

Lexi Moore



LOVE in the
AFTERNOON

LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON

“Sharp, witty, hot and funny. What more could you ask? The characters are great!!! And even though it’s a short story, they’re really alive and vibrant. I loved it. What can I say?”

***—Delphyne DeRouge
Author of Blood Songs***

“I hate you, Branson!” She punctuated her statement with an open-palmed slap to the right side of his jaw.

His head snapped to the side and heated anger flared brightly in his blue eyes. “How dare you! You started this whole thing. If you hadn’t slept with my brother—”

“He seduced me,” she hissed at him. She took a step back from him, tossing her long, red hair and raising her chin on the wave of her fury. “And you sent him to do it, didn’t you? Did it feel good to test me? You wanted me to fail, didn’t you? Just so you could take over this lousy company and call it yours again.”

He grabbed her upper arms and pulled her against his chest. “It didn’t take much for him to get you into his bed, though, did it, Trinkia? Just a bit of flirting, a few compliments, and he had you between the sheets.”

ALSO BY LEXI MOORE

Naked Eyes

Silk

Without Reserve

LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON

BY

LEXI MOORE

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LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON
AN AMBER QUILL PRESS BOOK

This book is a work of fiction. All names, characters, locations, and incidents are products of the author's imagination, or have been used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, locales, or events is entirely coincidental.

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To the man I love in the afternoon—and all day long!

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“And I wonder how he knew just what to say and do, Branson? Was

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he a good student? You taught him everything, didn't you? Including how you left me."

"I left you because I couldn't stay and watch what you were becoming."

"I was becoming the woman you wanted to spend the rest of your life with—at least that's what you told me...before you walked out of my life six months ago."

"I had to leave."

"But you didn't have to leave without me. I cried for weeks, prayed for a phone call, an email, a letter. Anything to tell me where you'd gone and why." Tears filled her eyes as she tipped an imploring glance at him. "And then Anton showed up..."

He lightly massaged the inside of her naked arm with his thumb. Sensations radiated from the caress. Her nipples pebbled against the muscle of his pecs in response, and she couldn't stop her tongue from stroking her bottom lip.

Great! I'm going to blow this, she thought, just as she heard the bellow of the director.

"Cut!"

She looked at Lachlan, dark hair dipped over one twinkling sapphire eye.

"Gotcha, didn't I?" he whispered as he drifted a finger down the tingling skin of her outer arm, sliding over to caress the curve of her breast. "Hailey, I could feel your nipples right through both our shirts."

"Okay, you two, I want more passion," stated Bill Cox, the director. "The audience tunes into *Love in the Afternoon* for passion, excitement, and the heat between their favorite couple. So, let's have a little bump and grind, people!"

"But don't we hate one another?" Hailey asked. "He left me, and I slept with his brother. He's furious at me, isn't he?"

"Yeah, yeah, but he still wants you, even though he's mad as hell

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right now.” Bill looked around. “Makeup, get out here,” he hollered. Turning to Hailey and Lachlan, he muttered, “You two stay in the clinch. I don’t want to re-block this after makeup does its thing.”

Hailey smiled at her onscreen love interest. “I guess I can manage.” She shifted so her belly pressed against the fly of Lachlan’s pants. Then she gyrated slowly. “If he can.”

“You’re enjoying yourself just a little bit too much, Hailey.” The moment Bill headed to look at the last bit of film, Lachlan pumped his rock hardness against her abdomen. “I have plans for us tonight...”

She gasped at the length and strength of his hard-on. “Lachlan...” Her voice was a breath against his lips, a breath she sucked in as his tongue flickered over her mouth. “You’re so bad.”

“And you love it.” He laughed and rubbed his hand over her bottom.

A young, beach-blond man walked up and clapped his hand on Lachlan’s shoulder. “Well, brother dear, just about my turn to bed your beauty, I’d say! Oh, and Lachlan, Bill wants you to go with me to the mall appearance in Indian Wells tomorrow. Rob has the flu, and we’re one hot-body short. I’ll pick you up at six-thirty in the morning.”

“Jeff, you’ve gotta be kidding. Six-thirty?” Lachlan’s voice registered his displeasure.

“Yup. It’s over a two-hour drive just to get to the mall, and our first appearance is at ten.”

“Fine. I’ll be ready,” he snapped.

“Good. And one other thing...our final appearance is early the following morning, so throw some things in a bag. We’re staying over. Now I’ve gotta grab your girl and get her between the sheets. Bill sent me to get Hailey and set up for our bedroom romp.” Jeff leered as he ran his hand down Hailey’s back and over her hips. “Ready, babe?”

“Always.” Jeff, as usual, always made her grin with his antics. She headed to her dressing room to change.

