aw. Thanks, Bette." She's so thoughtful.

Breathless huffs accompanied her words. "I've got a cute contractor cornered. Oh my God, girl. He's John Coombs. He's nice. And he owns a ranch."

Kenna giggled and looked at the handsome cowboy.

"Holy crap, Kenna. We're in a deep discussion about astrology of all things. So you'll have to excuse me. I didn't know I knew that much about it." Bette waved back to the silver-haired, tall gentlemen who wore a western suit and hat.

"I'm tempted to smoke."

"Lord God, no. You've not done that now for how long?"

"Five years." Kenna hoped her words and facial expressions didn't sound and look like doom and gloom. Not at a party. "But I won't."

"That's good. Don't you dare do it."

She cleared her throat. "All right."

"Good. I'm going to go back to the cowboy. Tootles." She wriggled her fingers and rejoined the cowboy.

Kenna took a calming breath and began mingling. A few conversations and hand-squeezings later, Kenna realized that she didn't yearn for her husband to accompany her.

An hour after Bette scuttled across the room, Kenna approached her. Bette now stood alone near the entry way, frowning. "So where's your cornered, contractor cowboy?" Kenna asked her best friend. "John? Is that his name?"

"Yeah." Bette rolled her eyes. "He had to leave. He nicely said that he had another party to attend. Oh well," she said, and gave a minute shrug.

"I'm sorry," Kenna said then leaned down and hugged Bette.

"It's okay. I don't want to talk about him anymore."

Kenna and Bette resumed their ongoing chat about their trip. Bette looked good in her new bright scarlet dress with a flared skirt. Soon Kenna gave her personal welcome the new couple to the neighborhood, Mary and Chuck Harris. Bette left her side, heading for the living room.

Kenna took a sip of wine, walked to the railing and peered downstairs at the rec room. Mark Hindman turned the music up and dimmed the lights. Three couples danced in the center of the room to piped-in music.

Kenna left the railing and wandered around mingling with friends and acquaintances. Fifteen minutes later, in the kitchen, three men side-stepped toward a sliding glass door. One of them had an unlit cigarette hanging off his lip. "I'm going to have a smoke," he told his wife and smooched her on the lips.

After the small herd of married men passed by, Kenna saw Blake. Her whole body stiffened. For a second or two, her line of vision held on his profile while she prepared herself, especially her heart, to talk to him. Blake looked good. Her breath caught upon seeing the obvious interest glittering in his eyes.

Bette approached again. "Want a refill on the wine? I'm going down to the bar. No sense of both of us breaking our heels in this thick carpeting."

"Sure. Thanks." She handed Bette her plastic glass.

"What're you looking at?"

"Him. Blake. To my right." Kenna motioned with her eyes and Bette took a sneak peek and turned back. "Oh my God."

#### Daring Deputy

He stood tall and proud while holding a cane in one hand. He chatted with Hindman's eldest son. Blake's thick fingers curled around a beer can.

"He's so rugged looking."

"Mm-hmm. He's beautiful."

Bette sighed and held her glass up. "I'm going to the bar for a refill. Maybe I'll find a quiet corner and have a good cry."

Blake would soon join her. Not knowing why, she sensed it.

Bette returned and handed Kenna a glass of Rhine. "I'll be in there. That hunk Blake has really caught your eye, hasn't he?"

A pause followed. "I'm looking but not touching. Not yet. There are no promises, of course." She stifled a smile.

"Of course." With a jerk of her head signaling she would migrate toward the dining room, Bette said "I want to talk to Lorene Jamison our neighbor who moved. She's here visiting her mother for the week. You go ahead and exchange glances with Blake." She gave an exaggerated wink, cackled like the Wicked Witch of the West and left the kitchen musically saying, "Oh God, I love seeing you interested in our neighbor."

A short, gregarious woman appeared and blocked her view. She offered an open hand for a shake and saying, "I'm Julie Cruise, psychic." For the better part of five minutes, Kenna and Julie discussed the neighborhood covenants and the convenience of shopping at the nearby mall at Fourth and Grand. "I see in your future danger with a past acquaintance. You must be careful in all your endeavors in the very near future."

Kenna didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "Oh, thanks for telling me. I've never met a psychic in my entire life."

The auburn-haired sixty-ish woman handed her a business card. "Here you go. If you'd ever like a thorough reading, let me know."

The meeting left Kenna baffled. She didn't know if she believed in such readings, or not. *How odd. Danger? Me? How nutty.* They parted and stepped in opposite directions. A third plastic glass of wine

and two chats with women later, when she'd been at the party for a little over an hour, Blake stepped up to her.

"How're you doing?" he asked in a masculine, Texas drawl that made her world stop spinning on its axis. "I thought you'd never break free so I could come over and say hi."

"It's a lively party, isn't it?"

"It's great."

She stepped aside to avoid a four to five foot green, tropical plant. "I can't believe it. I just talked to a psychic."

"I talked to her too. She said that I was going to fall head over heels for someone soon."

"Oh really?"

"Yeah." His navy gaze lazed down her curves, causing shivers to shoot throughout her body. Her knees weakened. "I'm glad you came. For a minute there I thought it wouldn't happen."

She blinked in her nervousness, looked about the room at the mingling group and back into his eyes. "I was a little late. I don't know why I do that...arrive late." Feeling like a girl in middle school, she paused, bit her lip and looked away.

"I'm always early."

"You are?"

"Yep." He took a sip of beer, gazed about the room. When his line of vision returned he said, "I found out some good news the other day."

"Oh really? Tell me."

He raised his hand and cane. "I won't have to carry this thing around much longer."

"Congratulations."

"Thanks."

"I heard about the shooting on the news. You're a brave man, Blake."

"It's nothing." He shook his head and raised the beer can to his taut lips. "I was just doing my duty."

#### Daring Deputy

"It was awesome what you did. I told everyone I knew that you lived across the cul de sac. I'm glad your leg is healing."

Their breezy banter took a more personal turn, much to her delight.

"What do you do when you're at home?"

She touched her chest at the stirring invasion of privacy. "You mean in my spare time?"

He took a swallow and leveled his gaze on her face. "Yeah."

She raised her glass to her lips but brought it down, fearing he'd spot the effects he had on her. Her shaky hands would give her nervousness away. She shrugged. "I paint pictures and sell them. I write a little. Poetry."

"Really? I didn't know that. What do you paint, Kenna?"

"Oils mostly. Landscapes all year round. But on-scene in warm weather."

"I like to do art, too. Drawing and painting."

"You do? Really?"

"Yeah. It's been years since I did it, though."

"That's great. I take classes."

"And in cold weather you write?" The smooth cadence of his voice flowed like a calm river in a sexy sort of way.

"How did you know?"

"Just a guess."

An unplanned smile curved her lips. "I write mysteries and romance, but mostly poetry."

"About what?"

"Life and love."

He leaned against the counter on an elbow. His body language, open arms showed that he wanted to know more about her. "Interesting." The skin between his brows rumpled. "How long have we known each other?"

"Three, no, four years, right? Well almost, I guess."

"Do you have a special someone waiting in the sidelines?" he

asked.

"I'm weighing my options." Her shoulders shook when she laughed. "Just kidding. Right now, no. I'm a lone widow. Oh. And I laugh at my own jokes."

"It's about time we went to dinner or maybe take in a movie. What do you say?"

"That sounds fun." The give and take caused a state of mild vexation to stir up obscene feelings in dark places. *Much more of this and I swear I'll melt right into the floor*.

When someone called Blake's name, greeting him, he turned to speak to them but didn't turn all the way away from her. As he talked, she admired his short military cut and neat winter dress suit that most assuredly hid a stone hard body that could deliver a sensual session of lovemaking to a needy woman. *It's too soon to be thinking such thoughts*.

He ended his conversation, and turned his attention to her. Motioning toward the stairs with his head, he eyed her. A million dollar smile curved his lips. It had a definite effect on her heart rate. He did it with rare verve that served to arouse her interest more.

"Care to dance?" He made a motion toward the stairs and dropped his empty can into a waste bin. His warm, rough hand enveloped hers.

She considered the implications of slow dancing in the dark recreation room below with the remarkably, sexy lawman who was at least decade or so younger than herself. Words stalled in her throat and she felt foolish.

He laughed. "Don't worry. I won't stab you with this." He pointed toward the cane. "I'll put it down."

"Ohh..." She ached to accept. In fact, her body yearned for it. "All right." She put her empty glass down on the counter. "Carry the cane if you want."

He murmured, his tone joking, "When I dance with you..." He raised his hands and wriggled his fingers. "...I want to use both hands."

Unable to stop herself, she laughed hard. "Okay."

"Kenna?" he asked and put his fingertips on her waist, causing tingles to shoot in all directions inside her body.

"Yes?" Her heart about beat out of her chest when he said her name.

"Is everything all right?"

Why did he ask that? "Does something show on my face that I don't know about?" she asked, then looked down and touched her cheek. Out the corner of her eye she saw Bette peering her way. "Everything's fine. Well, it's just that I've not been to a party since before Jim died." Blake's nearness wreaked havoc. Her eyes rose and met his as she struggled with her attraction that she failed miserably to keep corralled.

"Haven't you dated?"

"Well, yes. But it wasn't serious. How about you?"

He shrugged and took her arm, leading the way. "I've dated. I liked the women, but I didn't find the right one."

