

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ELLORA'S CAVE
Quickies

Christmas Cash
MAGGIE CASPER

White *Hot* Holidays

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Christmas Cash

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CHRISTMAS CASH

Maggie Casper

Chapter One

There was a definite nip in the air, enough to chill but not enough to freeze just yet. Standing on the street corner in a jacked-up costume on the day after Thanksgiving wasn't Noelle Jacobs' idea of fun, but it was necessary.

Since hunk extraordinaire, Cash McCain, refused to give her a job at Raising Cain, the McCain family bar, Noelle had no choice but to take the seasonal work.

It was bad enough she'd decided on the spur of the moment to move back home with no job lined up. The decision left her no choice but to accept the graciousness of her parents and the small apartment above their garage.

But as wonderful as her parents were, Noelle wasn't thrilled about moving back home at the age of twenty-six. Especially when her parents were sure something horrible had happened to bring her back home.

She tried to tell them there was no huge tragedy in her life. It was simple, really. Noelle was just tired of the hustle and bustle of city life. She yearned for home.

Poking her eyes out with fiery hot nails seemed preferable to asking her parents for money. Instead, she'd swallowed her pride and asked Cash, who also happened to be her best friend's brother, for a job.

She'd gone into Raising Cain before opening time, intent on leaving employed, but Cash had not so nicely shot that idea to hell with some lame excuse about her being too young to work in a bar. Their heated conversation and all that took place that day still made her ears ring and her core ache with need.

"How can you say that when Casey works here?" Noelle looked around the dimly lit interior of the bar, loving the rustic atmosphere. It had a definite traditional country feel to it. Everything about the place reminded her of Cash.

He'd shrugged his massive shoulders, pulling Noelle from her thoughts, then crossed his arms over the wide expanse of his chest. "She's a McCain."

He'd evidently thought that little fact to be explanation enough, but once started, Noelle was like a dog with a bone. She didn't easily give up.

"Oh give me a freakin' break. What in the hell does that have to do with working at a bar? We're the same damned age, Cash, and you know it."

Her words seemed to irritate him, causing a frown to crease his brow. His next words were spoken in a low, menacing voice.

"Everyone around here knows causing harm to Casey wouldn't be good for their health."

"You're nuts if you think her name is the only thing keeping her safe and the lack of it would make me a target. Think about how damned stupid that sounds, Cash!" Noelle was feeling a bit irate. Men could be such annoying bastards.

Noelle opened her mouth to continue her argument but was cut short when Cash pushed off the bar to stand directly in front of her. He grasped her upper arms, turned and lifted her until her ass landed firmly on the bar.

All thought of arguing fled when Cash wrapped his arms around her lower back, pulling her to the edge of the bar. When his head dipped toward the juncture of her thighs, Noelle thought she'd shatter into a million pieces.

He was so sinfully close Noelle could hardly catch her breath. His scent wafted around her, drawing her deeper under his spell. He nipped at her clothes, catching her thin pants and panties between his teeth in the process. Noelle couldn't help but gasp when Cash let them go with a snap. He seemed to enjoy teasing her.

The fingers of one hand kneaded her ass but it was his other hand that caught her attention and kept it. With sure, deft movements, Cash rubbed her through the thin barrier of her drawstring pants. He had to feel how hot and wet she was.

Noelle was so consumed with lust it never even dawned on her that she might want to say something, to insist he stop. When he used his thumb, adding pressure against the already sensitive bud of her clit, Noelle nearly shot off the bar her climax was so sudden.

She was a boneless heap when Cash pulled her from the bar. "Careful," he murmured against her ear as he turned her away from him.

The feel of his warm breath against her neck sent shivers of delight coursing through her body even though his mouth didn't actually touch her.

"This," Cash growled while pressing the thick length of his cock to her ass, "is why you can't work here. You're a distraction I don't need or want."

His words struck like lightning, cooling Noelle's ardor as if she'd been doused with a bucket of cold water.

"You...you..." Noelle hadn't been prepared for the impact of Cash's refusal or how he'd go about doing it. She was so angry forming a coherent sentence seemed impossible.

"This conversation...this *lesson* is over, Noelle. The answer is no. You should know me well enough to know I won't change my mind."

The damned man was built like a brick wall and had the mentality to match. There was just no swaying him once he made a decision, and he certainly wasn't known for his willingness to compromise, which was why Noelle found herself standing on the street corner dressed as Mrs. Claus and ringing a stupid bell.

The only joy she got out of the whole damned fiasco was the knowledge that she'd been stationed right across the street from Raising Cain. Knowing Cash was trying to sleep in his apartment above the bar made everything bearable.

The giggle that escaped her chilled lips was one of sheer wickedness. Cash McCain was going to have a miserably annoying Christmas season if she had anything to do with it.

Noelle rang her bell with enthusiastic cheer, smiling at every passerby as if they were her best friend. Even though she was always prompt, Noelle was going to be extra responsible in the days to come. Showing up early for work every morning might not get her a bonus, but it was sure going to make things much more fun.

When the front door of Raising Cain slammed open ten minutes later, Noelle was digging through her duffle bag for lip gloss. The errant thought running through her mind to bring a purse instead of her duffle bag was cut short by the vision of Cash standing there in nothing more than a pair of drawstring pants, which nearly knocked the breath out of her, but she was easily able to cover her near blunder with a wide smile.

It bit the big one that the arrogant ass knew just how much he turned her on. Now he'd probably take the information and use it against her, relentlessly teasing and torturing her with it.

The thought of Cash doing anything remotely close to teasing or torturing her made her nipples swell and ache. He was so big. Big hands, big feet, big all over. Noelle's feminine core couldn't help but wonder what the rest of him was like.

Would his cock be in proportion to the rest of his body? Noelle could almost picture it, thick and long with veins lying just below the surface. Her mouth watered just thinking about the utterly erotic possibilities.

She'd give just about anything to find out, but evidently Cash was hung up on age. At thirty-six Cash was ten years older than Noelle and therefore thought of her as off-limits. Of course, that didn't mean she was going to give up, it just meant she had to rethink her strategy.

Noelle loved a challenge. Hell, even her mama always said that if you didn't have to work for what you wanted, it probably wasn't worth having in the first place. The thought made her smile.

Knowing full well she had his attention, Noelle waggled her fingers in Cash's direction then loudly greeted those walking by.

Happy Holidays!

Cash wanted to murder someone. It was ten minutes after nine in the morning and cold enough outside to shrivel a man's balls. Undeterred by the cold, Noelle dressed in a tiny red dress with no more than a sweater on for warmth, stood on the corner ringing the bell from hell.

Her mile-long legs were covered in white stockings but they couldn't be enough to keep her warm in Cash's opinion. Hell, even the Santa hat perched on the top of her pretty little head sat at a jaunty angle. How was it possible for anyone to be awake so early in the morning, much less coherent and perky?

Cash wanted to march across the street and cover her in the bulk of one of his jackets. To haul her into the kitchen for a cup of hot chocolate with marshmallows on top just as he'd done when she and Casey were younger. It didn't seem possible that they were already grown women.

Especially Noelle. Hell, when she'd left town, she'd still been stuck between being a child and a woman, sort of gangly and awkward, a definite late bloomer. Cash closed his eyes briefly, trying to remember the last time he'd seen her up close and personal, and for the life of him, he couldn't remember.

Surely he'd seen her in the time between her leaving for school and her return home just a few weeks ago? Life had been grueling and busy back then, but that was no excuse. Cash felt a twinge of guilt at the knowledge.

The persistent ringing of the bell stopped, leaving nothing but the normal sounds of life. Cash opened his eyes to see Noelle squatting down in front of a child. A beautiful smile curved her lips, it looked nothing like the mischievous grin she'd bestowed upon him when young or the sneer she'd been aiming at him lately.

Realizing she was no longer the gangly teenager she once had been was like a blow to the solar plexus, stealing the breath from his lungs. Time had been more than nice to Noelle, filling her out in a way that made Cash's mouth water.

From her large, obviously real breasts to the nipped-in expanse of her waist, over gently curved hips and down the long, long expanse of leg she loved to show, Noelle Jacobs was all woman.

My woman!

The caveman in him growled. Cash would love nothing more than to drag her off to his lair to do with as he pleased. No matter how hard he fought it, Cash could no longer act like the responsible, big brotherly type toward Noelle.

She'd probably run as fast as her pink-tipped toes would take her when she found out the way he liked his sex. Being the impertinent minx she was, Noelle would probably plant her palm across his cheek, earning her an ass-burning spanking in the process.

"Dammit!" Cash muttered the curse as he backed into the bar. He didn't slam the door. To do so would only prove how much Noelle was getting to him. Something Cash wasn't quite ready to admit. Admitting he had feelings for Noelle, feelings that went deeper than he was willing to deal with, would open up Pandora's box and, sure as shit, all hell would break loose.