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She sighed as she walked behind the set. It seemed the only time she and Lachlan got together was during rehearsals and shoots, and occasional evenings when their schedules permitted. So many planned nights together turned into shoots for the show, or hours spent memorizing lines for the next day's shoot. And now their first night together in over a week had been torpedoed.

* * *

Hailey spent the rest of the day as Trinka, in bed with her true love's brother, Anton. She wriggled and moaned, stroked his chest and sighed, her character tortured by the irresistible attraction she had for the wayward man.

Stuck for hours wearing a teddy sprayed stiff with shiny wax so it glowed romantically in the candlelight of the bedroom, Hailey's butt was abraded by sheets treated with sizing so they still looked crisp after hours of shooting bedroom scenes for Anton and Trinka.

"Okay, folks, that's a wrap," ordered Bill finally. "We'll call it a day, and pick up tomorrow on the kids at the mall for the next two days. You adults have two days off!"

Hailey smiled. Two days off. She had lines to learn, but could slip into the silk lingerie Lachlan had given her on their last anniversary. *We'll crawl into bed tonight, and I won't let him out until we're both exhausted*, she decided...right before the reality of his trip to Indian Wells intruded. *Damn, we can't even spend our time off together*, she thought.

Then she shrugged. They both earned a very good salary and could afford to enjoy a lifestyle many envied. If it took some time away from each other to do public appearances, it was no different than any working woman who had to travel to conferences, or a family man whose business took him out of town to meetings. Since she had the rest of the day off, Hailey decided to stop at Lachlan's favorite gourmet shop on the way home. They could have a romantic dinner before

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having to call it an early night, at least!

* * *

“I’m home.” Lachlan’s voice rang out as he closed the front door. He could hear music playing softly from the back of the house. *Hailey must be doing her yoga*, he thought, as he made his way down the hall toward their library. It overlooked the back yard and the garden they’d filled with a variety of flowers so they could have blooms throughout the year. French doors led to a stone patio where Hailey often practiced her yoga exercises.

As he wandered down the hallway, Josh Grobin’s voice, singing of love and loss, drifted over him, washing away the tension of the long day at the studio. Lachlan found himself humming along. Then Josh’s voice was joined by the soft alto of Hailey’s. Lachlan quickened his pace. She was on the patio and he looked forward to taking her in his arms. He stepped through the French doors, and stopped short.

There Hailey sat, in profile to him on her yoga mat, arms stretched over her head, lifting her breasts into a perfect profile...totally nude. Her long, red hair cascaded down her back as she tipped her face toward the sun and rolled her neck in a slow circle. Lachlan’s groan turned her head in his direction.

She smiled. “Hello, darling. I’m glad you’re home.”

“Me, too,” he managed to get out. “You look fantastic.”

“I wanted to finish my workout so we could spend the whole evening together.”

“That would be great.”

“Why don’t you do a few laps in the pool while I finish my cool-down,” Hailey suggested.

Lachlan returned her smile. “Sounds good.”

Instead of heading into the house for his swimsuit, he started to unbutton his shirt while watching her continue to stretch and breathe deeply. His fingers lingered on the waistband of his pants. “You could

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join me when you're through." He unsnapped the top of the fly and slid down the zipper, forcing it over the sudden bulge in his crotch.

"Great idea," Hailey answered as she rolled onto her bottom and curled flat on her back onto the mat. She inhaled, her breasts thrusting skyward and peaking under his gaze.

Lachlan shoved his pants down as he kicked off his shoes. His boxer briefs followed and his engorged penis sprung out, bouncing with its own energy. Hailey smiled, and his balls tightened in pure lust for her. "Come here, you."

"I'm not finished with my workout yet," she protested weakly.

"I'll work you out. I'll find muscles you didn't know you had."

"Mmmm, sounds like an offer I can't refuse. Just let me move into one more pose, to stretch and rejuvenate my body."

Hailey maneuvered herself into downward-facing dog, resting on her palms and feet, her butt poked high in the air.

Lachlan groaned and reached down to cup his balls, massaging them as he slid his hand up and down the length of his cock. "You look so gorgeous like that."

Hailey turned her head and looked at him, stroking himself as he stood beside her, feet shoulder-width apart, penis jutting out of his curled, caressing fingers. "So do you, lover. Jerk yourself for me."

Lachlan obliged, running his hand up and down his shaft, faster and faster. He felt the slick of his own juices lubricating the action.

Hailey lowered her pose to her knees and turned to face him. "Come here, Lachlan."

She remained on her knees as he approached, still fondling himself.

"Closer," she ordered when he stopped.

He took a step toward her, his feet at the edge of her mat. His cock was less than an inch from her face. He couldn't stop its involuntary twitch at the thought of fucking her mouth.

She licked her lips in obvious anticipation.

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He groaned. "Please," he whispered.

"Of course." She extended her tongue, waiting to swipe along the length of him.

Hailey pulled his cock into the hot, wet, dark cavern of her mouth. Her tongue pressed him against its soft hardness, while her pulling, sucking action played with his control. She lifted her breasts, running her thumbs over her nipples.