\* \* \* \*

A pair of dancers two-stepped to romantic, pop music. Blake propped his cane against a stool. In one pull, he brought her to his hard body and enveloped her in his strong arms...the feelings of safety and security engulfed her psyche. *This is what I crave*. His lemony, masculine aftershave smelled luscious. He could easily tempt her, if she allowed it.

The words of the song, romantic and mesmerizing, propelled them like sailboats over a raven colored lake and lingered in her mind. At the far end of the rectangular room, a lone bartender poured a cerulean blue drink into a tall, plastic glass, propped an orange slice on the lip and handed it to a gentlemen who accepted it. He stepped up the stairs and disappeared. Another couple who seemed absorbed in each other, slow-stepped to the writhing, undulating, Spanish beat. Blake's flattened hands pressed against Kenna's brown dress. Tingles shot over her skin and an invisible force arced between them. Love at first sight exists. Her soul shuddered while enduring his fascination and scrutiny. She closed her eyes. The song concluded and everyone except Blake and Kenna left the rec room. The party neared an end but she didn't want her time with Blake to end.

Any intelligent, respectable woman would know that it was the time to say goodbye and walk home alone. She inwardly balked. Their closeness healed old wounds. For months, she hadn't felt so good. Aching to nestle into the caring, comfortable cocoon of his strong arms she tilted her head and gazed into his glittering eyes.

Without thought, she rose onto her toes and pressed her parted lips to his. His mouth and tongue tasted of beer. Her heart fluttered. She wanted more of him. He responded with a slight noise in his throat.

His rough fingers stroked the curve of her clothed back as his tongue slid between her lips. She wanted his hands on her back. *How long had it been since a man like Blake pleased me in bed?* His strong, ardent touches, up and down her spine, entranced her. Her attraction for this Caucasian god grew. How many nights would she spend revisiting this moment? She fought hard to restore some semblance of control before she pulled away. The smoldering flame now evolved into a bonfire.

His lips left hers and moved to the rim of her ear. "Would you like me to walk you home? I promise I'll deliver you to your door unscathed."

"Unscathed, eh?" Kenna paused and took a deep, trembling breath before continuing. "I would love you to. First, I'll tell Bette and the others goodbye."

"I'll get your coat. Beige suede, right?"

She blinked in disbelief. "How did you---"

"I've noticed everything about you since you set foot in the house."

### Chapter 5

Blake leaned against the banister near the front door, holding Kenna's coat and his cane while she said goodbye to friends and the neighborhood's newcomers. The vexing, dishy woman had a kind, courageous heart. Long, thick lashes and pouty lips enhanced her warm cinnamon features. He took a long, steadying breath, barely unable to cope with his glee, because she, a woman who evidently knew what she wanted and liked, initiated the kiss.

Her luminous doe brown gaze flickered his way, drawing him out of his reverie.

"I'll be right there," she said with a bright smile, relaying her intentions to step into the next room.

He lifted his brows and said with swift courtesy, "Take your time."

A couple dressed in heavy coats passing by Blake on their way to their car darted a glance at him, coupled with a smile. "Goodnight Blake."

"Goodnight, folks," Blake replied, stepped back and drew his cane in closer to his legs.

He loved Kenna's medium height and weight. In fact, her body was well-shaped and enticing. For that matter, he adored everything about her. An elegant black woman, she had the looks to turn many a man's head. The dress's low neckline revealed the fleshy part of her heavy breasts. *She's a straight shooter and spunky as hell, really.* When describing her he felt he could add such words as "creative" and "imaginative," because she stated that she had written novels and painted landscapes.

The age old question still bugged him. *How long has it been since a man had made proper love to her?* 

\* \* \* \*

When she returned, he held her coat up.

Kenna put her clutch bag on a table and turned her back to him. "Thank you." She slipped her arms into the sleeves. Feeling dreamy, she wrapped her hands around his upper arm and they exited into the February night.

An icy mist coated the cars and lawns. Dark residences of the Hickory Creek Subdivision waited quietly for their owners to return. "Be careful. There may be slick spots."

"Okay." This weather is not made for stiletto heels.

Blake touched the flat of his hand to her back as they descended the steps and walked away from Hindman's porch. He guided her around a frozen puddle.

"Want to go for a cup of coffee?" he asked in a soft tone not moving too fast with her.

She smiled. "Sure. I'd like to go to my house first."

Nearby dogs barked and the engine of a jalopy rumbled to a stop. Its lights darkened in front of her house, a hundred feet ahead. Side by side, they continued down the sidewalk. The stars glittered like iridescent buttons sewn on black velvet. No one got out of the car, but Blake wasn't worried. They walked under a streetlight.

"It looks like you've got a visitor."

She turned her gaze toward the car. A frown shaped her lips. "I don't know who it'd be. Maybe they're waiting to pick someone up from the Hindman's."

"They're at the wrong house."

"I'd say."

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\* \* \* \*

Blake kept an eye on the car, though he'd seen it in the neighborhood before. When they approached another slick spot, he grasped Kenna's arm and guided her around it.

"I didn't know everyone there tonight."

Cold air nipped his ears, so he released her arm for a moment and raised the collar of his leather jacket. "The strangers were probably friends of Hindman's or the new people. What's their names?" he asked, grasping her arm.

"The Harrises."

"That's right."

He took her hand in his, showing he cared.

A silhouetted, male figure rose from the car door the moment they stepped within five feet of the vehicle. The door slammed and a tall male moved their way. Taking Blake off guard, a hard fist flew and connected with Blake's jaw. Pain shot through his face. His hand rose to his jaw and he stumbled backward without falling. "Ah!"

The intruder snatched Kenna's arm. She dropped her clutch bag on the frosty ground and fought his advances.

"Come with me, bitch."

"What the—" She screamed. "Stop it. Brad, no!" She resisted by hitting his arm.

*That man's lost his freakin' mind. The son of a—* 

Brad pulled on her coat sleeve and ordered, "Get in the fuckin' car." He unleashed a deep-throated growl. "You and I are going to have a little chat."

"No, we aren't. I don't know where you're getting this crazy idea."

"You didn't give us a chance."

Just one date? He's nuts!

"You and I... It's just not meant to be."

Blake got in his face. "She's not interested. Can't you take a friggin' hint?"

A van that held people from Hindman's party stopped in the

middle of the road about twenty feet away. The auto-window whirred down. "What's going on?" a semi-familiar voice asked. Its headlights stayed on. The driver stepped out and walked toward them.

"Who are you with?" Brad asked Kenna.

"It's none of your business," she snapped. "I'm not dating you. You're out of your gourd."

He pushed her and she fell backward into a rock garden.

"That's it." Blake tossed his cane aside. He knew what he had to do—defend Kenna.

That no good, dirty, rotten— He fisted his hand into a tight ball and leaped toward Brad's upper body. He grasped his collar and held him up, facing him. Swinging a hard right, he slammed his knuckles forward, hitting the man's jaw, then let go of his jacket. Brad twirled a half-circle in place, thrown off balance and dropped back. He stumbled over a decorative rock and fell in the street, away from Kenna. A loafer dropped off his foot. For a few seconds he lay still and moaned. Soon, like he'd gone berserk, Brad threshed around on the icy grass and sidewalk, screaming incoherent words, cursing.

I'll make this low life jerk wish he never drove out to Hickory Creek Subdivision. Blake took Kenna's hand and drew her up and behind him to keep her safe. Leaning over Brad, he asked glowering, "You want more, ol' buddy? Give me a reason."

Holding his jaw, Brad sputtered and cursed as he looked around for his shoe. "I'll be back."

"I've got his license number," someone said from a newly gathering group of people. Folks from the party hurried toward them.

Brad located his shoe in Kenna's yard and dropped it on the ground, and with an awkward thrust of the foot, slipped the shoe on.

"Kenna? Are you okay? Blake?" Bette asked as she hurried up the walk. She wasn't even wearing a coat. "What happened?"

Alvin Jenkins, a man Blake barely knew, tapped the keypad of a cell phone. "911? Send a squad car to Hickory Creek Subdivision. There's been an attack on two people. Physical attack, yes, sir. Yeah. I

saw it." He placed a hand over the mouthpiece. "Mark what's the license number? Get it quick. My name? It's Alvin Jenkins."

Mark Hindman rushed to his truck, got a flashlight from the glove box and shined it on the license of Brad's pick-up truck.

"Texas 28374."

Alvin Jenkins said into the mouthpiece of his cell phone. "License 28374. Texas, yes."

"To hell with you, anyway!" Brad limped around the back end of his car, climbed into it and started the engine. The headlights and taillights lit up. The car lurched forward then stalled. He slammed a fist onto the steering wheel and restarted it. A second or two later, he drove forward with success. He turned the U-turn and sped out of the subdivision as onlookers stood near Kenna's house and gaped, their mouths open.

Blake drew a deep breath. He gathered Kenna into his arms and pressed his lips to her forehead. "Are you okay?"

"I think I scratched my knee, but I'm fine," she said in a small, shaky voice.

He slipped two fingers under the tight collar of his dress shirt and grimaced. "He won't be back tonight, I don't think."

"I hope not."

Within five minutes, two squad cars drove up and parked in front of Kenna's house, their lights flashing. The cop got out and walked around his cruiser then toward them.

Blake pulled her close and stroked her back giving her solace.