Cash made his way back through the bar and up the back stairs to his apartment. He enjoyed the dark wood and earth tones that seemed to engulf him every time he stepped through the door. No matter what was going on in his life, his apartment was always a place of retreat, his castle.

Cash showered and dressed even though he was nowhere near ready for the day. Coffee and food seemed to help but nothing could make the noise that blasted bell was making sound better.

At the end of his rope Cash stalked across the street. He didn't slow down to speak to those around him or acknowledge another soul. He didn't stop until he was face-to-face with Noelle, their chilled breaths mingling in the scant inches that separated them.

"What are you doing out here?"

She looked at him as if he'd grown horns. Then she began speaking slowly as if she were afraid he might not comprehend what she was saying. "I'm. Working." The damned imp even had the audacity to exaggeratedly move her lips. When she was finished mocking him on the street corner for all to see, she smiled.

She must be insane, Cash decided. Not many grown men were willing to go up against him, much less a woman who, when compared to his size, would be considered tiny.

Of course that didn't seem to stop her. Pulling herself up straight, Noelle glared at him before asking, "Why? What are you doing here?"

Cash wasn't certain how to answer the loaded question. If he admitted that her bell was driving him insane, she'd only ring it louder and even more obnoxiously. If he admitted that he didn't like the fact she was only partially dressed and standing out in the cold, she'd know he cared more than he should.

He knew she had a crush on him. She wasn't worldly enough to keep her emotions well hidden and even if she were, she'd never even so much as tried. Instead, she flirted shamelessly whenever the chance arose.

This one was going to be tricky. Cash was going to have to pull out the big guns and play the big overbearing brother, something he was very good at. If Noelle were anything like Casey, she'd be huffing mad in no time.

He was annoyed, just as Noelle had hoped. She had no problem with standing out on the sidewalk, freezing her ass off, if that's what it would take to make it impossible for Cash to ignore her. He never should have refused her the job, especially for some lame-ass excuse, because now she was on a mission, no matter the outcome. And to prove his point by using her sexuality was plain wrong. Noelle was going to make sure he knew it too.

It was bad enough that she had to stand on a street corner ringing a bell instead of working in the nice, warm interior of Raising Cain, but to have him waltz across the street all high and mighty as if he owned the whole damned block was too much.

She could be making a nice wage, but *nooo*, her sarcastic side chided, the almighty Cash McCain had to go and refuse her. The more irritated Noelle became, the more calm her outer appearance seemed. She was raging on the inside, but kept her smile sweet and charming. Deep down, she knew it was the only way to deal with the larger-than-life man, especially if she had any chance of opening his eyes to the truth.

I might be the same age as your baby sister, but there is nothing childish about me. Not the things I want to do to every inch of your muscular body, or the things I want you to do to mine.

If only she could say the words aloud. Noelle inwardly sighed, knowing it wasn't going to happen anytime soon. If there was one thing about her that would turn Cash off, it would be blatant forwardness.

So, she'd walk right on the edge, be just forward enough to irritate the hell out of him, flirting and sashaying about every time she was in his presence, not giving him any choice but to see her for the woman she was. And she'd do it all without crossing the line.

Who knows, Noelle thought to herself, maybe her actions would push him over the edge and he'd take her in a frenzy of angry sex.

The thought made her shiver.

"It's too cold out here to be dressed the way you are."

His words caught her off guard, surprising the smile right off her face. "So either you go home and change or—"

Noelle couldn't help but laugh. Not a giggle, an outright laugh. "Or what, you'll put me on restriction?" she taunted, not at all believing the man really thought she would just fall in line and do what he said, just because he said it. It was unreal.

Cash didn't seem at all amused by her outburst. Noelle wiped tears of mirth from her eyes, but the laughter just wouldn't stop. She wheezed and snorted and just about

the time she thought she had herself under control, she would look up, see his face and it would start all over again.

Cash on the other hand, had evidently had enough. "Noelle." His tone was undeniably peeved and brooked no argument.

"Oh sorry," she muttered, straightening from her doubled-over position. Noelle wasn't at all sorry, but when it came to Cash, it was best to act a bit repentant.

A dark brown brow arched over green eyes flecked with gold. "Either you change or you come to Raising Cain for a thicker coat, one that actually fits." Cash gestured to her too thin sweater.

His look of exasperation quickly changed to one of lust. His hooded lids spoke of something dark and sensual. He seemed to be in a trance, as if he couldn't pull his eyes away from her chest, no matter the consequences.

Following his gaze, Noelle lowered her eyes only to find her nipples prominently displayed through the lace of her bra and the thin fabric of her dress. Instead of crossing her arms over her chest in an attempt at modesty, she slowly started buttoning her sweater, from the bottom up.

When her fingers reached the button at the rise of her breasts, Cash's gaze snapped up and locked with hers. His eyes were dark and his pupils dilated. Color rode high on his cheeks and Noelle would bet it had nothing at all to do with the cold.

It didn't matter how hard she tried, Noelle couldn't keep her eyes locked on his. Not when the possibility of glimpsing his straining erection made her mouth water. She lowered her eyes to his fly, not even trying to hide where she was looking.

Damn!

She'd always known he was going to be awe-inspiring, beautiful even, but the sight of the thick ridge straining against the zippered fly of his jeans was just too much.

“Goddammit, Noelle! Knock that shit off.” Cash’s voice thundered through the haze of lust clouding her thoughts. Never before had he been able to embarrass her, and yet, this time he’d accomplished it without even trying.

She cleared her throat, trying to hide her discomfort then looked around her, hoping no one had witnessed her blatantly gawking at Cash’s crotch. “All right, already. I’ll come to the bar and borrow a heavier coat.”

Huffing a huge sigh of relief when Cash turned away from her, Noelle wondered for the first time since returning home if she was getting in way over her head.

Chapter Two

She was following him. Cash knew it even though he had yet to turn and see for himself. Her scent enveloped him like a gentle breeze, tickling his senses while making his cock throb to life. Knowing she had the ability to make him as stiff as a fence post without even trying irritated Cash to no end.

If Noelle ever really set her mind to seducing him, Cash knew he'd be screwed. Literally.

He opened the door to Raising Cain for Noelle. He had to hide his grin as she stomped through, making her anger known. She was a stubborn piece of baggage, that was for sure.

"Go on up and find something...warmer in my closet." Noticing once again the peaked tips of her beautiful breasts made Cash stumble over his words.

He didn't follow her up or offer to help. To do so would be asking for trouble Cash didn't need. Besides, it wasn't as if his place was so big she wouldn't be able to find the closet, he reminded himself as he set about making hot chocolate.

Noelle returned in moments. She looked utterly adorable and devastatingly sexy all but swallowed whole by his coat. She didn't look too happy, however.

"This is never going to work, Cash. Dammit! I can hardly move."

Noelle flapped her arms like a bird taking flight to make her point. The sleeves of his coat stopped several inches below her fingertips. The hem didn't stop until nearly her knees.

Perfect.

"Watch your mouth and come here so I can roll the sleeves, darlin'. Unless you want to pack up and head home?"

By the look on her face, Cash knew Noelle didn't much care for the choices he'd given her. "I'll be staying. Hurry up so I can get back to my post."

Noelle kept her eyes glued to the front window. Chaos was a small Texas town, with family-oriented folks but just like any other place on earth, there was occasional theft. She'd brought her little red money pot with her but her belongings sat on the sidewalk right where she'd left them.

"You brought a duffle," Cash commented, motioning across the street, "but not a coat?" He'd never understand women and the way their minds worked.

"It has my stuff in it and a change of clothes. I'm supposed to wear this getup while ringing the bell but I need something else for after and didn't want to have to drive all the way home."

Cash thought about her words for a minute. He wanted to know what she needed a change of clothes for but knew asking would raise her ire to an even higher level. She'd think he was being the bossy big brother again, when in reality, Cash was worried she might need the change of clothes for a hot date or something similarly wicked.

Jealousy won out. "What's the change of clothes for?" Cash winced at the gruffness of his voice.

Noelle raised a perfectly arched blonde brow at his tone. Could she tell he was getting jealous? Did she have any idea what the thought of her with another man did to him deep down inside?

"Jeez, lighten up already. I'll be job hunting after I finish my shift and I don't think this outfit is appropriate for the occasion."

Cash punched down the guilt threatening to choke him. He'd refused her a job because it was what was best for the both of them. He wasn't ready for anything permanent and even if he were, Noelle, as the best friend to his little sister, was off-limits.

“Come on over after you’re done and use my apartment to change.” He made the offer while mentally kicking himself. Once finished rolling the sleeves of the coat Noelle was wearing, he took a few steps back.