* * *

Hailey sighed in pleasure as Lachlan's long, hard, soft-skinned penis slid into her mouth. She loved sucking him off, and knew how much he enjoyed it, too. Reveling in her control—and testing his—she pulled him in and out, pressing his rock-hard rod with her tongue, and holding it captive with her lips, as she made love to him.

A smile played across her face as his pelvis began to rock rhythmically, preparing for the spasms of his orgasm. At the first jet of his load, she slid her mouth the length of him and released him, directing his spray down the front of her body, amazed at the volume he'd produced since they'd made love just the night before.

"Oooh, Hailey." His voice was no more than a groan as he tossed his head back and closed his eyes. "I love you, baby."

"I love you, too," she answered, using her hand to massage his flesh into one more contribution to the semen coating her body.

"What you do to me..."

"I love making love to you, Lachlan. Everything is always so good between us."

Eyes open, he leaned forward and kissed her, his tongue entering her mouth to lick at the remains of his taste on her tongue.

Hailey pulled his hands to her breasts, encouraging him to coat her body with his essence. She loved the slippery feeling and her nipples pebbled tightly under his slick touch. Her clit twitched and her legs spread as his fingers carried his jism to mingle with her juices flooding

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her most intimate places.

Lachlan raised his hands to her shoulders and pushed her gently to her back on the mat. He tucked his fingers behind her knees, lifting them until her feet were at her butt. A nudge and she dropped her knees out to each side, exposing her labia to his hot gaze. Her vagina clenched when he licked his lips.

Hailey rolled her pelvis as he leaned forward slowly, then she tipped her hips up, reaching for his hot, wet caress. He responded, flicking his tongue over her lips, dipping into the folds dripping with her excitement before touching her clit. It was a quick, soft tease of wet flesh on wet flesh, and she craved more.

“Please, Lachlan, please,” she begged.

She felt rather than heard his laughter rumbling across her pussy, sending her higher in an instant. His tongue played with her, while his mouth sucked at her lips. Suddenly, his finger began to massage the hard button of her desire as he drank at the entrance to her vagina. The hot length of his tongue slid into her just as she lost control, exploding in a passionate orgasm that rocked her from the soles of her feet to the top of her head. She quivered, a second orgasm flickering through her as Lachlan pulled his tongue from her and lapped up to her clit, sucking it into his mouth.

“Ooooh, Lachlan, I’m still coming,” she said on a third wave as his mouth wreaked havoc on her.

He continued to lick at her, moaning sex words and love words to her, as she slowly slid down the far side of her orgasms, limp with exhaustion.

“What a workout.” She managed a smile as she reached down to stroke his head, which rested on her lower belly.

“I told you I’d find some new muscles,” he teased, pressing a kiss into the curls below his chin.

They laughed together then slowly he crawled up her body, kissing

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her all the way. “You taste like come,” he said.

She reached forward and pressed her lips to his. “So do you.”

Hailey took Lachlan’s hand and they wandered to the pool, stopping to kiss several times along the way.

“I’m glad our house is a bit isolated,” she said. She pressed herself the length of Lachlan, her hands drifting down his back and caressing his butt cheeks. She pulled him closer.

His fingers traced over her shoulders and stroked her back, then slid to her sides to tease the side globes of her breasts. She peaked immediately, her nipples poking through the hair on his chest. She rubbed against him like a cat in need of petting, then stepped back, drifting her hands down the front of her body to pluck at her needy nipples. She twisted them, just as she knew he liked.

Lachlan’s fingers were on her in a moment, pulling the hardened nipples into tighter points. He leaned down to draw first one, then the other, into his mouth. His tongue tortured her with passion, and she felt her clit pop to life again. So soon? Sex with Lachlan always surprised her—even after five years together.

“Come with me,” he ordered. She complied, following him as she grabbed his cock, already hard again.

She squeezed and he increased the pace. In moments, they were at the pool.

“Hot tub or swimming pool?” he ground out as she centered his penis between her hands and rubbed.

“Swimming po—” Her voice cut off as he stepped beside her. His fingers slipped over her butt and between her legs, plucking at her clit.

Lachlan’s arm slid under her legs and he lifted her effortlessly against his torso, pulling a nipple into his mouth and sucking as he walked down the stairs into the pool. The warm water closed around them like a satin touch and she floated free of his grasp. Right away Hailey turned, curling her legs around his waist and seating his penis

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deep inside her. Arms clasped around his neck, she rode him, rocking against him, her clit bumping against the ridge of muscle and hair above his erection. She felt his balls bump against her inner thighs, and her passion increased.

Just as the crest of her excitement was peaking, she heard a voice call out.

“Where are you guys? Lachlan? Hailey? Are you home?”

“It’s Jeff,” she gasped. “What’s he doing here?”