The officer turned Alvin Jenkins' way and asked in a deep, raspy tone, "Can you tell us what happened?"

Alvin said, "You need to talk to them." He pointed toward Blake and Kenna. "That's who it happened to."

The cop stepped up to Blake and smiled. "Hey, buddy. How're you doing? What happened here?" He turned his attention to Kenna. "Do you need an ambulance?"

"I've just got a scratched leg."

Blake had known Jake Colbert for years and trusted him with his life. In fact, on more than one occasion he'd done just that on at the force. "This guy, he's named Brad—"

"Brad Zwick," Kenna added, bent down and gazed at her torn hosiery and cut leg. "He's a prescription drug salesman." Kenna sniffed and shook her head, obviously distraught. "He lives just north of Tyler. But he travels...selling drugs. At least, he says he does."

"Thanks, ma'am," Jake said in a courteous manner.

"Well, Jake," Blake began, "this guy...this Brad got out of his car, walked right up and punched me. A sucker punch. Then he grabbed Kenna by the arm and tried to force her to go with him. She fell. Then I got my bearings and threw a punch of my own and knocked him down. The bastard wasn't very happy when he left."

"We'll get all this down and you can be on your way," the policeman said and made a motion with his hand. "It's all over, folks. You can go on about your business."

Kenna lowered her voice and whispered in Blake's ear. "I have to go inside. My leg's bleeding."

"I'll take you." He turned to Jake. "Can you ask questions inside? I'm going to give her leg first aid."

Blake accompanied her up the brick sidewalk. "Do you have any bacterial spray or hydrogen peroxide?"

"I believe I do. In the bathroom."

\* \* \* \*

In the days and evenings after the police sped to Hickory Creek Subdivision, they began going to movies and out to dinner. Not once did they see Brad. They'd heard he had gotten out of jail and were convinced he'd stay away from Kenna in the future. Blake introduced her to his cop friends at the department. It stayed in the back of her mind that he was a lot younger than her, but to her it didn't matter. She wondered if her friends and relatives would accept their interracial relationship.

Days evolved into two weeks and cool weather yielded to the beginning of spring. One Thursday afternoon, they attended an art class. Together, they laughed, cried and told each other their innermost secrets and painted pictures in a class at a nearby strip mall.

One day outside the mall in the parking lot, she considered asking about how he felt about their differences before they carried their relationship to a new level.

She stopped near her car and let out an elongated breath. "I have something I'm thinking about that..."

Between short pecks to her neck and throat he asked, "What? Say it."

"Something...bothers me."

He stopped. His line of vision narrowed on her face. "Well, we don't want that. Want to talk about it?"

"Nah."

"Okay."

"It's nothing. Really."

"Sure it is, if it's bothering you, I definitely want to hear."

*Dear God, here goes.* She took in a breath of fresh air. "It's, well, our age difference and the other..."

"I know where you're headed with this and it's all right. Please, go on."

She swallowed hard. "...well, that you'll leave me for a white woman or..."

He stopped her short. "Don't you worry a second about race. As for me, to hell with those young, white things. For that matter to hell with the older ones too. You're my woman."

His tone and concern relieved. "I know ... "

"What brought all this up?"

"Oh...yesterday I heard someone gossiping at the grocery store about an old woman robbing the cradle. I'm in love with you...I want it—us." She turned her gaze more fully on him. "I want to make sure we're on the same page. Maybe I'm obsessing."

"It's all right to be sure. It doesn't bother Demi and Ashton out in Hollywood. Or, let's see...there's Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins."

She wagged her head and laughed.

"I read that younger guys think older gals less flighty, more interesting, fun, and financially settled. I agree. So yeah."

Relief tinged her tone when she answered, "Definitely yes, then since we're a hundred percent sure that our differences aren't an issue."

He kissed her earlobe and gave her a hug. "It makes me love you that much more. I cherish our differences. Does our difference in age or skin color cause you a problem?" he asked, his tone stern.

"I also know that I want us to be a couple and living in one house."

"Good." Blake pressed a kiss to her temple and then to her lips.

She loved the strength of his character and physique. Much pride was chiseled into his attractive face. His scent always smelled delicious. She buried her nose in his shoulder as her heartbeat quickened.

"I care about you very much," he said. "Don't pay any attention to anything anyone says. They're just jealous...or ignorant. I just don't want to rush you."

Kenna gave herself a mental reprimand for believing the woman's close-minded take on May-December relationship. Damn her for planting a seed of doubt! She clucked her tongue. "I'm sorry. I'm excited about our living together and engagement." Feeling like an idiot, she rose on tiptoe and pressed a kiss to his waiting lips. "I'm sorry."

"You don't have to be." Blake captured her face between his hands, gazed down into her eyes and tilted her chin up. An intense expression washed over his face. He drew a ragged breath and whispered, "You're still my baby?"

"Oh yeah." She drew a shaky breath. "Good."

\* \* \* \*

At Blake's insistence, Kenna had electronic security equipment and monitors put up in the front and back yards. Motion detectors surveyed her yard.

Chemistry between them flowed like a river. Their relationship strengthened. Blake continued to limp a little, but he no longer used the cane and went to physical therapy at the Veteran's Administration Hospital religiously.

Never did their intimacy slip beyond sharing passionate kisses and warm embraces. Daily, his lust got more difficult to tamp down and ignore.

Two and a half months into the relationship, Blake decided it was time to up their level of intimacy. He was, after all, a man who had manly needs. For a couple of minutes, he paced in his plush, carpeted living room. His heart thundered in his chest then finally he made the decision. He read the time on the brass clock at the end of the rectangle room and stabbed his fingers into the back pockets of his Levi's. He planned to go back to work the following week and felt great. At eight o'clock p.m., during a cold downpour, he located his umbrella and locked his house up. He put the umbrella up and crossed the road, walking toward Kenna's front porch. Lightning streaked across the sky like neon pitchforks from hell. *I need her and I think...no, I know, she needs me. To hell with what the neighbors will think.* 

\* \* \* \*

The doorbell rang, catching Kenna's attention as she loaded dishwasher with a few dishes from supper. She gaped at the security monitor's screen while standing in her kitchen. "Who in the-?"

Blake retracted the umbrella and peered up at the camera in his quirky and charming way that caused her knees to turn to a gel-like substance. As though he knew she gazed at his image, he said, "It's just me."

Wearing little else than a robe and silky white panties underneath, Kenna strode to the front door. She gripped the brass knob, unlocked the door and pulled it open. Their eyes met. "Hey, hi, Blake."

"I had to share." He quietly stepped inside, put the umbrella down and grasped her hand.

"Share?" She raised her arms and slid her hands over his collar bones and behind his head. The tips of her fingers slipped up into the hair at his nape.

"I'm going back to work next week."

"I'm so glad." She smiled. Her heart pounded in expectancy.

"The doctor said my leg has healed."

She caught a glimpse of his square jaw and aristocratic features under the soft light over the front entry way. Their mouths fused. His hands slipped around her waist and he pulled her to him. Without ending the kiss, he closed the door and flipped off the lights.

The long, quiet evening alone was no longer lonely. It pleased her that he made his need known. His effort enkindled a tickling that flittered to and fro low in her belly. His kisses, soft and arousing, momentarily ended. Their lips parted. There was no mistaking the unspoken, x-rated designs for the night that played out in his hungry gaze. He smelled of rain and lemony aftershave lotion. His lips formed a lazy, sensual smile. Under the soft, terry robe she wore, her naked body quaked. She yearned for his arms to slide around her and draw her to him. The skin between her upper thighs dampened. *God, how I love this thoughtful gentleman*.

"My love," he murmured. With a finger to her chin, he tilted her face up and covered her lips with his taut mouth, stirring her in deep lonely places. "You have no idea of the effect you have on me."

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She leaned toward him, wanting to savor the arousing sensations his words engendered.

"I want to be with you now...tonight."

She couldn't bear the thought of sleeping alone without him, without feeling his warmth, or being wrapped in his arms. So much I need his kisses and hard sex pushing into me. I just know I'll remember my first night with him forever. Shaken, she clung to him, aflame from head to toe in her want. "It's been such a long time."

His taut body pressed into hers as he tightly held her and rimmed her ear with his tongue. *Mm. Such virile potency. A force of nature with which I want to deal.* His warm breath tickled her cheek when he stopped to nibble her lobe. A growl rumbled low in his throat. The shifting movements caused the fabric of her robe to brush against her sensitive nipples. She drew a deep breath and bit her lower lip.

She sucked in a deep breath and let out the words. "I need you, too."

He seemed almost relieved. "I know. I intend to take real good care of you," he said, his voice raspy. "This will be no one night stand. I, uh, didn't want to rush things, though I knew it was coming between us. Gossip. I hate it."

The richness of his voice took her breath away. "Oh Blake, stay all night and part of the morning. Stay 'til next week, for god sakes!"

"You're sure?" he asked in a deep, carnal voice.

"Blake...yes."

## **Chapter 6**

*He does many things I like. I care about this man. The time for talk has evidently ended.* 

On their own, each end of her belt parted and her robe fell open. Blake drew the lapels aside more, revealing her curves in the dim, overhead spotlight of the foyer. His hungry gaze fed on her breasts. She loved how his hands rose and smoothed over them. When he grasped each nipple between his thumbs and forefingers, her knees weakened. For several long, sweltering seconds, he softly assaulted the tight buds into submission by rolling them.