Noelle opened her mouth. Cash was sure it was to argue and didn’t give her the chance. Arms across his chest, stance wide, he narrowed his eyes. “It’s warmer here than a public restroom and cleaner, so don’t argue.”

She just stood there staring at him for a minute before she gave a single sharp nod of her head. Then, instead of stomping her foot or pouting as he expected, Noelle moved impossibly close to him. Heat radiated off her voluptuous body in waves, nearly pulling him in. It was her finger poking his chest that brought him back.

Her closeness was overwhelming as was the feel of her finger touching him. Even if it was just to poke at him. Cash caught her wrist on its next pass toward his chest and used it as leverage to jerk her body against his.

She was warm and pliant in his arms, a sure sign she was more than willing for anything he cast her way. Damn, the woman was going to be the death of him. Cash wasn’t sure it was possible to get close enough to ease the ache in his groin but he’d damn well try.

Without warning, Cash slanted his mouth over hers, licking and nibbling at her. “You taste so good,” he growled against her lips. “Open up for me, darlin’.”

Noelle parted her lips, taking everything he had to give as if they were made just for each other. When Cash finally broke the kiss to bury his face in the curve of her neck, Noelle was panting.

Erotic visions of Noelle and him together danced through his mind. Cash was sure some of the things he wanted to do to her delectable body were illegal.

When Noelle pushed closer, all but climbing his body, Cash lifted the hem of the jacket she still wore then pressed a knee between her thighs. She was hot against his leg. Her heat seeped into his body causing his balls to draw up close to the base of his shaft in anticipation.

Noelle whimpered low in her throat. The contact between their bodies wasn't enough to get her off and Cash wanted to see her fly apart. He needed to see the bliss on her face before he once again sent her off.

Just thinking about pissing her off again or even worse, making her cry, left him breathless and not in a good way. It was like a fist squeezing his insides, cruel and unusual, but there was no way around it because there was no future for the two of them together.

"Ride me, darlin'. Show me how pretty you look when you come."

Noelle's glazed eyes fixed on his face as he used her hips to pull her close, lifting until she was on the tips of her toes. When she gasped and rocked forward, increasing the pace Cash had set, he knew she was getting close.

"That's it, baby. Come on. Come for me, Noelle."

Cash dug his fingers into her hips, pulling her hard against him and she shattered. Her cry of completion as well as the scent of her arousal would haunt his nights for years to come.

Taking a deep breath, Cash tried to steel himself for what was to come. With a wealth of regret, he set Noelle away from him then, swallowing the bile that threatened to rise, he said, "Go finish your shift then go home, Noelle. This is no place for you."

"I'm not your little sister, Cash. Never was and never will be, so stop treating me like a goddamned child."

She was pissed and hurt, that much he was sure of. Her eyes shot green lasers at him. If looks could kill, he'd be six feet under in no time.

"Then stop acting like a goddamned child." Cash knew his words were harsh but she'd asked for it by throwing a fit. "I won't tell you again to watch your mouth either, darlin'."

Cash led Noelle to the door. Once outside, he turned her toward the street. She'd only taken one flouncing step away from him when Cash brought the palm of his hand down on her delectable ass.

Noelle yelped then looked around in abject horror as if being caught getting spanked was the worst possible thing in the world. Cash would have to keep that in mind.

"Watch your mouth, brat, and stop trying to push me. You won't like the outcome."

* * * * *

It was hard to stalk across the street as if in a huff of anger when she was so wet her cream was surely coating her thighs. Her damp panties clung to the folds of her pussy like a drunken lover.

Cash had swatted her. Making her climax had been great, the kiss so passionate Noelle was sure she'd be dreaming about it for days, but he'd actually spanked her ass! Noelle's mind swirled with arousal even as the curve of her ass stung. Even through multiple layers of fabric, she could feel the burn. Imagining what he could do to her bare flesh made her shiver with delight.

Cash would probably head for the hills if he knew he'd just partially fulfilled one of her all-time favorite erotic fantasies, forget the fact that he'd just brought her to a raging orgasm without taking even a stitch of clothing off.

The original skirmish might have involved a job at Raising Cain but in Noelle's mind, the only way she could truly be the victor was by claiming Cash. A dreamy smile curved her lips. Noelle straightened for a minute. She had to remember that pacing herself was the important part. If she intended to win the war, she'd have to take things slow.

A thought so brilliant it nearly blinded her flashed through her mind. Noelle studied the street, allowing her gaze to drift up one side and down the other. There were several small shops sporting antiques and collectibles but the main attraction,

besides Raising Cain, was the new sports bar Dooner's, which catered mostly to the college crowd.

It was rumored that the waitresses were all young ladies who wore low-riding jeans and tight sports-oriented T-shirts cropped at the bottom to show their midriffs.

Sounded like just the job Noelle needed to keep things interesting.

She hadn't applied there before out of loyalty to her friend Casey and the McCain family business but she'd been left with no choice in the matter since Cash refused to hire her.

She smiled again, a knowing smile the likes of which would make the devil himself tremble in fear. Happy once again, Noelle set out ringing her bell and spreading the holiday spirit with an extra boisterous flare.

Her voice was a bit hoarse by the end of her shift but Noelle felt light and springy. After loading her work-related supplies in the trunk of her car, she headed across the street to Raising Cain with nothing more than her duffle bag in hand.

"Hi, honey. I'm home," Noelle announced as she strode casually through the door.

Cash was behind the bar stocking bottles of beer in the cooler while talking to one lone customer. Red vinyl-covered stools stood beside the bar ready for the evening ahead, as did the chairs next to the tables. The floor had obviously been swept and mopped. On the floor, fresh sawdust had been scattered.

Noelle couldn't help herself. She was in such a good mood, knowing damned well she'd soon have the upper hand that she couldn't help but push her luck.

Cash had stopped working and was now just standing there staring at her, a confused look on his handsome face.

Noelle sidled up to him, happy to know she could shake him up just a bit. "Aren't you going to welcome me?" She laughed as she went up on tiptoe to kiss the side of his jaw. She'd have preferred his lips or even his cheek but Cash was too tall.

His extremely large hands grabbed a hold of her arms. His touch was firm but gentle as he placed her away from him.

“Don’t do that again.” His voice was strangled, low and raspy in a way Noelle had never heard it before.

Knowing she had to take it slow didn’t make it any easier. Deciding to lighten things up, Noelle smiled impishly. “Hey, you invited me to change my clothes, insisted really. Remember?” She batted her eyelashes for good measure.

Cash didn’t laugh. Hell, he didn’t even smile. He thrust a hand through his hair and sighed. “To change your clothes, Noelle. Nothing more.”

Her fingers itched to feel his hair. Would it be silky soft or coarse? It didn’t matter in the least. When she finally got the chance to clutch it between her fingers while Cash’s face was buried between her thighs, she wasn’t ever going to let go.

Noelle could feel her cheeks heat. Looking away from Cash’s intense gaze damn near took an act of Congress, but finally she managed. Could he tell she was aroused? He’d probably bellow the roof down if he knew exactly what it was she’d been thinking.

“Just checking, big boy. Just checking.” Noelle waggled her fingers just the way she knew would annoy him then fled to the stairs leading to Cash’s apartment.

Once inside, she hurriedly changed her clothes. She wanted to get over to Dooner’s before it got too busy. Maybe then she’d be able to talk the owner into taking on one more waitress.

If so, she’d be killing two birds with one stone. Not only would she have a decent paying job but, if she knew Cash half as well as she thought she did, it would piss him off to no end. What more could she ask for?

Noelle skipped down the steps light on her feet, her spirits soaring. With a smile on her face, she entered the cavernous room immediately searching out Cash. She finally found him in the storeroom with Connor and Carson, his younger twin brothers.

* * * * *

“The truck ought to be here anytime. Why don’t you two head out back and wait for it?”

Cash made the command sound like a request, but his brothers knew it for what it was worth.

“Sure,” Connor started, his smile growing by the second.

“Whatever you say,” Carson finished, his gaze bouncing first to Noelle then back to Cash.

Cash still found it funny the way they could finish each other’s sentences. What he didn’t find the least bit amusing was the way they were both staring at Noelle, looking her up and down as if she were a rich and creamy desert.

“Now would be good.” This time, Cash left no doubt as to his feelings on the matter. After Carson and Connor left, Cash turned back to Noelle.

Her honey blonde hair was loose, swinging around her shoulder, framing her features in a way that made his cock throb to life. The pale green orbs of her eyes held a wealth of mirth. The vixen was playing him again.

Cash decided to continue with her lessons. He’d give her a taste of her own medicine. His mind screamed for him to retreat but his mouth insisted he move forward, just for a taste.