“I don’t know. Let me find out.”

“There are towels on the chaise. Can you throw me one?”

As Lachlan scrambled out of the pool, he called, “Jeff, wait for me in the library. I’ll be right there.” He tossed a towel to Hailey before he grabbed another and wrapped it around his waist. “I’ll keep him in the library.”

Hailey’s heart was still pounding wildly when she climbed out of the pool and wrapped herself in fluffy terry cloth. She hurried across the garden and into the house through the kitchen door, down the hall and into their bedroom. She threw on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt, then pulled a cotton sweater over it, knowing her still-erect state would give them away.

When she arrived in the library, Jeff was sipping a glass of cola and Lachlan had on his jeans. *How had he done that?* She raised her eyebrows at him, and Lachlan just smiled mysteriously.

“So, grab your stuff and let’s get going,” Jeff was saying. “I’m supposed to pick up Nicole in less than an hour, and she’s way down in that stupid canyon.”

“Nicole?” Hailey couldn’t keep the chill out of her voice. The other actress was a notorious flirt, always looking for any opportunity to get her picture into the tabloids and keep her name in front of her fans. Hailey knew Nicole had orchestrated a couple of publicity stunts where it had looked like she was involved in a tryst.

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“Yeah. Bill decided to send her, too. She’s always good to draw a bunch of reporters to an event, so she’s coming with us.”

“Okay, but why are you headed out tonight?”

“Oh, that.” Jeff waved his glass of cola. “Nicole said she couldn’t be ready in less than an hour in the morning, so we needed to go up tonight. She already called ahead and got our reservations changed to two nights instead of one.”

Hilary felt the slow burn begin, but actress that she was, didn’t betray her feelings for even a moment. “I’ll grab your suitcase, if you want to get a shower, Lachlan. And, Jeff, you can head out and pick up Nicole.” She raised her eyebrows as Jeff opened his mouth. He closed it again. “Lachlan will be ready by the time you get back.”

“Okay. See you in an hour or so.” Jeff tossed back the rest of his cola. “If Nicole is ready, that is. I’ll call when we’re on our way back.” He laughed and waved, then headed toward the front of the house.

Lachlan tipped his head to the left. “And what was that all about? I could’ve tossed a few things into a bag and gone right now.”

She leered at him. “I’m not done with you just yet.” She slid her forefinger down the front of his fly, pressing and rubbing all the way.

Lachlan’s cock responded in an instant, rising to meet her questing digit. As her fingers slid inside his jeans to caress his hard flesh, the phone rang.

“Ignore it,” Lachlan said on a sigh of passion. “The machine will pick up.”

Hailey smiled with no intention of answering a ringing phone at this particular moment.

Lachlan’s warm hands tugged the sweater down over her shoulders, dropping it onto the floor in a heap around her. The phone kept ringing. She stretched her arms up, and he pulled the tee over her head before it followed her sweater to the floor.

When she lowered her arms, her hands went directly to the button

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securing the fly on his jeans. A quick flick had it open and she grasped the zipper, quickly yanking it down so she could get to the prize it hid from her hands, mouth and eyes. She shoved his pants down over his hips, and to his knees, where they fell around his ankles. Lachlan stepped free of the denim just as his hands pulled her jeans to her hips and he discovered she wore no underwear. Their message machine ended the phone's intrusion.

"Mmm, you are so sexy," he breathed against her, and their lips joined in velvet heat, tongues dipping inside one another's mouths to bring extra sizzle to the actions of their hands on their bodies.

"Lachlan," Hailey moaned, as she pushed down his boxer briefs and his thickened penis bumped promisingly against her belly. She felt the drop of moisture from its tip dampen the skin just above her navel.

"Okay, you two, whatever you're doing, stop," ordered a voice from midair.

"Bill?" they said together.

"One of you pick up the phone."

Lachlan looked at Hailey. "You want to take it?"

She stalked to the phone and hit the speaker button. "What is it, Bill?"

"Get your clothes on," he said with a snort. "I can't leave you two alone for a minute without you going at it like rabbits in heat."

"We are married, and do have two days off—even though Lachlan has to do a public appearance tomorrow, thank you!"

"Yeah, yeah, cry me a river, baby—"

"Bill, you're calling for a reason, I assume," she said.

"Spit it out, Mr. Director," added Lachlan.

"We've had a post-prod problem. We need Hailey in the studio for the next day-and-a-half to re-shoot the boardroom scenes."

Hailey scrunched up her face. "Come on, Bill. We just finished those yesterday."

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“Yeah, but an intern made an error, and we have to do it again.”

Feeling sorry for the intern, likely quaking in fear of a lost job, Hailey forced a grin into her voice. “Oh, well, *c’est la vie*.”

“Bill, Hailey was going to come to Indian Wells with us,” said Lachlan.

Hailey looked at him, and she knew her surprise was etched on her face.