Kenna breathed deeply, enduring a sharp tug that clenched in her core then streaked through her limbs.

Blake released her nipples and ran the pads of his fingers over her pebbled areoles, driving her insane in a good way. His eyes hazed with desire, he leaned, cupped a breast and suckled it deeply. He gave the other breast equal treatment. "They're so beautiful," he said after a nipple escaped his lips.

He raised a hand and ran his fingertips over her cheeks, nose, eyes and lips.

"Do anything to me. I'm yours."

"I know what you want." A smile quirked at the corner of his lips. His eyes shined like gemstones under hooded, dark-fringed lids. "I've waited to give it to you since I first met you."

"Mm," she softly said. "I like this." His hands on her flesh felt so luscious.

"Let me show you what I mean," he whispered.

"Mm. Please do," she said, enchanted with his words.

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Blake pushed the sleeves down her arms and pulled the garment from her body. It dropped in a soft pile to the floor. Her newly bared, uplifted breasts awaited more of his touches. Keeping her hands at her side, she let him take in her nakedness, not wanting to dissuade him in any way. Wearing only a pair of tiny, white thong panties that just covered the lips of her pussy, Kenna stood before him serving as her own offering.

Blake leaned, plucked her robe from the floor and tossed it onto a chair without stepping away. One hand settled on her waist and one hand touched a waist-high table.

Heart pumping fast and hard, she dragged air into her lungs as he lifted her up and placed her squarely on the wooden top. He parted her legs and knelt before her. His mouth hovered mere inches from the slit in her crotch. His outstretched hands pushed her thighs toward her chest, opening her for oral exploitation and penetration.

"Oh yeah," she said, her back pressed to the wall. *How long has it been since a man has done this?* His tongue didn't immediately touch her clitoris. Instead, it drew wet rings around and into her navel, back and forth. She ached for him to move his effort down. "Lick me," she begged. When he bit a path though her trimmed mound, she squirmed and tried to spread more. She whimpered as his lips neared her hot zone.

His lips moved and suckled skin scant inches from the target area. "Your skin is so soft." Blake hooked a finger around the crotch of her panties and exposed her moist crevice. "Delectable." He bit each of the fat lips. The tip of his tongue touched the base of the slit and slowly dragged up, without delving below the surface. His mouth left her pussy. "Mm. You don't know how long I've wanted to taste your sweetness."

She fought to endure the tormenting ache in her loins as he continued to orally tease her. She clamored for him to fulfill his commitment and end the volatile situation. "Oh my God."

Finally Blake sunk his tongue deep into her, withdrew it and

lavished her clit, until small, animalistic sounds erupted from her throat that soon changed to cries of ecstasy. The delectable tending that he was so adept at doing, didn't ease her need, but served to arouse her more.

He began grazing in earnest.

Her breath caught. It's just like I wanted, only a hundred, no, a million times better. The blatant, wicked action reduced her to a crying, needy and breathless mass. I'll die if he quits before I come. A monster of a climax is definitely in the works.

The naughty, flicking of his tongue continued. It slipped into her, again and again, between her pulsing, puffy lips. A relentless in-out assault which caused her need to grow stormier and greedier by the second.

Moans formed and rumbled in her throat when his tongue left her canal then relocated on her bud. Back and forth, he thrashed without remorse, until her body responded with spasms, squirms, and cries for mercy.

Kenna closed her eyes and held onto each side of the table, at her hips, her legs uplifted, draped over his shoulders, his face buried in her crotch. Her eyes slitted and she saw the top of his head moving side to side as he pressed his mouth to her pussy. Her spine flattened against the wall that served to brace her. Her surroundings hazed. She moaned in her mindless pleasure as the life-altering climax loomed and threatened to unleash.

With what seemed a deliberate deceleration, his tastes and strokes slowed. She tasted the salt of her own tears.

A reflection of their erotic position played out across the hall in a mirror. *I don't want this to end*. In the glass she saw the back of his head bobbing between her upper thighs as he suckled her folds. Wave after wave of heart-stopping sensation flowed through her like liquid through a pipe. She uttered tiny screams, when she rode over the plateau of an orgasm. Sobbing, she clung onto him.

He rose to a standing position. In what had to be record time, he

unbuttoned his shirt and yanked it from under the waistband of his jeans, baring his chest. "I'm not finished." His nimble fingers unfastened, unzipped and grasped each side of his jeans and shoved them down his strong, hair-dappled legs. He hooked his thumbs under the elastic band of his boxers and took them down, baring his formidable erection that rose to just under his belly button.

Virile. Potent. Hot. A guaranteed tight fit.

Her eyes returned to Blake's torso: muscular and wellproportioned. His flat and hard stomach appealed to her. Reaching out, she ran her fingers through the inviting, dark sprigs of chest hair.

"Want to go to the bedroom?" she asked, her words breathy.

"It'll be more comfortable for you there."

"Okay."

Blake brought a square gold foil packet from his jeans' pocket. She hopped off the table and led him upstairs, to her bedroom. She sat down on the edge of the bed and dragged the bedspread and top sheet down.

He handed her the package and said, "Put it on me. Please," he quietly said. He stepped closer and snapped on the bedside lamp which brightened the room. After placing the rubber in her hand, he leaned in and passionately planted his taut lips on her parted lips and gave her his tongue.

She felt her own heart beating and tasted herself. Their mouths parted. "All right," she breathlessly said.

"You don't mind, do you?"

Drawing back, she studied his face and shook her head. "No, I'd love to."

He gazed down, intending to watch.

Kenna's hands shook as she peeled one side off the square package and brought out the lubricated, vinyl tube from the second half of the packet.

Pinching each side of the condom, she stretched the base over the seeping head, tightly ringed it with the forefinger and thumb of her right hand and pushed it down his engorged shaft. She leaned close to his sex and felt his body heat.

"Aaah," he said and winced.

"Did it hurt?"

"Oh God, no."

Realizing the pleasure she'd just given him, Kenna pushed the ribbed tube harder down to his cock's root. In the dim light her gaze met his.

"That's it," he said and brushed a few stray strands from her face.

She let go and lay back, her arms back over her head in the pillows. She waited, aching for him to take down her tiny scrap of underwear.

Blake didn't disappoint her. She lowered her gaze and shuddered with delight when he bit the elastic band and drew the garment down her smooth legs, revealing her trimmed mons. He tossed the thong onto her dresser. His interest stayed with her pussy. "Spread for me, Kenna," he murmured.

Helpless to resist, not wanting to anyway, she parted her legs. The feverish need spiked. Kenna ran her hand up a brass pole on her headboard behind her pillows and held on, considering her own desperate hunger.

"That's it," Blake said. Each hand grasped her damp inner thighs and massaged them. His fingers brushed through the stripe of hair on her mound until she writhed in the softness of her bed.

Onto his knees, he positioned himself at her center, surveying the possibilities. Her heartbeat quickened.

Kenna's eyes drifted down his magnificent body and stopped on his cock. Pearly liquid oozed from the crown. She ached to fondle it and the tight scrotum.

Blake leaned in, until their bodies touched and tasted her lips.

"Mm." She lost herself in the sensuality of the moment. His velvety chest rubbed her sensitive nipples. He lowered his massive, steel cock until it pressed into her pubic mound without entering. His

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mouth blazed a line of kisses along her jaw to her lightly perfumed throat and the needy area behind her ear. He made love to each square inch that he came across while his cock lay in wait to enter. She ground her hips into his loins, seeking his penetration. His hands stopped in the curve of her back and slid all over her derrière. She bit her lips. *Isn't there something I can do to get him to enter me*?

"Have patience." He brought a hand to her breasts and pinched her budded nipples. His chest compressed her breasts between them. He shifted and the lips of her pussy pressed onto his upper thigh, causing the need for her to ride his leg. Perspiration dampened her skin as she waited for him to shove himself into her, to accommodate her by making her come.

As though he could read her mind, he rose on his knees, slipped a hand under each butt cheek and drew her close. "Ready?"

"Mm-hm, do it."

The cockhead pressed into the point of entry and began slipping into her small, tight space in increments. A series of screams enlivened and left her throat. His member stretched and readied her for the first, full push. When it went in as far as it would go, her body shuddered at the awesome shock of being filled with him. Her sex muscle squeezed it hard like a tight glove on someone's hand.

A gentleman, Blake let her adjust to his size before he began the aggressive thrusts and withdrawals. "Am I hurting you?" Waiting for her to answer he looked down at her, wearing a serious expression.

Such a thoughtful lover. An elongated moan slipped from her lips. "Ohhh no. It's wonderful." The fiery throbbing between her thighs grew. Words didn't exist to relay how much she enjoyed the delightful impalement.

Blake slowly began pumping and picked up speed.

Dear God, soon my thirst of this man will be quenched. Maybe not, too.

The bed creaked with each depression. He picked up speed. After a gasp, she arched against him. His thrusts got faster. During the fierce climb that followed, his balls spanked the lower part of her labia, delivering her to the brink. She pressed her pussy forward, meeting his crushing blows. Ragged breaths left their lungs. With one last push, they toppled headlong onto the cresting wave. A shattering explosion followed—*a great orgasm*. "Oh my God!" Her pussy clenched his shaft, milking him of his juice. Her breath caught as the ongoing rippling sensations washed through her. Blake reached up and pinched her nipple, adding a measure of pain to her pleasure. He uttered an elongated groan and expelled a raspy breath.