He’d just scare her a bit. Cash knew not all women craved their loving rough and messy the way he liked it, so he’d use that little bit to gain leverage. To make her forget she’d ever had a crush on him.

“Come here.” Noelle’s eyes widened and the smile slipped from her face. “Now, Noelle.”

Her breath quickened at the sound of his voice, causing her breasts to bob enticingly beneath the confines of her too tight T-shirt.

She moved toward him slowly. Cash gave her no time to think or react before he gathered her close. Her hair swung around her shoulders as he jerked her against his chest, causing her unique scent to waft around them. Cash inhaled deeply, taking the scent of Noelle deep into his lungs.

For a second, her body stiffened against his tight hold. Cursing himself for a fool, Cash slanted his mouth across hers, plundering the moistness he found between her parted lips.

The urge to nip her lower lip was too enticing to fight. The feel of her warm flesh between his teeth was heavenly. Noelle's gasp at the sharp sting of pain was like music to his ears. Cash lapped at the hurt causing Noelle to all but melt into him. She was nearly purring in delight by the time he finished.

In mindless need, he clasped the finely rounded globes of her ass in his hands, pulling her close, grinding his hips against hers. Cash nearly came in his pants at the contact. The plan to run Noelle off had, in effect, backfired on him.

All thought of trying to salvage what was left of his sanity fled at the contact. Cash broke the kiss and stepped away from Noelle, but only for a moment, just long enough to lift her shirt above her breasts. The sight of her nearly naked chest made his mouth water.

Needing her nipples free for his mouth, Cash lowered the cups of her bra until her breasts spilled over the top, begging for his touch. Noelle shivered at the first touch of his tongue then groaned when he worried the erect nub between his teeth.

She seemed to enjoy the small bite of pain, a reaction that urged Cash on. He felt a bit of triumph at the dazed look on her face. Her normally clear eyes were glazed with lust and need.

Cash tried not to think of what it would be like to wake up every morning to the feel of her body snuggled against his, to take her every morning, in every way thinkable. Would she always look so luscious after he made love to her?

Cash's mind snapped back to the present. The need to be inside of her, to feel the fist-tight channel of her pussy throb around his cock made him mad with desire. Cash, knowing he was moving beyond the point of no return, wrenched her pants open. Then, dropping to his knees, he took them as well as her barely there panties with him.

As much as he wanted to taste her, to tease and torment her every fold, Cash just couldn't wait. He took only the time needed to unzip his fly and sheathe himself with a condom from his wallet before bending Noelle over the deep freezer sitting in the corner of the storeroom.

Within minutes Cash was balls deep inside her warm and willing body. He couldn't help but groan and shudder at the feel of her body gripping his so erotically tight.

"Fuck, baby, you feel good."

Cash pulled back then thrust home again. The slippery sounds of sex as well as their breath panting into the otherwise silent room urged him into a mind-blowing tempo guaranteed to have him seeing stars in minutes.

Noelle's white-knuckled hands grasped the edge of the freezer as if it were a lifeline. Her breathing was shallow and her body glowed with a fine sheen of perspiration. The sexy little sounds she was making grew louder as small spasms gripped and released Cash's cock.

Reaching forward, Cash braced a hand at the center of her back, holding her exactly where he wanted her.

"Hurry, Cash. Hurry!"

She didn't need to urge him on. Pistoning in and out of her body swiftly brought them both to completion. Light burst behind Cash tightly closed eyes, a growl of hunger tore from his throat as Noelle climaxed beneath him, taking Cash with her.

Cash didn't regain his bearings until Noelle squirmed beneath him in an attempt to dislodge his body. "Stay still."

Cash gathered her hands in his, placing them over her head, holding her in place. He wasn't quite ready to let her go yet and that knowledge made his knees weak with fear. He couldn't...wouldn't let himself think in long term.

"Let me up, Cash." Noelle didn't beg or whine. She seemed absolutely coherent, a thought that pissed Cash off to no end when he couldn't seem to string two thoughts together without feeling strangely panicked.

Reluctantly, Cash let her up. He removed and discarded the soiled protection into the nearest trash can then tucked his now flaccid cock back into the tight confines of his jeans before turning back to her.

Noelle seemed to be fine. Her jeans were back in place as was her shirt. Cash immediately missed the taste of her and wondered if he'd ever again have the chance to sink deep into her tight sheath.

"Wow!" Noelle breathed, looking at Cash from beneath her slightly lowered lids. She then ran her tongue across her swollen lower lip, all but inviting him to taste more.

Cash wanted to follow her tongue with his own. He'd made a huge tactical error. By tasting her and feeling her body against his, he hadn't put an end to what was between them, he'd merely upped the ante. For the first time, Cash realized there was no getting Noelle out of his system. He craved her like an adrenaline junkie needed a challenge.

Noelle stood before him, a woman who'd just been thoroughly fucked. There was a sparkle in her eyes that hadn't been there before and, for a moment, Cash was afraid she was going to jump him this time.

He'd just decided he wouldn't stop her when she said, "Well that was fun but I've got things to do and people to see. See ya later."

Cash stood there dumbfounded and irritated as hell as she walked out the door. His day, as well as the complicated mess of a fiasco only got worse when Connor and Carson both started snickering from the doorway behind him.

Chapter Three

Trembling legs were the least of Noelle's worries, but wonderful sex topped the list. She was pushing hard and although she knew her actions would end up biting her in the ass, she just couldn't seem to stop herself.

Cash was a commanding presence. Noelle had always known it, but the way he kissed her, nearly devouring her, took her breath away. Now that she was out in the chilled night air, catching her breath should be no problem.

Only that wasn't the case.

Remembering the way Cash had touched her, tormenting her with his hands, mouth, and the wicked length of his cock, left no denial as to how dominant he actually was.

Knowing she might very well be getting more than she'd bargained for sent shivers of anticipation up her spine. As soon as she finished speaking with the owner of Dooner's about a job, she'd go home and rest up for tomorrow.

If Cash thought he could touch her and kiss her the way he had, as a means of punishment or as a scare tactic, he was sadly mistaken. And Noelle planned to make sure he knew it.

It took a lot of concentration, but Noelle finally got her head on straight and her thoughts out of the gutter. By the time she reached Dooner's she was well prepared for what she hoped would be a lucrative waitressing job.

Forty minutes later, with a tray full of drinks in hand, Noelle began her training. She did well during the short, three-hour shift she pulled and planned to do even better tomorrow night when she came back for a full four hours.

Mona Sinclair, the owner of Dooner's, had hired her on the spot and within minutes, they'd come to an agreement. Noelle would work a four-hour shift, five days a

week until the Christmas season was over and then move on to full-time. By then, she ought to have the lay of the land and know how to wield a tray with precision. At least that's what Mona had said.

Just knowing she was now gainfully employed took a bit of the pressure off. Now she'd be able to either find her own place closer to town or pay her parents rent for the small apartment above the garage she'd been occupying. Either way, she felt like life was finally taking a turn in the right direction.

"I'm off, Mona." Her new boss was a very stylish, forty-something-year-old woman with a wicked sense of humor. Noelle liked her right off the bat.

"Sure thing, missy. You take care."

Noelle headed out the front door and back up the street to where her car was parked. Although Chaos was a fairly small town without big-city crime, she still kept her eyes open for any danger, just as her daddy had taught her.

The drive out to her parent's small ranch took much longer than Noelle would have liked. She was so tired after her long day of working and flirting that it took everything in her to keep her eyes open.

She couldn't help but sigh tiredly when she finally reached the house. It was dark and quiet, perfect for thinking, but Noelle was too damned tired to think. Tonight she was going to sleep like the dead.

Tomorrow morning, however, would have her bright-eyed, bushy-tailed and hopefully as irritating to Cash as she had been today.

Unfortunately, things didn't quite work out the way Noelle had envisioned. She'd made her way up the rickety stairs to her apartment and into bed in a matter of minutes, but instead of sleeping, she'd tossed and turned. And dreamed.

* * * * *

The next morning Noelle stood post on her street corner and thought about the night before. Some of her dreams had been so erotic she couldn't help but blush just

remembering them, even in the light of a brand-new day. Pushing naughty thoughts out of her sleep-deprived mind, Noelle fired up her boom box. Within seconds Christmas carols filled the crisp morning air.

She smoothed a hand down her shorter than usual skirt and unbuttoned another button on her white dress shirt then began setting up for the day. She had on a fuzzy, red button-down sweater over the top of her shirt. It wasn't thick by any stretch of the imagination but it was cover, and thus would keep her out of trouble while still showing off her assets.

Noelle smiled then checked her watch, curious to see how long it would take Cash to wake this morning. What type of a mood would he be in? So many different thoughts tumbled through her mind.