“I need you,” he whispered, tracing a finger over her breast.

She caught her bottom lip in her teeth to restrain the moan she felt breaking free at his touch.

“Get your hands off my star, Lachlan,” said Bill. “You get your ass to Indian Wells, and I’ll keep her busy here. She won’t even miss you. When you’re back, I’ll give you both a long weekend, with no appearances or shooting...promise.”

“Okay, okay,” Hailey answered. “But we’re holding you to that long weekend, boss man.”

“See you at five a.m.” Bill signed off before Hailey’s expletives could reach his ears.

Hailey and Lachlan looked at each other—still naked and wanting each other as if they hadn’t enjoyed one another minutes earlier. Lachlan’s penis jutted straight up, its head a deep, glistening purple. Hailey’s nipples stood out like peachy beads of passion.

“I want you to come with me—if for no other reason than to keep Nicole at bay.”

“Ha! Chicken. Just because she had her hooks out for you before I came along.”

“No kidding. She gives new meaning to the word ‘predatory.’ Thank goodness her sites are set on Jeff for the moment,” said Lachlan with obvious heartfelt relief. “But for now, I have to have *you*.” He ran his hands down her willing body.

“How would you like me?” Hailey shimmied in front of him,

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knowing how much he loved to see her full breasts jiggle.

“I’ll take you any way, any time.”

Hailey smiled as she sank to her knees, then placed her hands on the floor, too. She glanced up at him over her left shoulder. “Do me, Lachlan. Hurry...I want to come.”

Lachlan knelt behind his wife and ran his hands down her back, over her firm butt cheeks and between her legs. He tickled through her folds, her excitement coating his fingers with her distinctive musk. When he found her clit, Hailey dropped down onto her forearms and spread her legs wider for him.

He sank his cock deeply into her, easing into a rhythm that carried them both forward as if on wings. His fingers continued to play with her labia and clit, and her breasts brushed against the cool ceramic tile of the floor.

Hailey could feel her orgasm building, forming like a tsunami. She squeezed her vagina in an attempt to catch up to the frothing turbulence, and seized her passion just as it crested. As she rode the wave, she heard Lachlan’s groan and his cock’s cadence pause as he pulsed inside her.

“Aaaah,” he breathed his release. “You are so good, Hailey.”

“We’re good together. I love you, Lachlan, and how you make love to me.”

“It’s my goal to make you feel that way always,” he promised as he kissed his way up her body. Reaching her neck, he pulled her hair out of his way, and slid his tongue into the folds of her ear. He flicked his tongue in and out, mimicking the age-old dance they’d just performed.

Hailey pouted. “I don’t want you out of me yet, lover, but I need to kiss you.”

“I think we can work on that.” Lachlan moved her between his legs, turning her under him without totally pulling his semi-erect cock out of her. As she settled under him, she felt him harden again.

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Hailey's eyes lit up. "Yes..."

And the in-and-out began once more, their sweat-slick bodies bouncing together and carrying them to ecstasy again.

* * *

Hailey had just finished blowing her hair dry when she heard the doorbell. Jeff was back with Nicole, and Lachlan would be leaving in a few minutes. Her heart dropped. She knew she'd miss curling up against him in their queen-size bed. *Which we never even made it to today*, she thought with a grin.

She walked down the hall in time to hear a too-sexy-to-be-real voice saying, "So we're spending the night together again, Lachy."

"We'll be in the same city, Nicole."

"The same hotel, Lachy...even the same suite."

"What are you talking about?" His voice was incredulous.

"Since we had to change the reservation to two nights, they had to put us in a suite."

"The three of us?" asked Lachlan, suspicion clear in his tone.

"Of course not. How would that look? Just you and me in a suite, and Jeff in a separate room."

Hailey snorted as she walked in the room. "And why on earth would you and my husband be in a suite, while Jeff's in a separate room? You and a married man?"

"Well..." Nicole turned to Hailey with a superior smile. "It really only makes sense. If the two guys were to share—and if the tabloids were to get a hold of that—think of the rumors..." She raised her eyebrows and showed her teeth. "And those tabloid reporters seem to be everywhere these days."

"You still haven't said why you and Lachlan should share a room."

"Jeff and I are both single, and Lachlan is supposed to be happily married to you." Nicole looked at the three other people as if that should explain everything.

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“And that means you and *I* would share a room because—?” asked Lachlan finally.

“Because everyone knows you’d never cheat on your sweet Hailey.” Nicole’s mouth curled into an unattractive sneer. “So, grab your bag, Lachy, and let’s hit the road. Our hotel room awaits, and so does our public.”

“Nope. I’ve got a call to make.” Lachlan picked up the phone and asked Information for the hotel’s number. In moments he was connected and had arranged for three separate rooms. “You can keep the suite, Nicole. I’ve got my own room in a separate wing, and Jeff’s just down the hall from you.”