Together they rode the plateau in bliss, until his sheathed cock left her. He dropped to her side, and rested his head on her pillow, facing her. He raised his hand and drew his finger along the line of her chin as though he regarded her as a precious commodity. "That was exceptional."

"I don't think I'll ever be the same."

"Let's go away and do something this weekend." Blake drew his finger down her arm, tickling the skin. "Just you and me," he said in a hoarse voice.

"That sounds heavenly."

Kenna's surroundings normalized. She recognized the familiar tick of the clock and the moving blinds when the furnace kicked on. An ambulance's siren screamed as it sped down a nearby highway as she returned to her senses. Call it women's intuition, or maybe it was the way he pressed a kiss to her forehead and drew her to him, that she knew their love would be the real thing.

### Chapter 7

Kenna didn't know where the days went after their initial coupling. In the space of a few weeks, their love took root and flourished. Passing hours yielded to the warmer, sometimes rainy days of spring. Dreary periods of mourning for what once was yielded to sunny days spent with Blake. His sweet demeanor and arousing ways resuscitated her sexually and emotionally. By the end of May, he also seemed healed from wounds of the past. He walked without a limp and returned to work, doing surveillance work for the Smith County Sheriff's Department. Before she knew it, spring neared an end and the momentum of their love swept them into a sultry, early summer.

The first Sunday of June, they drove to Louisiana where she met his parents. Retired executives from the telephone company, they spent their free time selling wooden, handmade trinkets on eBay. They welcomed her, opened their arms and hearts, offering kindness and warmth.

She learned Blake truly did come from an open-minded family. Different shades of skin and age didn't bother them. In turn, the next weekend, they drove to Laredo where she introduced Blake to her parents. Both Kenna's parents had aged into their sixties. When they first entered her parent's house, her dad gave Blake a reluctant handshake.

"Daddy, we're a couple. Blake and I are thinking of getting engaged."

He frowned and grumbled incoherent curse words, turned his back and walked away. The rocky few first moments smoothed out within an hour. Blake spent the weekend getting acquainted with them and winning them over with his wit and charm. By Sunday, her mother and dad accepted and hugged him like he was one of their own, before Kenna and Blake climbed into the car to return to Tyler.

Her dad said, "Kenna, I think you got yourself a real good guy, yes, sir. Age or skin color makes no diff"rence these days. We're all human bein's." His sweet words made her swell with pride and ache with love for them.

Kenna made peace with another person, herself. Jim would forever remain in that one special place, locked away forever in her heart. She had needs and adored Jim, but now she wanted to move on and let go of the past by telling him goodbye. Her old wounds of losing a loved one closed and healed.

As the chilly spring gave way to early summer, Kenna and Blake continued to keep up separate households, but on most nights slept in the same bed. Their intimacy carried with it honesty, caring and a sense of safety. Their direct in-depth conversations on a daily basis enabled their sex to be satisfying and hot. Without giving it much thought, she'd fallen in love with him and when he slipped a diamond engagement ring on her finger, her heart fluttered and she said yes. Soon she knew a date would be set.

\* \* \* \*

The last part of June, a week after they'd delivered the news to Kenna's family, Blake left for work. She busied herself by cleaning the kitchen. Beef stew bubbled in the crock pot, filling the house with its delicious scent.

Kenna wore a pair of tight gray workout pants and a cut off gray Hard Rock Cafe t-shirt that left her midriff bare. She always dressed down when she did housework. Having money, she could hire someone to do her housework, but she didn't want to relinquish her privacy.

#### Daring Deputy

She needed a lot of it since she'd taken up with Blake. Thinking of him, she smiled wistfully, stepped up on the seat of a chair and took a jar of spice from a wall rack. She carefully tossed an old jar of cinnamon into the garbage can, leaned and nabbed a wash rag off the counter and washed the shelf off which it came. *Now the afternoon quickie we shared seems a fantasy. So sweet and good and errrgh, man, oh man, Blake knows how to please me.* She vigorously scrubbed the cabinet door, getting turned on by her own thoughts of their afternoon delight. She drifted back in time to early afternoon that day.

He'd finished mowing, taken a shower and had lain down to take a nap before going in to work the graveyard shift.

Flittering shadows had danced on the pulled shades. The sheers wriggled when cool air filtered up from the floor vents. Not wanting to interrupt his sleep, she slipped into the bedroom and stepped up to the bed. He lay so still. His sooty, fringed lashes were closed over his navy blue pools. Unable to resist, she extended her finger and drew a line through the short hairs below his navel. The patch of skin felt like velvet. She did it again and again, just lightly. It felt so erotic to do. It upped her need tenfold.

Kenna enjoyed the sight of him. His long, strong body was sprawled out naked and haphazardly covered under a white sheet; such a good looking male. *Who cares that he's ten years younger and white to boot? I sure don't. Evidently he doesn't care, either.* 

He continued breathing evenly as she ran her finger along the sheets and to a bit of the top hem that barely covered his sex. So very much she yearned to feel his solid shaft buried inside her. She didn't know exactly when he'd opened his eyes and began watching her. His leg twitched, so she withdrew her fingertip and hoped he wouldn't get mad, because she'd woken him up. Her stomach tightened.

Cops needs plenty of rest before they went to work, don't they? Since they had switched him to a surveillance team, and he worked the graveyard shift, he had to nap when he could take it. Having a dangerous job, he had to be on top of things and be alert.

Without preliminaries, he extended his strong arms and pulled her on top of him. She felt the thumping of his heart as his hands smoothed possessively over her clothed ass. His flattened palms moved up her back, pushing her top up. Amusement quirked at the corners of his lips. He grasped her hand and brought it to his very hot, dry lips. She moved to his side and ran her hands over the rigid plane of his chest. He rolled her onto her back. His voice was hoarse. "You're going to get it now." A small, laugh-combination-scream left her lips a second before he squelched it with his mouth and plunging tongue. Their bodies melded into each other as their tongues met in a deep kiss.

Blake pulled back, his head moved down and he moved his kisses down to her tightly budded nipples that were clearly defined even through the knit fabric of her top and bra. "Let's get this shit off." With a quick yank, he whisked it over her head and onto the dresser. A husky chuckle left his throat as he reached behind her and undid her bra so that her breasts spilled out. "My big fingers get in the way when I try to undo these darned fasteners."

She laughed and lay back for his inspection.

Free of their lacy constraints, pleasure streaked through her when his massaging hands claimed them. Her fierce craving caused her pussy to clamp. He brushed his mouth over her nose as he rolled the nipples between his forefingers and thumbs. His cock pressed into the flannel pants that covered the apex of her thighs. Suddenly finding herself on fire with desire, she visualized his thrusts and thought of his needy body bunching and relaxing already. She moaned for his sexual offerings, needing replenishment and restoration. *Blake can give this to me*.

"Do we have time?" she asked, whimpering, amazed that he wanted to make love in the daytime. Blood rushed in her ears.

"I can fit this shit into my schedule anytime," he said, in a deep, teasing voice that she'd come to love. The mischievous glint in his

eyes promised to bring her to the brink.

His hands moved, dragging down her sweatpants. He sat up and drew a pant leg off her leg, pulling it down along with her panties. "Know what I've been fantasizing about lately? Hm?" His voice sounded sultry and enticing.

"Oh you have. About what, may I ask?" she asked, her voice breathless in her need. She moved her spread hands over the sculpted muscles of his arms and chest.

"You may. Right now I'm thinking about sinking myself inside your hot pussy," he said between kisses. "Would you like that?"

"There's nothing I want more." The statement caused unrest to stir deep in her core. "Mm-hm."

His cock tented the sheet. "Your body likes my hands, I can tell."

She smiled as she licked his right nipple. "Mm-hm, it does."

He gazed at her. "I know." *It turns me on to feel him so near, each of us aroused by the other.* "Lay back, then. Relax," she said, taking control of the volatile situation. "Close your eyes and enjoy..." The need to tease and please him overcame her.

Blake removed his heavy-lidded gaze off her face, lay back, looking up at the ceiling. "Oh God, I need this."

Knowing what he wanted, she positioned herself between his legs, her chin almost touching his balls. As he lay perfectly still, she very slowly ran her fingertips up and down the inside of his thighs, then nibbled, fondled and bit his ball sacs. She extended her tongue and licked the enchanting area behind them. She tickled his inner thighs, getting used to the musky smell of his sex.

"Dear God, Kenna. Ahhhh." He reached down and touched her head and drew several long strands of hair back from her face.

In a deep, delicious, sensual spell, she grasped his shaft in one hand, touched her tongue to the pulsing cock's root and licked upward to the corona with her flattened tongue, in one long stroke. A pearly drop of cum oozed from the slit and Blake uttered a noisy breath. Again, she did it...and again. *Sheer and utter torture, is what this is.*  The muscles in his body contracted. Her heart thudding, she knew her touches drove him crazy. When she took the swollen length whole and paused, a loud groan unleashed from his body.

She raised her mouth from the head. "Do you like this?"

"You keep it up and I'm going to come."

Heat spread through her body like a fire in a drought. She drew her mouth off his phallus and murmured, "Do it, then."