Her bell sounded merrily as did Noelle. She greeted those passing by as long-lost friends, even making a few new ones in the process. It was wonderful to see so many people giving to charity. Her little red pail seemed to be filling quite nicely. A surprise to Noelle since it wasn't quite ten o'clock yet.

Letting impatience get the best of her, Noelle rang the little bell in her hand as if her life depended on it. If Cash didn't show himself soon, she was going to have to resort to drastic measures.

Noelle wasn't quite sure exactly what those drastic measures were, but she'd sure the hell think of something if necessary.

* * * * *

Murder was too good for the bell ringer from hell. She deserved an ass whipping to outdo all ass whippings. He grumbled and complained as he climbed from the warmth of his bed. Two mornings in a row were too many as far as he was concerned.

Still pissed off from the night before, Cash yanked on a pair of faded jeans. He didn't bother fastening his pants much less putting on a shirt or shoes before making his way down to the bar where there would be a fresh pot of coffee.

Not for the first time in his life, Cash decided whoever had come up with the idea of putting a timer on a coffeepot deserved a medal of some sort.

He was enjoying a moment of bliss, eyes closed, warm coffee in hand when a burst of cold air came from the back of the building. Within seconds Cooper and Casey, the youngest two McCain siblings, made their way into the main area of the bar.

“Mornin’.” Casey approached him for a brotherly hug. She always felt so tiny against him but not in the same way as Noelle. By height standards, Noelle was small but she was far from fragile with her overblown womanly curves.

Cash, disgusted with himself for comparing his little sister to her best friend—the same friend he’d all but devoured the evening before, stepped away from Casey so fast she stumbled forward.

“Oh hell,” Cash cursed, placing a steadying hand out for Casey. “Sorry, Case.”

She cocked her head to the side, her bouncy brown curls falling over her forehead in the process. “Everything okay?”

Cash thanked everything holy that she had no idea of what had been happening between Noelle and him. If Casey had even an idea, she’d be on him like white on rice.

“Yup. Everything’s just fine.”

“Good God, what is that awful racket?”

The disgruntled question came from Cooper, the youngest McCain brother, who also just happened to be the only staid one of the bunch. He liked numbers almost as much as he liked to be alone. Cash could only imagine how annoying Noelle’s bell would be to his accountant brother. The thought made him smile.

“Ohhhh!” By the squeal of delight, and the way Casey was racing for the front door, Cash figured she’d just noticed Noelle across the street.

“It’s Noelle. She’s got a new job.” Cash was actually enjoying Cooper’s discomfort.

“You mean they actually *pay* her to make that noise?” The look on Cooper’s face was just too much. Cash couldn’t help but laugh.

“I don’t think they pay her to make *that* much noise. I believe she gives it a bit extra for my benefit.”

Cooper grumbled something about loud females on his way to the coffeepot to which Cash just shook his head. It was beyond comprehension the way Cooper acted toward women, as if he could take them or leave them and be perfectly happy either way. Nothing seemed to excite the man.

“Where’s the pipsqueak?” Cash asked of his niece Autumn, Casey’s five-year-old daughter.

“She’s with Mike for the morning.” Mike was Casey’s ex-husband. It still made no sense to Cash how two people could divorce and remain good friends. To his dying day, he’d never understand it.

Cooper mumbled something else as he left the room making his way toward the storage room, which also doubled as an office, to do the bookwork. Without any further distractions, Cash was able to get back to work.

A couple of hours passed and before Cash knew it, it was time to open for the day. He went to the window to change the sign to “open” and couldn’t help but notice that Noelle still stood across the street ringing her bell, although she no longer seemed in the high spirits she’d been in earlier that morning.

He was just beginning to wonder where Casey had run off to when she wandered her way up the sidewalk toward Noelle, a bag in hand. The transfer of the bag and goodbyes didn’t take long at all. Within minutes, Casey was walking back across the street toward Raising Cain, a mischievous smile on her face.

Cash knew in that instant he was in trouble. Casey’s first words as she strode through the door, proved it.

“Oohhh, you are so getting what you deserve for refusing Noelle a job.” The smirk on his sister’s face was over the top.

“You gonna tell me or make me guess, twerp?”

Casey wrinkled her nose at Cash's choice of endearment.

"Fine then, spoilsport. I'll tell you." Casey sucked in a huge breath warning Cash she was fixing to go into a long spiel on a subject that could probably be summed up in ten words or less.

"Well, you saw me across the street talking with Noelle, I'm sure."

Cash just nodded. There was no use in trying to talk, because once Casey got started, there was no getting a word in edgewise.

"Let me just say I'm not happy she's stuck on the corner ringing a bell. Then again, that doesn't really have anything to do with this, does it?" She didn't wait for an answer nor expected one, Cash was sure.

"I went to apologize *again*," she stressed, "for you not hiring her when she all but begged you for a job, and you know what she told me? She said it didn't matter because Mona over at Dooner's, the new place down the street, hired her like that."

The news was bad enough, but the way Casey snapped her fingers in front of his angry face made things even worse. Her next words sent him on a course that would surely change the relationship he had with Noelle for the rest of their lives.

"She even sent me to get her some more of those low-rise jeans and a few more T-shirts. Said her stuff wasn't sexy enough."

* * * * *

It was probably stupid to be so angry that Cash had ignored her all day long. How he'd managed to tune out *A Chipmunk Christmas*, blaring as loud as the tiny speakers on her boom box would allow was beyond Noelle.

As hour after hour passed, she'd gone from happily doing her job to barely managing a smile for those nice enough to stick money in her bucket. Damn if she wasn't peeved, with no real reason for being so.

Casey's visit almost made up for standing out in the cold without so much as a glimpse of Cash. Her friend was quirky and could talk an auctioneer under the table,

but she was caring and had a heart of gold. Noelle made a mental promise to spend more time with Casey and her daughter Autumn as soon as the holidays were over and she was done ringing a blasted bell for a living.

The next few hours crawled by at a snail's pace. Checking her watch, Noelle was glad to see it was time to load up. Just as she had the day before, Noelle wrestled her belongings to her car where she stowed them into the trunk safe and sound.

Job completed, she grabbed the bag of new clothes Casey had picked up for her earlier in the day. She was debating whether to change at Raising Cain or Dooner's when she was startled by a sound behind her.

Cash stood there as still as stone, looking as angry as a thundercloud. "Uh, hi." Noelle licked her lips, nervous about the angry gleam in Cash's eyes.

"I was just fixing to—" Noelle's words were cut off, her breath sucked right from her lungs by a kiss so hot, so full of anger, she couldn't help but struggle against its intensity.

Cash's tongue vied for entrance and won. The heat between them grew until Noelle couldn't stand it. Rubbing her abdomen against the hard length of his erect shaft nearly buckled her knees.

Why was he so mad? Did it matter? Noelle was sure it did, but for the life of her, she couldn't fathom why. As abruptly as he started the kiss, Cash stopped it. He pulled his body away from hers, still holding her by the upper arms. "You are not going to work at Dooner's. Do you hear me?"

Noelle felt her eyes widen at his tone. "Let go of me, you jackass!" Noelle put action to her words. She pulled herself from his hold but refused to do the smart thing and take a step back.

With her one free hand planted firmly on her hip, she gave him her best no-nonsense look. "I don't answer to you. You didn't want me as an employee, so as far as I'm concerned, you've got no business butting into my affairs."

Something in Cash's stance changed. He went from boiling mad to calm in the blink of an eye. The way his eyes kept her rooted to the spot was extremely uncomfortable. He was quiet, too quiet. Noelle began to worry.

She thought of fleeing. Things had gotten quickly out of hand and she needed time to regroup and prepare for the next round. Cash must have caught the way her gaze skittered to her car because in the next second he had her by the hand, all but dragging her across the street to Raising Cain.

Casey stood on the sidewalk with several of the regulars. They were all watching intently, only Casey had a loony grin spread across her face. Noelle tried to stop Cash, to insist Casey tell her exactly what in the hell was going on, but the Neanderthal pulling her along, as if she weighed no more than a feather, was having none of it.

The only words he spoke as they made their way through the bar toward the stairs leading to the apartment were, "You'll answer to me all right, Noelle, and you'll never forget doing it."

His words alone, forget the deep, gravelly tone of his voice, were enough to make her panties damp with need. An aroused smile replaced the look of uncertainty she was sure had wreathed her face just minutes ago. Let the games begin, was her new motto.

Chapter Four

The feel of Noelle's fingers entwined with his made Cash's pulse skyrocket. He tugged her behind him up the stairs to his apartment. They'd no sooner crossed the threshold when he backed her against the wall, pinning her there with the full length of his body.