Nicole tossed her head and stalked out the front door without another word. Jeff followed with a grin. “Don’t take too long kissing her good-bye, buddy,” he tossed over his shoulder from the front door.

Hailey stepped into Lachlan’s arms. “You handled that perfectly.”

“I hope so. Nicole can be a real pain in the ass.”

“I know, but I think she’s pretty clear where things stand right now. And besides—” Hailey smiled up at him. “—you can always bolt your door.”

Lachlan’s lips slid over hers as his laughter rumbled up from his chest. And then Hailey forgot about everyone but the two of them as their tongues touched and tickled, and their hands stroked each other’s backs. Their lips were soft heat, binding them to one another until they couldn’t tell where one of them stopped and the other started.

The jarring of a car horn interrupted them. They laughed as they pulled apart and walked, arms around each other’s waists, to the front door. Before he grabbed his duffel bag, Lachlan leaned in for three quick kisses. Then he lifted her hair back over her shoulder and stroked the back of his forefinger down her cheek.

“Be safe while I’m gone. I’ll be thinking of you,” he said.

“I’ll be thinking of you, too. Have a safe trip. I love you.”

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“I love you back.”

And then he was gone, off to Indian Wells and fans eager to see him, take his picture and get an autograph. Hailey closed the door and headed to the library to find the script she needed to review.

* * *

It was still dark when the alarm sounded at three-thirty the next morning. Hailey growled in the back of her throat and hit the snooze bar. She did that twice more before she forced herself from bed and straight into the shower in an attempt to regain full consciousness.

Hailey pulled her long hair into a ponytail, and slipped into her favorite jeans and a sweatshirt. It was chilly in the mornings and she wanted to be warm for the drive in. Besides, since she'd be in wardrobe at the studio in short order, there didn't seem to be any need to dress up. She downed a glass of orange juice, grabbed an oatmeal bar and was in her car by four-thirty. It would take her nearly forty minutes to get to work. She'd be able to get a cup of green tea from the commissary and still be on time.

By six a.m., Hailey was in character as Trinko, dressed in a designer business suit, her hair pulled into the same French braid she'd worn when the same scene had been taped earlier. She had on the same too-tight stilettos, and her face was perfectly made up. The crew and actors spent a couple of hours re-blocking the scene, and did one quick run-through before Bill called for the cameras to roll.

They took a short break mid-morning. Hailey called Lachlan, knowing he'd already be at the mall, and left a message on his hotel phone. She grabbed an apple from the caterer's table and another cup of green tea, and settled at a table with a couple of other actresses.

“Hey, Hailey,” said Bethany, who played the twenty-something heiress on *Love in the Afternoon*. “I heard you had to re-shoot this morning. That's a pain, isn't it?”

“Oh, well, it's better than the poor intern getting fired.”

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“True. I remember when I first started out, I was so terrified of making a mistake, they had to run my scenes up to ten times before I’d relax enough for them to get a decent take,” offered Angela, who portrayed the heiress’ mother.

They laughed and reminisced about gaffs they’d all made.

“And then,” Hailey continued, “Lachlan got out of bed, and the sheets were still pinned to his underwear. He pulled off every bit of material and there I sat wearing next to nothing!”

“I heard Nicole Jackson once actually did a love scene in the nude—with some guy she was hot for—and supposedly ‘forgot’ and got out of bed starkers,” said Angela. “Every once in a while it shows up on a blooper tape.”

“That sounds like Nicole. I’m assuming there was a leak to a tabloid about it, too?”

“Absolutely,” confirmed Bethany. “You know her—she’ll do anything to get some ink, or a blurb on *Entertainment Tonight*.”

The P.A. system coughed to life. “Hailey to the boardroom set in five, please.”

Hailey shrugged. “Back to the salt mines. See you at lunch.”

* * *

At the afternoon break, Hailey noticed a couple of the crew looking at her. They glanced away quickly when she smiled and lifted her hand to wave. *They look embarrassed. Is my hair falling down? Is my skirt caught up?* At the break table, two people got up as she approached.

“See you later,” the script supervisor called, hurrying away.

Hailey was beginning to feel a bit paranoid. Just then Angela arrived, coffee cup in hand and a sympathetic smile on her face. “How’re you doing, Hailey?”

“I’m kind of weirded out, to be honest. Everyone seems to be avoiding me.”

“Ahh, you haven’t heard the latest then.”

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“The latest what? Did someone get fired?” It was always hard when an actor, even one on recurring status, was let go.

“No. This has to do with the trip to Indian Wells.”

Hailey’s heart rate ratcheted up instantly. “Was there an accident? Oh, God, please no. Don’t let anyone be hurt.”

Andrea put her hand over Hailey’s. “No, sweetie, I’m sorry. I didn’t handle this very well.” She paused. “It’s that stupid bitch, Nicole.”