"Then it's-ahhh-your turn."

The doorbell chimed, piercing into the comfortable silence. The disappointment heightened. *I don't want to stop*. It caught her attention and drew her out of her daydream and back in to the here and now. "Oh crap." Her damp pussy continued to throb for Blake. She shook off the vestiges of the sexy recollection and strode toward the front door. Thinking Bette had stopped by to chat, she didn't bother to check the security monitor. Upon opening the door wide, she locked gazes with Bette. Her eyes were bloodshot and puffy. *How long has she been crying?* 

## **Chapter 8**

Standing in the open doorway of Kenna's home, Bette daubed tears with a tissue and sniffed. "Oh, Kenna. You're not going to believe this. It's awful."

Pain played out in Bette's expression. Shocked, Kenna's jaw dropped. Her heart went out to her. Bette just didn't look well. In fact, she looked haggard and it worried Kenna. Dark strands of hair hung in her face, giving an unkempt appearance. Her housecoat wasn't snapped closed. On her right foot, she wore a pink house slipper and on her left foot, a blue one.

"Come in. Tell me what's the matter." Kenna grasped Bette's arm and guided her into the air conditioned front hallway and closed the door to the soggy night air. "I've made some coffee."

Her forefinger rose. "Remember the bottle of Lambrusco?"

Kenna nodded, blinking. "Yeah, why?"

"Do you still have it?"

"It's never been opened."

"I think that'll do." She stalked into the entry hall with a moan. "I need something to settle my nerves. I'll buy you another one."

"You don't have to."

"I will. I insist."

*It's so out of character for her to ask for alcohol.* "Let's go in the kitchen." Kenna slipped her hand around Bette's waist and led her through the living room. "You gave it to me two years ago."

"It wasn't a very well thought out gift anyway. I hadn't bought all my gifts that year. I was in a rush. I stopped in the first store I saw. As luck'd have it, it was a liquor store." She raised a hand of her fingers outspread and let it drop to her side.

"It's no biggie. I didn't give it a thought."

Soon, settled at the kitchen table, Bette nabbed a tissue and blew her nose.

What in the world is wrong with her? Kenna pulled the refrigerator door open, leaned in and gazed into the back of the top shelf. "I see it."

As Kenna located a wine glass, placed it into the counter and searched for the napkins, Bette began telling a story. She punctuated it with swallows, moans and sniffs. "You're not going to believe this...I've always acted sensibly. I'm intelligent and I teach, for God sakes. Most people think I'm friendly...also not the type that's easily taken in. Right?"

"You're right, Bette." Kenna listened with attentiveness while she poured three fingers of wine into the long-stemmed glass.

"It's okay. Just fill it up."

Kenna nodded, finished filling the glass almost to the lip and placed it on a napkin before Bette. She put the wine away, took a seat and settled with her chin in her hands.

Bette took a sip, placed the glass on the napkin and sucked in a deep breath. "And this is one of those times. First of all, I owe you an apology. I hate bothering you. But I've done something really dumb."

In a soothing voice she said, "Maybe I can help."

"I doubt it. It's a real doozie."

"I'm concerned. You don't even seem yourself tonight."

"Please don't get mad."

"How could I ever get mad?"

"You may consider it after this."

"No, I won't."

"Remember Brad?"

"How can I ever forget him?"

"Call me temporarily insane. I saw him one night at the café." She stopped, shook her hand and sighed, looking down.

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"Go ahead."

"I drove there and had a cup of coffee. It was the Rainbow Cafe down the road."

"I know the place you mean."

"Since Jack died I've been going there. I couldn't sleep. Well, Brad came in. He looked so tall, strong and handsome. I'd hated like hell how he'd treated you after the party that one night. I vowed to not have anything to do with him. He struck up a conversation. And I...we talked. Somehow, don't ask me how, one thing led to another. Oh Kenna, he begged me to forgive him, saying he wasn't really a bad guy. He'd been drinking. I started thinking the night he mistreated you was just a mistake he'd made. He talked and seemed like a nice man. For several nights in a row at the cafe, he began sweet talking me and bam! The next thing I knew, I took him home because his car had broken down. One friggin' thing led to another. I didn't tell you. Oh dear God!" She yanked another tissue from the box and wailed. "Forgive me, Kenna. I've betrayed your trust."

Kenna's mouth dropped in a moment of speechless shock. *Maybe the death of Bette's husband caused her to need a man...any man.* Like I did.

"You haven't heard the worst of it."

Kenna shivered. "What?"

"He came to me with this story after I started liking him. He said he owed some very bad guy some money. He would hurt him if he didn't pay soon."

"Like a loan shark?"

"Yeah. I dunno. Anyway, Brad asked to borrow twenty thousand dollars until the next Monday. He had 'a dividend check coming in and would repay me,' he said" She shrugged and sighed. "That was three Mondays ago. Dear, dear God. I didn't even ask him to sign a promissory note. He's not showing up at the cafe and my bank account is 20K smaller. Kenna, I was going to live on that money next year. I'll bet Jack is turning in his grave right now." Sobs consumed her for a few moments.

Brad wronged her badly. She's another of his victims. Damn that con man! Bette's problem moved Kenna to her own angry tears. How can I help? She squeezed Bette's hand, hoping to give her comfort. "The dirty bastard. I feel like it's partly my fault." She went around the table, patted Bette's back, aghast at what Brad was capable of doing. An image of his dark blond hair and aristocratic features focused in her mind. He looked good and at first he made an excellent impression that could lower a woman's defenses.

"Believe me, above all else, like you said, he's a thieving jerk." Bette tossed another tissue into the waste can near the dishwasher. "I apologize to you for even talking to him. I'd always preached to you about taking up with a man who would be conniving enough to take a widow woman's money. Remember that? Then stupid me does that exact thing." She moaned between sobs. "Jack and I worked hard saving that money, every dollar of it. Now he's got some of it. There's not a chance in Hades that I'll get it back. I realize now. He was stunning and said all the right things." She took a long sip of wine. "He flashed me a smile, and damn it, I rolled over." She put the wine down, nabbed a tissue from the box and mopped her face. "I was lonely."

Kenna's anger welled, but she managed to keep calm. "Maybe I'll talk to him."

Frowning still, Bette gazed up. "Don't worry about it, Kenna. I'm just going to chalk all this up to an expensive lesson."

"The next time I see that creep..." Maybe I'll run him down tomorrow after Blake goes to work.

"No, Kenna. Don't. He gets angry. You know how he is. I'd feel bad. Please..."

"He's used you." Kenna straightened her shoulders. "I'm going to tell Blake."

\* \* \* \*

#### Daring Deputy

Blake read the stark red numbers on his dash—10:00 p.m. Between calls, he drove through Tyler with two hours left to work, thinking about taking a coffee break. Two domestics, a junky's suicide attempt, and a drive off from Gas Mart kept him busy for the first six hours. The dispatcher's voice spoke and the radio hissed. Cars' headlights grew bright and passed.

Not really hungry, he turned off the highway onto a rocky lot outside the Rainbow Diner. Pulling into a space near the front entrance, he shut off the engine and went inside. At the counter he read the menu and then put it behind the napkin holder. He brought out his cell phone and pecked Kenna's home telephone number onto the keypad. A couple occupied one of the red, vinyl booths near the front window. Blake was the only person sitting at the counter. The aroma of pie, coffee and cinnamon rolls filled the air.

"I'll take a Coke."

An auburn-haired waitress who wore the pink dress and a name tag that read Sylvia stood behind the counter. She held a pen to a green pad of paper and asked, "You sure that's all?"

"Yeah, thanks." I want to wait to eat with Kenna.

Sylvia left and scooped ice into a tall glass.

He still held the cell phone to his ear when he heard Kenna say, "Hello?"

"What's going on, beautiful?"

"Nothing much, except, I miss you. Where are you?"

"A diner. I'm taking a break." He let out an elongated breath. "What a night. I miss you, too." He paused and said, "So what else is going on?"

"Oh, Bette's been over. It's awful what happened."

Startled, he asked "What?"

"It's Brad. Remember him after the party out front?"

"How can I forget?"

"Bette saw him out one night at a cafe near here. The Rainbow, I

think. The damned sweet-talker conned Bette over a period of time and talked her out of twenty thousand dollars of her hard-earned savings."

"Damn."

"That's what I said."

"Why did she take up with him after what he did to you?"

"She apologized. She said her reasoning wasn't sound. She was weak. She said that she felt lonely. Brad talked just right to get to her. Bette's embarrassed and ashamed. She just left a little while ago, crying. I feel so sorry for her. He took advantage of her."

White hot anger shot through Blake's system. "I'll see what I can do." A man conning a lonely, innocent widow woman out of money, made his blood run cold. "Where does he live?"

"Not sure, but he used to rent an apartment at 6304 Arizona Avenue, Apartment six."

"I'll be home in a couple of hours. Don't wait up."

"I've made some stew. Thought you might be hungry."

"I probably will be. Mm. Sounds good." They exchanged goodbyes and he shook his head, thinking of what Brad Zwick had done this time. "That's totally cracked," he muttered to himself when he pressed the end call button. I'll have a talk with him.