Instead of struggling against him or cursing a blue streak as he thought she'd do, Noelle dropped her bag of clothes then squirmed to get even closer. She snaked her free hand beneath the hem of his shirt, skating her fingers across his abdomen, causing the muscles there to bunch and ripple in anticipation. Her warm breath feathered across his neck, warning just how close she was getting to making him lose it.

"Put your hand by you side." If she didn't stop touching him, Cash was going to forget that he had plans involving the palm of his hand and the plump curves of her ass.

"Wh...what?"

"By your side, darlin'. Now."

With obvious reluctance, Noelle removed her hand from his stomach. Cash missed her heated touch instantly but wouldn't let it sway him. He was on a mission, a mission that could very well change his life, and he planned to get it right.

If the look on Noelle's face were any indication, she didn't like being told no, especially when it came to matters of sex. Her cheeks were flushed with arousal, her eyes heavy-lidded. She moved away from him, her arms crossed over her heaving chest.

Cash knew exactly how she felt, but he wouldn't let her huffy attitude deter him.

"Casey said you're working at Dooner's."

She gave a sharp nod of her head, causing the silky locks of her honey blonde hair to swing sensually around her face as if caressing her cheeks. "I don't see how where I work is any of your business though."

Cash rubbed a hand over the back of his neck as he made his way across the room. He wasn't sure whether to laugh or groan. Did she not see what she was doing to him? Or maybe she did, and being extra obnoxious toward him gave her great pleasure.

"It's my business because I chose to make it my business."

Damned if she didn't arch a brow then sneer, "Well, isn't that special?"

Cash knew then and there that Noelle wouldn't be leaving without her tail end on fire. "Come here, Noelle." His tone brooked no argument and for the first time since stepping foot in his apartment she seemed unsure.

"Why?"

God, but she'd probably argue him into an early grave, he thought, as he moved closer to the only straight-backed chair in the place. "Now, Noelle. Make me ask you again and you'll have trouble sitting for more than just a few hours."

His words must not have sunk into her thick-as-hell skull because in the next instant, she was stomping across the room toward him.

"There. Happy now?"

This time, Cash couldn't help but chuckle. "No, but I will be real soon," he said as he sat and upended her over his lap all in one motion.

The palm of one large hand was all it took to hold her in place when she started flailing her arms and legs about.

"Let me up, goddammit!"

Cash made a tsking sound. "Such language for a lady."

Noelle kicked and shrieked at his words. "This *lady's* going to kick your ass!"

Raising one hand high, Cash brought it down on her cloth-covered ass. It was enough to cause her to still, cutting off her foul tirade in the process. When Cash knew he had her attention, he continued.

First he lifted the hem her skirt until her ass was bared for his gaze. The sight of nothing more than a strip of red elastic that seemed to all but disappear between the fleshy globes of her ass was nearly his undoing.

“Holy hell.”

“Cash? Don’t.”

Her voice quivered slightly as his fingers glided over her curves, dipping slightly into the well of warmth between her thighs.

“You want me to stop?” The guttural tone of his voice proved just how on edge he was.

When she made no move to answer, Cash delivered another stinging swat, this time to her bare ass. Noelle’s yelp of surprise turned into moans of need as Cash slid a finger along the silk-covered folds of her pussy.

Her ass was already pink in stark contrast to the white of her thigh-high stockings. Cash brought his hand down again. *Whack!* Her smooth flesh heated beneath his palm, jiggling enticingly as he delivered yet another stinging swat. *Smack!*

Small swats landed repeatedly, peppering her ass. When Cash reached where the curve of her cheek met thigh, she gasped.

“You want me to stop, baby?”

She prayed he was kidding. *Please let him be kidding,* she pleaded silently. Noelle thought she might very well expire on the spot if he didn’t finish her off.

“Answer me, darlin’. Do you want me to stop?”

“Nooo,” Noelle wailed when Cash brought his hand down again, catching her off guard.

Nothing seemed to work, she'd tried it all. Rubbing herself on his leg only made things worse. With the way he was holding her, she couldn't open her legs wide enough to get her clit the attention it needed, and yet, every time she pushed her ass back, asking silently for more, he stopped.

Stopped spanking, stopped caressing, stopped touching. Noelle was sure she was going to die.

"Please."

"Please what, baby?" Was that smugness she heard in his voice? Probably, but at this point in time, it didn't matter. Later, she decided. She'd deal with everything later.

"Please fuck me. Make me come. Something!"

As the words tumbled from her mouth, Noelle felt a change in Cash. His touch became frenzied. The sheer force of the need she saw written clearly across his face as he lifted her from his lap, standing her before him, made her inner muscles clench and spasm with tiny pre-climactic tremors.

Cash's hands trembled as he pulled both her skirt and thong panties down her legs until they pooled around her feet. She quickly stepped out of them as well as her shoes, leaving her bare from the waist down except for her stockings.

"Leave them on." The huskiness of his command left Noelle no choice but to obey.

Cash reached into his back pocket for his wallet. He then quickly extracted a condom before discarding his wallet on the floor. When he held his hand out with the condom between his fingers, Noelle didn't hesitate to snatch it out of his grasp.

Kneeling between his parted thighs, she unzipped the fly of his jeans. She sucked in her breath when his erection sprang free, not a stitch of underwear in sight. The head of his shaft was large, welcoming and leaking copious amounts of pre-cum.

Noelle didn't even think before she leaned forward and licked him from base to head. She couldn't help herself. The sight of him, as well as the scent of his arousal, was overwhelming.

“Enough, darlin’. Put the condom on then come up here and ride me.” His voice was a deep rumble, touching Noelle in places no body part could reach.

She did as Cash asked, eager to feel the thick length of his cock buried deep inside of her. When the condom was in place, she straddled his lap, staring into his eyes. They were so green—McCain green—a woman could lose her soul in them.

Cash’s hand was beneath her thigh, guiding his length into her heat. The first nudge of his cock head against the sensitive folds of her pussy sent frissons of longing down her spine and, for a minute, Noelle thought she’d come before he buried himself completely.

“Hurry.” The single word left her lips on a breathless whisper.

“Mmm,” Cash growled into her mouth as his hands tightened on her hips. He plunged Noelle onto the full length of his shaft in one wicked thrust, wringing a gasp from the both of them.

In no time at all, Cash set a rhythm Noelle couldn’t help but follow. Her body was hot with need and slick with perspiration. Her inner muscles spasmed around Cash’s intruding length, urging him on.

His scent wafted around them, musk and man—unbelievably arousing. He was hot inside of her. Hot and hard, and so deep Noelle wasn’t sure where he ended and she began. Her hips rocked back and forth, stimulating her clit just right. The feel of his large hands grasping her hips so tight Noelle felt the hold all the way to her core was the little bit extra she needed to send her right over the edge.

“Oh! Oh, God.” Noelle was sure her scream of completion could be heard for miles but it didn’t matter. Nothing mattered except for Cash and her and the mingling of their bodies.

Cash thrust home one last time, lifting the both of them off the seat, then collapsed beneath her, a huge masculine heap of a man.

Noelle ran her hands along his face, twining her fingers in the hair at his temples. The wavy brown locks were thick between her fingers. Noelle gave a little tug then

basked in the deep growl that rumbled from his throat. She then proceeded to cover his face and neck in kisses. She'd have liked to taste his chest, to lick and nibble until he was hard inside of her once again, but that was impossible since he was still dressed.

The now uncomfortable feel of his zipper beneath her ass told the story of just how dressed he was. Noelle flushed at the reminder of just how hot they were for each other.

Memories assaulted her. She'd acted like a sex-crazed woman. One used to asking for exactly what she wanted, a woman used to being erotically spanked and giving sensual delight in return. How far from the truth that actually was made the whole thing funny.

She'd by no means been a virgin, but then again, she'd also never acted so...so... How had she acted? The only word that came to mind was wanton. For some reason the old-fashioned word made Noelle giggle, which caused Cash to stir beneath her.

His flaccid cock twitched inside her making Noelle's internal muscles quiver in response. She laid her head against Cash's chest but couldn't stop the moan of delight his involuntary actions caused.

"Something funny?" Cash was sated, loving the feel of Noelle's soft body molded intimately to his.

"Nope, nothing." Her words were mumbled against his chest.

Cash felt her hips flex before the rest of her body moved. He tightened his grip, not wanting her to separate their bodies just yet. "Where you going?"

The thought of her just leaving after all they'd shared was too much for Cash to take in. Had Noelle felt the same intense heat he'd experienced during their wild ride?

"Nowhere just yet, but I need to get up before I end up with permanent zipper marks on my ass."

Noelle wiggled to make her point then winced when the metal of his zipper bit into her tender flesh. Feeling like a cad, Cash helped her to her feet. Once she was steady, he

strode to the bathroom where he discarded the soiled condom before moving back to her side.