“What did she do now?” Hailey felt her panic begin to subside at the relief no one was dead or injured.

“Get ready, sweetie. This isn’t pretty.” Angela handed Hailey what was obviously a print out from a website. “It’s a picture you’re not going to like...someone at the appearance snapped this with a digital camera and uploaded it to the main LITA fan site.”

Hailey’s hand trembled only slightly as she reached for the paper. “Reunited?” asked the headline. “Fan Favorites in Clinch,” read the cut line under a photo of Lachlan, arms wrapped protectively around Nicole. Her naked back was to the camera, while she stared up into his face, her mouth less than an inch from his.

“I’m sorry,” said Angela. “It’s probably from a scene they’re doing.”

“Topless? Let me read that. I want to know what’s going on.”

Hailey swallowed hard as she forced herself to read the article. Nicole and Lachlan were announcing they were involved again. “We got here last night, and our passion just exploded,” the actress was quoted as saying. “I’m sorry some people will be hurt, but we couldn’t help ourselves.” There was no statement from Lachlan.

Hailey closed her eyes on the pain that hit her like a physical blow. She could hear Angela speaking, but couldn’t understand a word the other woman was saying. Hailey gulped for air, unable to get enough oxygen into her lungs. She stood, and it was the last thing she remembered.

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* * *

When Hailey's eyes fluttered open, she didn't know where she was, or who was with her, but she instantly remembered that Lachlan was in Indian Wells with Nicole. She clenched her jaw, unwilling to cry. A hand stroked over her forehead and cupped her cheek.

"Are you okay, sweetie?"

Hailey recognized Angela's voice. As she glanced around, Hailey realized she was in a moving car. "How did you get me here?" The strength of her voice surprised her.

"I just got you to the wheelchair we've been using for Tori's scenes, and wheeled you here. Easy as pie."

"I've got to get home."

"I know. I told Bill you didn't feel well and he's sending you home in this studio car."

"Thanks."

"I'll ask my husband to follow me out to your place tomorrow, so I can get your car back to you then."

"Thanks." She closed her eyes again, and let the sounds of the highway drown out the questions screaming through her head.

Angela got Hailey settled in, made her supper and watched while she ate every bite. Then she stayed by Hailey's side all night, even when all Hailey did was pace the floor of her bedroom for hours, occasionally sobbing in tortured loss. The phone never rang.

In the morning, Angela took her leave after Hailey had assured her she would be fine. As soon as she was gone, Hailey flew back to the bedroom. She wanted everything of Lachlan's out of there before he got home.

"Hell, I want it out of my house," she muttered, gathering an armful of shirts and pants. She stomped to the front door, pulled it open and walked to the driveway. She dumped everything in a heap, then repeated the procedure until Lachlan's closet and dresser drawers were

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empty. Then she collected his cds and books, and threw them on the pile of his belongings.

Hailey then changed into her swim suit and swam laps for twenty minutes.

Nothing helped. The pain of Lachlan's betrayal was as fresh as if she'd just cut herself, and as deep as if the wound went to her soul.

Drifting on the air mattress in the pool, she closed her eyes, willing herself back to the day before when she and Lachlan had made love. She felt his hands on her body, his mouth on hers, his cock claiming her climax. Hailey ran her hands over herself, drifting fingers across nipples that puckered under her touch. She slipped off the air mattress and stripped out of her bathing suit, leaving the two bits of cloth on the edge of the pool. She drove herself to more laps, hoping to end the aching memory of Lachlan making love to her; of being on her knees, pulling his cock in and out of her mouth; of his come drying on her body.

Hailey climbed back onto the air mattress, this time stretching out on her stomach, avoiding the temptation to masturbate. She floated into the shade at the end of the pool and drifted, emotionally and physically exhausted. She'd trusted Lachlan with her body and her spirit...and now it was done. Her marriage and their relationship had been smashed on the rocks of infidelity. She closed her eyes, remembering the lovemaking they'd shared, the dreams they'd had.

She felt his fingers touch her ankles, brushing up the calves and rubbing gentle circles up the backs of her thighs, and she sighed in contentment. Lachlan always knew how to get her juices flowing. She spread her thighs slightly. As strong fingers dipped into her, she moaned his name.

A tongue followed the fingers, and she twitched under the caress, her body slick with excitement. The sweet torture of touch continued and her passion grew. She writhed on her floating bed, surrounded by

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warm water, drowning in the growing strength of her impending orgasm.

“Lachlan, I love you,” she cried as she crested and her body exploded.

“I love you, too.”

In shock, she twisted to her side. There in the water beside her was Lachlan. He smiled as he reached forward to kiss her again. Her rage detonated and she slapped him so hard she fell into the water. Struggling to her feet, pushing her sodden hair back over her shoulders, she glared at him.

“What was that for?” His confusion was clear on his face. “Aren’t you glad to see me?”