\* \* \* \*

A few minutes after midnight, in the locker room of the Smith County Sheriff's Department, Blake unbuttoned his shirt, slipped it off and put it in a laundry bag. The room held the scent of sweat, disinfectant and men's cologne. He unfastened and unzipped his uniform pants and hooked the waistband and elastic band of his boxers and took them down his legs and off his feet. He grabbed a white towel off a laundered pile and padded to the shower room and turned on the medium-hot water. Two other cops showered a few feet away. When the temperature suited him, he stepped under the

#### Daring Deputy

pummeling streams and let the warmth run over his body. While soaping his underarms, an image of an ex-girlfriend entered his mind. Her long, blonde hair streamed down her back. She had a slender build and dainty features. Most people who had gotten to know Jenna thought she was the perfect match for him. He had allowed himself to get close, but the relationship failed and he ended up hurt. The chemistry hadn't been there. *No wonder we ended it*.

As the water dribbled down his head and onto his shoulders and chest, the moment he met Kenna entered mind. At first, she avoided looking at him. At least he thought she did. Kenna sat at a small table in a coffee shop, writing on a piece of stationery. *Maybe it was a letter, I don't know.* He figured her age to be five or six years older; at the most eight. Her raven hair tumbled to her shoulders and her chocolate colored skin was smooth and enticing. Her breasts stood high and proud under her tight, v-necked top.

She dropped a pen. "Oh no."

Blake ambled forward, knelt and retrieved it for her. "There you go," he said and placed in on the table.

"Oh, clumsy me. Thanks." Her gaze caught and held his attention.

"Do we know each other?" he politely asked.

She flashed a pearly smile that made his heart skip a beat. "You're my neighbor. You live across the cul de sac."

"I do?"

"Yep."

"You're in the white house with brick?"

"Uh, no. The light gray with brick."

He nodded and smiled. "Oh, okay." She had struck him as beautiful, intelligent and sexy as hell. *I'm lucky to have Kenna as my woman. And yes, the chemistry is there.* 

He vigorously washed his short hair and rinsed it. After he finished dressing in jeans shorts and a white polo shirt, he called Kenna again. He pulled a pen and small yellow pad of paper from his locker and placed them on a bench.

"Are you going to talk to him?"

"Yeah. There's no promises that I can do any good. That money's probably been spent."

"Bette knows."

"I can't stand men who steal or con women out of money. If she gave it to him with no promissory note, it'd be hard if not impossible to prove or recover."

Kenna sighed. "I know."

"I can at least talk to him."

"Thank you, Blake."

"I'll be home in a few minutes. I may drive by the Rainbow Cafe and see if he's there."

Blake admired the arched white sliver that hung above the deep navy blue skyline when he left the department at midnight—a lover's moon. He climbed into his Chevy truck and drove toward home, happy because he'd see Kenna soon.

Blake smelled the delicious scent of broiling steaks from a nearby restaurant as he crossed the parking lot, going to his truck.

## **Chapter 9**

Wanting to bump into Brad Zwick at the Rainbow café, he wondered if he was in a positive mood about repaying his debt.

A blustery wind moved the limbs of trees. A shower wet the empty streets. In a blur, a strip mall and gas station passed by his passenger window. I want to do this and get home to Kenna. I'd like to eat a bite and unwind before going to bed.

A few minutes later, he stepped inside the café. The usual plethora of cafe aromas greeted him—steaks, specials and coffee. Two couples occupied booths near the window. An elderly man sat at the counter eating a hamburger and sipping a drink. Sylvia married ketchup behind the counter. "Hi." She smiled, greeting him, and put the bottle on the counter top. "What can I get for ya?"

I don't see him. "Nothing for now. Thanks."

A puzzled expression played out on her face. "Oh. You wantin' to talk to Joe the cook?"

"No. Uh, I need your help."

"Mine? All right." She stood poised to listen.

He straddled a stool and sat down a few feet away from her and leaned on his elbows on top of the counter top. "When a certain person comes in, I was wondering..."

"Yes?"

"...if you could call me?"

"Sure. I'm not here all the time. I work night shifts six nights a week though."

"I appreciate it."

She glanced at him and picked up a new bottle. "You're a cop,

aren't you?" She stopped chewing gum and unscrewed a lid.

"Yes."

"Who is it you're lookin' for?" she asked and began marrying another bottle of ketchup.

"Brad Zwick. Do you know him?"

"Not off-hand." She put all the ketchup on the back counter and grabbed a wet rag.

He let her think about it for a moment. "Are you sure?"

Sylvia swiped the counter a few times with a cloth and paused. Her nose crinkled. A light of what looked like recognition lit up her eyes. "Wait a sec. Yeah, I do think I know of him. He stiffs me all the time on tips. Oh, and he brings women here...sometimes. When he brings them they sit off to themselves and drink coffee 'til all hours. The reason I know his name is that a woman came in lookin' for him. She was real pissed, yah know? I don't know why, of course. But she said his name, Brad Zwick."

Blake gave her a pleased nod. "If I give you a tip and my numbers, could you give me a call when he comes back?" He slipped his hand in his pocket and drew out a five dollar bill and held it up. "I would greatly appreciate it."

She took the money and shoved it into her apron pocket. "Sure thing. I want another after you come here and see it's him."

Blake raised a hand. "It's a deal." He gave her his Sheriff's Department business card and strode back to his truck. He knew the woman who owned the apartment building where Brad lived, assuming he told Kenna the truth and he still lived there. He really didn't want to cause a scene at his building. The owner suffered several ailments that threatened her life.

I'll wait. This con artist will surface. Call it a hunch, but I'll see him soon.

68

\* \* \* \*

Three nights later, Sylvia called with the news he wanted to hear. Brad had just arrived at the Rainbow. Blake climbed out of bed, explained to Kenna what the call was about and got dressed in jeans and a t-shirt and drove to the Rainbow Cafe. Blake immediately recognized him.

Brad sat at the counter talking with Sylvia. Blake took a seat on the stool next to him and to the side, out of Brad's view, put a five dollar bill on Sylvia's palm.

He smiled. "Bring me a coffee, please."

She stuffed the bill into the pocket of her apron and said, "Sure thing."

Brad kept his head down and didn't speak. He took a sip of coffee and watched the television that was mounted on the wall behind the counter just above a pie case.

Sylvia brought a decanter filled with steaming coffee. "Off duty?" she asked Blake.

"Yep."

"You like cream and sugar?"

"Thanks."

After the waitress put down some creamers and sugars she went into the kitchen, entering through swinging doors.

"How are you doing, Brad?"

Brad shot him a frown. Without answering, Brad carried his mug to a booth. "Bring my sandwich to the booth," he told Sylvia as he walked away.

*He recognizes me too.* Blake followed him to the booth, looked down and let him get settled.

"Listen, Deputy, I'm not wanting to talk. I'm wanting to eat."

"Do you know why I'm here?"

"No," he said in a bored voice. "What?"

"Are you going to pay Bette back?"

"I don't have an inkling what you're talking about."

"She told Kenna that she loaned you \$20,000. Is that right?"

"To hell with her. She gave me that money as a gift."

Very calmly, in a low tone Blake said, "She loaned it to you out of the kindness of her heart and now she wants it back. You see, Bette is a very reputable person. She doesn't lie."

His eyes brazenly narrowed on Blake's face. "Listen, uh, Blake—" *I won't be intimidated.* "There're laws. I'm sure the judge would

take her situation into account. You'd be held liable."

"What situation?"

"She's vulnerable, buddy. A widow."

Brad raised his voice. "Fuck that bitch. You can't do nothing about it, either."

Anger rose like heat in Blake's body. What a freakin' thief this asshole is. He wanted to knock some sense into him but stopped short of it. How dare he sweet talk and lie to Bette, playing on her sympathies?

What did Kenna and Bette ever see in him? Then again, he's probably a skilled con artist. Blake put a lid on his rage and said under his breath, "Listen, Brad, I expect you to pay back her money within the week."

"And if I don't?"

Blake pressed a finger to his shirt pocket. "I'm sure Bette will weigh her options."

He rolled his eyes and said through clenched teeth, "I hope you hit me. I'd just love to press charges. I have lawyers too. They'd be thrilled."

Aggravated, Blake said, "Just remember what I said. Pay her back in a week and we'll let bygones be bygones. Now go on back to your meal." Blake took his finger off his shirt and stepped back, vowing to make Brad's life miserable if he didn't repay the money. A few seconds later, Blake made a mental note of Brad's license plates number and vowed to check him out at the department.

## Chapter 10

After finishing an invigorating four-mile walk, Kenna bid her walking partner goodbye and padded up the walkway. She loved her morning jaunts with Bette almost as much as her time with Blake. She looked up in the sky where a jet flew. Next door, a dog barked. Maroon and pink Bachelor Buttons lined her sidewalk and added a delicate scent to the air, reminding her that she needed to do some yard work. She stopped at the mailbox and pulled the metal handle down as a car made a U-turn in the road, but she caught just a glimpse of it. Reaching inside the box, she nabbed envelopes and post cards, closed it, and returned to the front door. After punching in a numerical code, she stepped into the empty house and secured the door. The house smelled of its usual smells of disinfectant and fabric softener. The clock on the living room mantel chimed, its hands reading eight-thirty.

Blake had traded shifts with another deputy, and worked until eight that morning. He told her he planned on talking to the real estate person before he went to bed that morning. A realtor would come over to place his house on the market so they wouldn't only have to keep up one house. Later he planned to go in and work four until midnight, so it seemed she wouldn't see him for any substantial amount of time that day.