She'd already dressed and was smoothing down her skirt, covering herself from his gaze. When she came close enough to touch, Noelle lifted herself to her toes, and this time, Cash took advantage of her eagerness by taking her mouth in a slow kiss.

He flicked the tip of his tongue over her lips then as slowly as he could possibly go, Cash traced the curve of her neck to the soft pink shell of her ear. When she shivered, he smiled.

She was so damned soft and so responsive that her moans alone would keep him hard for hours. Cash tore his mouth away from hers, intent on inviting her to stay for the night. So many things had changed in such a short time. There was so much they needed to talk about.

"Yummm." Noelle licked her kiss-swelled lips. Her gaze, when she looked up at him was searching, even hesitant.

"I need to change and then I've got to go."

Cash should have known angry sex wouldn't make her forget. Not his Noelle, she'd keep at it until one of them died of exhaustion. And he loved her for it.

My Noelle? Love?

The thought struck Cash funny. After all the time he'd spent trying to run her off, now he had her right where he wanted her, knew he'd love her until he took his dying breath and now she planned to leave. Although still uncomfortable with the fact that Noelle was the same age as his sister Casey as well as her best friend, Cash would no longer let that come between them. She was his now. Forever. That's just the type of man he was.

"No."

The minute he said it, he knew he'd chosen the wrong way to go about getting his way. He should be getting used to her narrowed eyes staring up at him, open and hostile.

"You're offering me a job, then?"

Cash shook his head. Trying to keep his patience tightly reined in, Cash paced across the room and back. "I told you I don't want you working here. It's no place for a young woman without protection."

He could have sworn her eyes swam with unshed tears before she snapped her spine board-straight, grabbed her bag and headed for the door.

Cash caught up to her just as she wrenched the door open. "I said you're not going back to work at Dooner's." He all but yelled the words at her.

Noelle gave an unladylike snort. "You said a lot of things, Cash. You said you didn't want me to work for you and you also pretty much said that I couldn't work here because none of you big, bad McCain men give a shit enough to protect li'l ole me. Now. Please move. I'm going to be late for work."

Her voice cracked, making Cash's chest ache with regret even as his anger boiled over. "That's not what I meant, dammit, and you know it."

"This conversation is over, Cash. You were right, you know. For whatever reasons, this never would have worked."

She turned from him then, intent on leaving his apartment, intent on leaving him—only Cash was having none of it. He'd bide his time, give her the space she thought she needed, but by no means were things over between them.

There was no way he'd let it be over. Hell, they'd just started.

Chapter Five

Leaving was the hardest thing Noelle had ever done. She never should have assumed that just because they were having sex all would be well and all of a sudden her life would come up looking rosy.

Instead, she felt like everything was going to shit. She was unequivocally in love with her best friend's brother, a man who obviously didn't feel the same way. Hell, from the looks of it, Cash didn't care about anything except the fact that her pussy was warm, tight and wet.

Noelle sniffed, trying to hold her tears at bay. She refused to cry over Cash. If he didn't have feelings for her, then she'd just have to deal with it. No more pushing, no more teasing, no more Cash.

The thought tore at her heart as she stalked her way up the street toward Dooner's. Once inside, Noelle made her way to the restroom where she quickly changed her clothes before clocking-in to begin her shift. It was hard to keep a smile plastered across her face but she managed it. At least she managed it until Cash strolled casually through the door.

Noelle stopped dead in her tracks then wildly searched the room for Mona. Her boss had yet to ask any questions but it was only obvious she knew something was wrong with Noelle.

"I've got him, missy. You go on about your business as if he ain't here."

It wasn't hard to like Mona. Noelle squeezed her hand in thanks as Mona walked by on her way to Cash's table. She served drinks, listened to the fun banter between the patrons, all while stealing quick glances toward where Cash and Mona sat speaking.

It wasn't long before Mona shook Cash's hand then left his table. And yet, Cash stayed put. Noelle couldn't help but wonder why he wasn't leaving. He was making her nervous the way he followed her with his eyes.

"Why isn't he leaving?" Noelle blurted the question as soon as she had Mona to herself.

"The boy's got it bad, missy. Best if you put him out of his misery right now."

Noelle couldn't believe what she was hearing. "The only thing that ass has bad is a temper. He's probably just pissed because I didn't follow his orders. Well, you know what? He can go to hell for all I care!"

Noelle knew she was being childish but it didn't stop her from stomping away like a teenager in the throes of a hissy fit. It took her several minutes of deep breathing before she felt in control enough to work again without growling at any of the customers.

Coming out from behind the bar, a tray in hand, Noelle noticed Cash still sitting at an out-of-the-way table in the corner. He had a smug look on his face. It was as if knowing he'd hurt her and continuing to do so while pissing her off for good measure, made him happy.

Noelle wasn't sure if she'd ever understand men, Cash in particular. He wanted to make her cry, scream in anger and throw herself at his feet begging for even a little bit of his love all at the same time.

Just knowing he could so easily turn her life upside down pissed Noelle off and everyone knew working with the public while mad was not a good idea. If Cash got her fired, there was going to be hell to pay. Knowing she'd never make it through her shift with him watching, Noelle decided to bite the bullet and see what he wanted.

* * * * *

The way she kept stomping around was sort of funny. It made Cash want to paddle her ass again. To feel her warm skin beneath his palm, hearing the sound of flesh upon

flesh while she writhed against him, first at the stinging pain and then at the arousal coursing through her body.

What Cash didn't like was the hurt look in her green eyes. She was trying to hide the hurt behind a veil of anger, but it wasn't working. Cash could clearly see how deep his words had sliced. He regretted every one of them. When Noelle disappeared into the storeroom, Cash feared he might never get the chance to tell her how much.

He didn't realize how tense he was, waiting and watching for Noelle until she appeared back in the main room of the bar. Cash wanted nothing more than to gather her close and insist she listen.

When she turned to him—her eyes pinned on his—Cash knew trouble was brewing. Noelle was looking at him as if she wouldn't mind seeing him roast in hell. Cash knew in that instant life with Noelle would never be boring.

She must have gotten tired of being stared at because before Cash could think of something irritating to say, she was across the room and in his face.

"What do you want, Cash?"

Boy was that ever a loaded question. Cash, however, knew when to keep his mouth shut so decided not to answer. Besides, from the look of her face, all red with anger, he wasn't going to get a word in edgewise.

"I mean, you spend half your time pushing me away..." Noelle looked around then moved closer. Lowering her voice, she added, "Except for when you're fucking me, then it's okay."

Whoa, that was a bit too much. "Don't say another word."

"Why? What in the hell does it matter? I mean, you're here watching me like a hawk. You think these people don't already have a clue?"

Cash watched Noelle's shoulders sag, her anger knocked completely out of her and wanted to fix it. "It matters, Noelle. It matters to me."

Her blonde hair swayed around her face as Noelle shook her head. "I don't understand you, Cash." Her voice was a mere whisper as if she didn't want to open up for fear of letting her emotions loose.

"I know, baby. Took me a while to understand it all myself but now I do. It's crystal clear and I feel like a damned big idiot for not getting it sooner."

A puzzled look crossed her face. Cash stood then gritted his teeth in irritation when Noelle backed up a step.

"Getting what, Cash? You're not making any sense."

"I'm making perfect sense, darlin'. You just aren't listening." Cash stepped closer to Noelle then without touching her, he placed his lips against hers, keeping the kiss sweet and innocent.

"What I'm trying to say," he murmured against her lips, "is that I love you, Noelle. With every breath I take."

Her head snapped back on her shoulders as if she'd been slapped. "Don't do that. Don't mess with me like that, Cash."

Her eyes were awash with unshed tears, making their green depths appear even more luminescent. Cash's heart ached for her, with her, but there was little he could do if she wasn't ready to listen.

Noelle held her hands up as a single tear streaked down her face. "Just go. Please," she pleaded when he opened his mouth to speak.

Cash, knowing he would only make things worse by staying and pushing her, cupped Noelle's cheek then wiped the single tear away with the pad of his thumb. "I'll go, sweetheart, but I won't go far or stay gone for long."

He heard her breath hitch at his words and knew she was fighting for composure. With regret running through his veins, Cash turned from Noelle. He left the bar, but instead of heading straight back to Raising Cain, he wandered aimlessly until he realized the moon was high in the sky.

Cash was thankful for his family and the fact that Connor and Carson were at the bar and would close up when he didn't return. He just needed some time to think, time to get used to being in love with Noelle, but most of all, he needed time to plan exactly how he was going to win her over.

Even when his body was so tired he could hardly drag himself home, Cash's mind whirled. He couldn't get visions of Noelle out of his head. The sight of her head thrown back in passion as she slowly took every inch of his cock within the tight depths of her warm and willing body made all his blood travel straight to his groin.