“What? Glad to see... Why the hell would I be...” Words failed her.

“I rented a car and drove back early,” he said. “I missed you so much. And Nicole said she didn’t feel well and wanted to stay on for a day or two.” He snorted. “I’m sure she’s discovered by now that I’ve checked out. No way I want to babysit her the way she is right now.”

“It appears you were doing a helluva lot more than babysitting her. Is she still a good fuck, Lachy?” Hailey’s voice scalded the pet name Nicole used.

Lachlan’s brow furrowed. “What’s going on, Hailey? I thought you’d be as glad to see me as I am to see you.”

“Hardly.”

“What’s wrong? And, by the way, what are my clothes doing in the driveway?”

“Waiting for you to pick them up.”

“Hailey, I have no idea what the problem here is. When I left, we were so connected, so in the same place. I come home and it’s like you hate me.”

Hailey looked more closely at him. It was clear he had no clue why

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she was angry. Did he think she didn't know?

"Lachlan, did anything happen when you were in Indian Wells?"

He laughed. "You heard about it, did you? It was incredible, but hardly worth you being upset over."

"What?" The word jetted out of her, coated in ice and sulfur.

"Nicole was being her typical self, flirting with all the good-looking men in the crowd. She had on this silly top that laced up, and somehow she managed to catch one of the ties on something." He shook his head. "It pulled down to her waist like it was two sizes too big. And she didn't have anything on under it. Talk about a wardrobe malfunction."

Hailey felt her heart begin to unclench. Each breath didn't rip its way into her lungs any more. The incident in Indian Wells must have been just another of Nicole's stunts to get publicity. "Let me guess. She launched herself into your arms to prevent being overexposed."

"Yep. For about five seconds until I grabbed a towel from the hair stylist. That's probably why she's complaining about being sick. God forbid she should run into someone who saw the whole thing! She'd be too embarrassed."

"Well, anyone who is a fan of the show and has an internet connection will see it," Hailey offered. "Towel off, and let me show you what Nicole arranged for the world to see."

Hailey took Lachlan on a tour of the *Love in the Afternoon* fan site, letting him see the picture, read the headlines and the article. He was fuming by the time he finished. He slammed his hand against the desktop. "That stupid woman...if she had a brain, she'd be dangerous." He paused. "Someone showed you this, didn't they?"

Hailey nodded.

"It explains the pile of my belongings in the driveway." He grinned and she returned it. "But, Hailey, come on..."

"It was stupid, I know, but it caught me by surprise, and it looked so real. Everyone at the studio was avoiding me and I couldn't reach you."

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“That’s because my cell phone was turned off. Which I didn’t know until I tried to call you earlier today.”

“Nicole,” they said together.

“That bitch,” added Hailey. “She turned it off.”

“I left you a bunch of messages,” said Lachlan. “But I figured you were at work and that was why I didn’t hear back from you.”

“I didn’t call you because I couldn’t talk to you. I was too angry. You know, this whole mess reads like a storyline from work, doesn’t it? Scheming, desperate woman concocts a story to break up lovers.” She laughed. “I’m an idiot to have jumped to all the wrong conclusions. I played right into Nicole’s hands.” She lifted her eyes to his. “When the only hands I want playing with me are yours.”

“I can definitely oblige...and you *are* dressed for it.”

Hailey realized they were both naked. Lachlan must have shed his clothes when he got in the pool with her. His hands reached out, tweaking gently at both her nipples at the same time. She grabbed his cock, eager to feel its sleek steel in her hands. He rose to her grasp, filling her fingers with hot flesh. They pressed together, skin to skin—from breast to knees—reveling in their varied textures, and common passion.

The phone rang, and they looked at it, then returned to touching one another, enjoying the slow buildup.

After the machine tape invited the caller to leave a message, Nicole’s voice rang clearly in the library. “Hi, Hailey. Just thought I’d better give you a call. I imagine you’ve seen what happened here in Indian Wells. We’re sorry...it was just more than Lachy and I could bear when we found ourselves together again. We didn’t mean to hurt you.” Insincerity echoed in her voice. “It just happened, Hail. But we’re all adults, and we’ll get through this, I know.”

Hailey looked at Lachlan and he nodded. She smiled and winked at her husband before she snatched up the receiver and panted into the

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phone, “Nicole, is that you?”

“Yeah, Hailey. It is. I was calling to apologize.”

“How did you know to call right now?” Hailey started with surprise as Lachlan dropped to the floor in front of her. He nudged her thighs apart with caressing fingers. “I mean, do you have some kind of a sixth sense?” She couldn’t stop the gasp triggered by Lachlan’s explorations. “Oh,” she breathed, heart pounding wildly at the sensations triggered by Lachlan tonguing her clit. “Oh...I’ve gotta go, Nicole.” She dropped the phone back into the cradle. “I’m coming.”

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