Standing at the small table in the hallway, Kenna opened the light and water bill. She made mental note to pay them the next day and strode down the carpeting toward the bathroom. She undressed, took a leisurely shower and washed her hair. In a few minutes she turned off the water and swabbed herself dry. While dressing, her mind wandered.

*Our relationship is right...it's just that...* She shoved the recurring negative thought out of her mind. Instead she considered going to Wal-Mart to buy some sandpaper and brushes. A bookcase needed a coat of paint. She dressed in jeans and a t-shirt and padded to the living room, the carpeting sinking beneath her bare feet.

Movement out the corner of her eye caught her attention on the other side of the picture window. Blake, who had not gone to bed, across the road, chatted with a woman. After opening the back door of her car, she brought out a for sale sign. A man who sat in the front seat climbed out and began putting up the sign.

For a moment, Kenna studied Blake's demeanor, anxious with anticipation to see him again. He looks so good—tall and strong in his deputy's uniform. He's the best man a woman could ever want... All the men in her life, if lumped together, couldn't equal Blake in regards to sensitivity, loving ways and personality.

The realtor and a young male helper climbed into the car and drove away.

Blake strolled across the cul de sac and came in the house. He gazed intensely at her. "She said a house like mine would sell in no time." His tone seemed optimistic. "Buyers like nice homes that aren't too far from the center of town but not a long commute."

A smile curved his lips. "It'll be cozy. You and me, don't you think?" He stopped in front of her and leaned toward her. Their lips met. The kiss lured her closer until his tongue plunged and slid over hers. Their lips parted. "Have a good walk?"

"Sure did."

"Hungry? I'll make you some breakfast. Brunch maybe?"

He looked into her eyes. A lazy smile curved his lips. He said in a deep, velvety voice, "I'm hungry all right, but it's not for food." Over her soft, lower lip, he ran his rough thumb.

Not another word was spoken. He kissed the lobe of her right ear and curled his hand around her waist. He picked her up and carried her toward the bedroom.

The phone rang twice, so they stopped. "I suppose I should get that."

"Okay. I'll be in here." At the kitchen door, he put her down and continued down the hallway going to the bedroom. Before stepping out of her sight, she noticed that he began unbuttoning his black uniform shirt.

After bringing the phone handset to her ear and uttering an initial greeting she heard Bette's weeping voice. "Oh no! Oh dear God, no."

"Bette?"

"It was Brad. He's been here." Between every couple of words, she sobbed.

Kenna tensed at the mention of Brad's name, because Bette was involved with him in some way. "What happened?"

A silence lingered on the line.

"I'm coming over right now."

"He hit me," she said. "He's came by and told me that I'll never get the money and for me to keep the cop out of the matter."

"You mean Blake?"

"I don't know. I guess."

"Why that dirty..."

"Yeah."

"I'll come over right now. You need to call the police."

"It's okay. I've called them." It sounded as though she drew a ragged breath. "I'll be fine,"

"He's dangerous."

Blake began buttoning his shirt and tucking the tails under the waistband of his trousers. Once the conversation ended and they bid each other goodbye, Kenna put the phone on the base, turned and gazed down the hallway to Blake, disturbed by the conversation she'd just had. "It's Bette. Brad has come over and hit her. I'm going to see if she'll be okay."

Blake hurried ahead of her. Wearing his complete uniform,

including his service revolver he said, "Wait here. I want to make sure he's gone."

\* \* \* \*

Brad left his car and slammed the door behind him.

He hadn't left. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out this crazy guy intended to cause a lot of trouble. He instantly was glad he wore his service revolver.

Walking at an aggressive gait, Brad neared Bette's front door. He wore his hair in a spiked style that swept back from his face. "That woman's not long for this world. She can't do this. I thought she was diff'rent." He gestured with his head toward Kenna's house. "She's like that bitch of yours."

Sensing danger and at the same time hearing the conversation, Blake began crossing the yard, taking strong strides toward Brad, determined to stop him. "Stop now."

"Shut up, cop." He still walked at a fast gait.

Blake halted thirty feet away and he spotted something suspicious in Brad's hand. Maybe I imagined it. I'm not sure.

Something he held glistened like blue metal. *Crap, a gun?* 

"Hey!" Blake drew his Glock and aimed. "I said 'stop now,' I'll shoot. Drop it."

"I'll do it, motherfucker," Brad said, slurring his words after the second warning. In the distance, a siren sounded. More cars approached.

"Do it now." He paused as though he thought better of getting himself killed, turned and aimed a second before he dropped the gun to the ground.

With relief Blake ordered, "Get down and spread your legs and arms. Now!" Blake held his gun on the man until another cop who'd climbed out of his cruiser, could run over and cuff him.

Officers climbed out of their cars, their guns drawn. They

recognized Blake as a deputy from their department. He holstered his gun and watched two other deputies lead Brad to a waiting squad car and read him his rights.

A friend from the department walked to Blake and said, "Okay what happened?"

Blake began relating the tale thankful the ordeal with Brad had ended without firing a shot.

## Chapter 11

A week later, on the Fourth of July, at an outdoor get-together in Kenna's backyard, the air smelled of grilled hamburgers and the neighbor's roses. Kenna's eyes watered and she sneezed the whole time they talked to the Smiths and Barucks.

"You okay?" he asked and guided her to a private corner of the yard.

"Oh, it's nothing. I'm allergic to roses."

"I'll remember that."

Many neighbors of Hickory Creek Subdivision attended twenty-six adults and children, Fire lapped up around grilling hamburgers and hot dogs, kids splashed in the pool and men pulled cans of beer and soda from tubs of ice. Kenna stood at Blake's side while they mingled. They discovered that not all the people lived at Hickory Creek Subdivision. A few were guests. The temperature hovered at one hundred degrees.

Kenna glimpsed Bette who talked to the cowboy she'd met at the last party, much to her glee. *What is his name? John? Oh yes, John Coombs, the contractor.* "He doesn't seem to take his eyes off her," Kenna whispered to Blake.

"John is a good guy," said Blake, and shot his glance back across the yard in Bette's direction. He brought a can of beer to his lips, took a swallow and reset his gaze on the new couple. "The cowboy used to go to a church I attended as a kid. I know his family." Blake tossed his can into a waste receptacle and returned with a can of Diet Coke.

"I hope she finds love again. Like I have ... "

"Mm, me too."

Pleased, she surveyed his strong profile as he watched Bette.

He slipped a spread hand to the small of Kenna's back and pulled her close. His sensual lips formed a smile when he gazed into her eyes. *I sometimes see those eyes in sexy dreams*.

He took a sip then set the can down on a planter. "I'm celebrating today."

"Why?"

"The realtor called. The house is going into escrow. A young couple bought it."

"Ohhhh great." Consumed in her love, she pressed a quick kiss to his waiting lips. "I'd love to."

"When then? Next month?"

"Sure."

"A simple ceremony. Maybe go to Las Vegas?"

"Sounds great. Maybe go to one of those drive-thru chapels" She laughed.

"We can gamble a little."

"I'd like to play a few slots."

His voice turned soft. "Or, we can go to our room and....rest."

"Right, rest." She laughed but the thought made her squirm. "Right."

The Harrises and Hindmans watched their kids swim and splash in the aquamarine in-ground pool. A few sat under shade trees talking to friends. Two deputies Blake had invited stopped by to eat before they started their four to midnight shift.

Bette crossed the yard, leaving John. She stopped before Blake and Kenna and smiled. "I believe John and I are going out for dinner tomorrow night." She smiled and laughed. "He's so nice."

Kenna said, "That guy I like. You wait and see. You're going to get along famously with him."

"I like him already. This time I'll make sure he's the right one, before I do anything stupid." Her eyes welled with tears. "Do you mind if I give each of you a hug? I didn't tell you thanks for last week, Blake. You are my hero. You stopped that guy last year and you saved me this year. I think he came back to do me in."

He held out his arms and accepted her hug. "I didn't want anyone to hurt you."

"You've got a heart big as all of Texas."

Once Bette gave them another hug, Kenna raised a hand to Bette's upper arm. "Know what?"

"What?"

"Next month we're getting married. I'd—we'd like you to be there."

Blake said, "In Vegas. Maybe stay at the Mirage? If they are booked we can try out Caesars or the New York?"

Kenna laughed at Bette whose mouth had dropped open.

Can you join us?" he asked.

She beamed. "I'd love to."

"Kenna, we've got our Matron of Honor, so all we need is a best man." He made a motion toward John, across the yard. "I'll ask my old buddy the contractor cowboy over there to go with us, since you're getting along so famously with him."

"Oh my God. You're serious?"

"Yep. How do you feel about him going?"

Bette wiped her wet cheeks with a tissue and added, "I'm honored that you'd ask."

# THE END

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Carol McKenzie was born and raised in Illinois. Through her twenties, thirties and part of her forties she lived in California, Texas, Montana, Washington and Colorado. She then she moved back to her home state of Illinois. She plans to stay there with her husband and Jack Russell terrier.

She enjoys rendering artwork, sewing, quiltmaking and playing Civilization IV. On any given day, she dutifully works at her computer typing up a new erotic romance story. She writes interracial, contemporary, historical and alternative lifestyle fiction. If she's properly accomplished her goals, all her stories contain hot, sex scenes.



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