Once in bed, Cash took the length of his rigid shaft in hand and, with thoughts of Noelle, stroked himself to a groaning completion.

* * * * *

Noelle woke the next morning after crying herself to sleep, feeling completely out of it. She was so afraid to believe Cash's words of love. But something inside of her not only remembered but also held dear his words. The way he caressed her cheek, wiping away the tear she'd let slip, touched a spot deep within Noelle's soul, a spot that yearned to be loved unconditionally by Cash.

Afraid she was making too much out of Cash's spur-of-the-moment admission of love, Noelle readied herself for work. By the time she left her apartment, she was running on nerves and giving real thought to moving away from Chaos once again.

Ringling her bell didn't bring the same wicked delight it had been. She didn't want Cash to notice her, much less come storming across the street to complain about how she was dressed. What she wanted was to forget what a fool she'd been.

Luck was having none of it, though. Noelle had only been at her post for an hour when the front door of Raising Cain opened. Her pulse skyrocketed at the sight of Cash dressed as usual in faded jeans and a button-down shirt.

It wasn't until Noelle noticed the rest of the McCain family all but tumbling from the door that Noelle began to panic. Leaving them all on the sidewalk in front of the

bar, Cash made his way across the street to her. He was almost nose to nose with her before Noelle found her voice.

“What’s going on?”

Without a word, Cash gathered her against his solid chest. He was warm and comforting and smelled sinful. His face was cleanly shaven and smooth against the side of her face as he nuzzled her, getting closer and closer while arousing her to no end.

“Cash?” Noelle could have kicked her own ass for allowing her voice to quiver in such a way.

“You know how I feel about my family, right?” Cash didn’t let Noelle do more than nod her head against his chest. “I got to thinking last night, trying to come up with a way to prove to you how much I love you, and the only thing that came to mind was to do it in front of my brothers, sister and whoever else in the town just happened to be watching. I thought maybe then you’d believe me.”

Noelle couldn’t believe what she was hearing. The impact of his words nearly blew her away. Cash really did love her. When he tried to pull away, Noelle couldn’t help but cling to him, afraid if she didn’t, he might very well be lost to her forever.

“It’s okay, baby. Just give me a minute.”

Noelle struggled to loosen her hold as Cash backed away from her. When he lowered himself on bended knee before her, Noelle let the tears flow.

“I love you, Noelle Jacobs, with everything I am. Be my wife?” Cash’s tone was hopeful. Only Noelle saw the tenseness he held in check. When he pulled a simple emerald ring from his pocket, Noelle held out her shaky left hand, allowing Cash to place it on her ring finger.

“Did she say yes?” The hollered question came from Casey who was still standing across the street.

Noelle laughed, she couldn't help herself. Then, gathering Cash's face in her hands, she kissed him full on the mouth, deep, slow and sensual. When she was done, she smiled. "I love you, cowboy, and, yes, I'll marry you."

His hoot of excitement could have raised the dead. Cash got to his feet then lifted and swung Noelle in a circle. "She said yes." His voice was loud enough that no one could have misunderstood. Cheers came from all around them, from both family and friends. Noelle was finally home.

Epilogue

Cash carried her across the street and into Raising Cain where the rest of the McCain clan had set up a table full of appetizers and drinks. Folks continued to mingle and talk long after Noelle and Cash snuck away to be alone.

They'd made him wait, putting him through the misery of holding Noelle by his side yet never being alone with her long enough for much touching. And if that wasn't bad enough, Noelle had spent most of the time torturing him with whispered words and provocative wiggles.

Cash had decided she'd pay for her part in keeping him with a hard and throbbing cock for hours on end.

Carrying Noelle over the threshold, even before the wedding, would forever be a high point in Cash's life. He made his way through the apartment without slowing his pace then unceremoniously dumped her on his bed.

"Shh." He had plans for Noelle. Down and dirty, sexy as hell plans that didn't include talking, unless the sound of her screaming his name as she climaxed over and over was considered talking.

"No talking, huh? Just fucking," Noelle said, pushing with words guaranteed to get his attention, her voice hopeful.

"There's going to be plenty of fucking, darlin'. Now lift up so I can strip the bed down."

Noelle did as asked, her movements eager. Cash wondered just how long it would take before she was cursing with her need for release.

"Now for your clothes, they've got to go too." Noelle hesitated. Cash could only assume it was from the tone of command clear in his voice. He was on edge and in need, a man barely hanging on to his control.

“Now, baby.”

Cash wasn't worried he'd scare her. The way her breath fluttered out in excited little bursts, not to mention the way her nipples pressed against the fabric of her shirt, begging for his touch, proved just how unafraid she was.

By the time Noelle was completely nude, Cash was so damned hard, he thought he might keel over. Her breath came in panting little bursts as she waited on her knees in the center of the bed for his next move.

Cash was unable to get past the need to taste her, to fuck his tongue so deep within her depths he'd never be free of her essence.

“Face the wall on your knees and hang on to the headboard, sweetheart.” Her pupils dilated. Cash was lost.

He climbed onto the bed behind her until they were touching, Cash's shirt-covered chest to Noelle's nude back. Her bare ass was cradled in his lap. Cash thanked his lucky stars he hadn't yet undressed because if he had, it might have all been over before it ever got started.

With his hands, Cash brought her to the brink by touching and teasing her soaked center but never allowed her to fall completely over. When she was pleading for release, Cash pulled away then settled on his back behind her. With deft movements, born of an intense need to taste and savor, Cash pushed himself to the head of the bed and comfortably between Noelle's thighs.

At the first swipe of his tongue, Noelle whimpered, “I... Oh, God, Cash.” She nearly screamed the place down when he circled her thighs with his arms and sucked the swollen bud of her clit between his lips.

“Mmm.” Cash knew his mumbled response would only add to her pleasure.

“Please, please, please.”

Cash gripped Noelle's thighs tighter then pulled them down the bed just a bit. Their new position left her leaning forward, perfect for what Cash had planned.

Moving his hands from her thighs to caress the full, round globes of her ass cheeks was only half the fun. Her gasp of pleasure as he collected her own cream before sinking knuckle-deep into the ultra-tight channel of her ass was like music to Cash's ears. Her climax nearly sent him over the edge.

Within minutes Noelle was bucking back against his finger. Cash, unable to wait, pulled himself from between her thighs. It took every ounce of his self-control to reach for a condom and lube and not just plunge balls deep into her body.

Once protected, Cash moved back to where Noelle now lay sprawled on her belly. "Noelle." It was as close to asking for permission as he was able to grit out.

When she looked over her shoulder, blonde hair in wild disarray and smiled, Cash's pulse leapt. The intensity of their position only grew as he spread the pale cheeks of her luscious ass. With lubed fingers, Cash carefully prepared Noelle's ass for the thick length of his shaft.

Inserting first one finger and then a second, Cash stretched Noelle's tight channel until she lay panting for breath, her skin covered in a light sheen of sweat. When he was sure she could handle his girth, Cash sank into her inch by inch until he could go no farther.

"Oh...oh! Please hurry! Hurry!" The last came out as a shrill scream. Cash couldn't hold back, powering into her body over and over, as she spasmed around his cock, he came with her.

After they were sated, lying with their bodies entwined, Noelle asked. "Why, Cash? Why would you want to marry me?"

It wasn't like Noelle to be so cautious, so unsure, but when it came to loving Cash, she had to know.

"Besides the fact that I love you more than words can say?" Cash asked, as he started beneath the sheets once again.

“Oh yes,” Noelle gasped not at all sure if she was answering Cash’s question or urging him on his wicked journey down her body.

“I figured it was the only way I could get you to stop ringing that damned bell.”

About the Author

Maggie Casper's life could be called many things but boring isn't one of them. If asked, Maggie would tell you that blessed would more aptly describe her everyday existence.

Marrying young and being loved by a great husband and four gorgeous daughters should be enough to make anybody feel blessed. Add to that a bit of challenge, a lot of fun and an undeniably close circle of friends and family and you'd be walking in her shoes.

Speaking of challenges and fun, when not writing, Maggie's alter ego spends her time fighting fires and treating patients as a Lieutenant and Advanced Emergency Medical Technician with the local fire department. These awesome people are like her second family, no picking and choosing, they're just stuck with her.

A love of reading was passed on by Maggie's mother at a very early age, and so began her addiction to romance novels. Maggie admits to writing some in high school but when life got in the way, she put her pen and paper up. Seems that things changed over the years because when she finally decided it was time to put her story ideas on paper, the pen was out and the computer was in. Took her a while to catch up but she finally made it.

When not writing, Maggie can usually be found reading, doing genealogy research or watching NASCAR.

Maggie welcomes mail from readers. You can write to her c/o Ellora's Cave Publishing at 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

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