

ELLORA'S CAVE EXOTIKA

DEVYN
QUINN

THREE TO
Dance

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Three to Dance

ISBN 9781419912467

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Edited by Nicholas Conrad.

Cover art by Syneca.

Electronic book Publication August 2007

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THREE TO DANCE

Devyn Quinn

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Pizza Hut: Pizza Hut, Inc.

U-Haul: Arcoa, Inc.

Chapter One

She had arrived.

Kate's heart beat with excitement. She slowed the U-Haul, maneuvering the truck through an imposing gate, careful not to scrape the trailer carrying her car. The last thing she needed was a wreck less than a mile from her new home. Faux stone pillars guarded the avenue leading toward the apartment complex, and the iron tracery of the gate itself displayed the fancy but fake coat of arms of the Vista Hills development.

Pulling up in front of a row of apartment buildings, she rolled down the window, eager to examine her new home—Building Nine, Apartment Six on the second floor. She glanced at the spot where her friend Scott usually parked. His ratty old pickup wasn't there.

She fumed inwardly. *Damn him. He said he'd be here to help.* That was Scott. A man for whom the concepts of time and responsibility were relative.

Her unit was settled amid velvety green lawns overlooked by wooded hills. She picked up the brochure on the seat beside her. It was almost unnecessary to look yet again. She had practically memorized its text, could almost quote it word for word. It had taken almost two months to get her application approved to this exclusive complex, each unit partially furnished in its own individual style. A bonus was that all the suites had the most modern appliances. Plus, there was a heated pool, a tennis court, a miniature gym and even a tanning area—plus the usual laundry and parking facilities. At this point in her life, it seemed like the lap of luxury to Kate.

Her gasp of delight caused the felines to stir restlessly. The twin Persians were side by side in their kitty carriers on the passenger side floor.

"What do you think, guys?"

Both cats stretched and meowed in response. It had been a long drive from Montana to Oregon and they were more than ready to run free.

Kate sighed. God, what a hard move. This was her third – and last – trip over those treacherous mountains. Through the snows of Montana and the rains of Oregon, no less. Why had she chosen the end of winter to move? Even now, the sky above was leaden, throwing down handfuls of chilly rain. Through one dreary week, she'd run back and forth between Helena, Montana, and Patches, Oregon, signing papers, paying deposits and packing up her old apartment. The weather had not been a cooperative element.

She killed the engine. "Time to get out and start unpacking for our new place, guys. Be right back."

Claiming her purse and keys, Kate jumped out of the truck. Rain pelted her as she crossed the parking lot and ran up the staircase that led to Apartment Six. Fumbling and then finding the key, she pushed it into the lock. For a moment it jammed and wouldn't move. Her heart was hammering—her breath caught in her throat. She twisted the key a second time. This time, the deadbolt slid aside. The door swung open on silent hinges. The scent of fresh paint and new carpeting tickled her nostrils. Her hand shot out, flicking on an overhead light that immediately flooded the apartment with blessed illumination. Good, the electricity was on. Hopefully the phone had been turned on as well.

She walked around the place for a minute, getting to know it. The lease she'd recently signed was still on the kitchen counter. The apartment was spacious and comfortable. Her windows gave a view of the yet to be developed acreage. As it settled under the clouds, the sinking sun struck the sparkling bay windows, setting them into brilliant blazing hues that matched the cloudy sky—fading pinks, yellows and oranges that were slowly deepening into a soft indigo blue and darker purple. The oyster white walls and beige carpeting would be easy to decorate around. The kitchen cabinets were solid wood and the flooring was ceramic tile, not linoleum. The living room's main

treasures were its huge bay windows and magnificent marble fireplace. The place was costing her a small fortune, but it was worth it.

"This is it. Home sweet home." There was that old saying, "Home is where the heart is." Trouble was, she didn't know where her heart was, much less home. Hopefully she could settle here and make a place for herself, and who knew? Perhaps she might even find true love. Or at least a guy who actually respected her needs.

Or would she pull up stakes and take off again? Cut and run. It was easy to do. Automatic. After all, it was a thing deeply set in her genes. Her ex-husband wasn't the only one with itchy feet. When William had left her, she hadn't been devastated. Instead she'd been relieved.

Strange town. New home, new job, new life. Suddenly she felt very small. Alone. What the hell was she thinking, moving off to Oregon all by herself? But then again, what had she been thinking, when she'd left that small town in Texas for Montana with William?

Thunder boomed outside, reminding her that she had two very displeased cats in the truck. Leaving the lights on, Kate dashed back downstairs. Monty and Larry were none too happy to be rudely jostled around as she dashed back up the stairs.

After setting up the cats' litter and a bowl of water in the spare bedroom and then freeing them in there, she grimaced as she headed back out into the rain. People coming home from their workday were beginning to pull up, all casting curious glances her way. A few waved and smiled and made ducking motions. Clearly they were sympathetic about her having to move in the rain. Miserable.

"Better get out of this rain before you catch a cold," one neighborly woman called out to her, simultaneously ushering her own kids under the shelter of the awnings.

"Working on it!" Kate called back, trying to sound cheery. "Yeah, right," she muttered under her breath. *Too bad I can't wave my hands and make it go away. I'd better not catch a cold.*

Drawing her denim jacket closed in front, she unlocked the back of the truck and hopped up inside. Her gaze raked over the furnishings and boxes. The truck was only mid-sized, but everything it held was all she had in the world.

Not a whole hell of a lot. She sighed. Not that she even cared where William was. After losing his last job, the bastard had decided he needed “a change” in his lifestyle, so he packed up and moved back to Arkansas to live with his mother. Two years of marriage down the drain, all gone without any explanation, except that he didn’t like being married. *What a goddamned prince.*

As she dropped a few boxes in the kitchen, Kate glanced up at the clock on the microwave. Almost six. Today was... She had to search her exhausted mind. Thursday. She had the weekend to get settled in, then at eight o’clock Monday morning, she started her new job in the advertising department at the newspaper. She didn’t relish unpacking, but she needed to get the U-Haul back by tomorrow or else she’d owe extra charges. That was something her pocketbook just couldn’t afford right now. The divorce had taken care of that. And the bankruptcy. Geez, it had been almost two months since her divorce had become official and three years since William had left her, and still that aborted marriage managed to haunt her. She wondered if she’d ever recover. The marriage beginning with such hopes had quickly crumbled to dust. Even when she was saying her vows, she remembered thinking she was making a dreadful mistake. It was one thing to be the girlfriend of an irresponsible man. It was another thing to be the *wife* of an irresponsible man—the stresses and pressures had immediately tripled and everything had gone downhill from there.

She sighed, wanting to put William out of her mind. Amazing how his memory would pop up just when she thought there was no reason whatsoever to think about him. Not all the memories she had of him were entirely bad, though it had gotten to the point where the bad began to outweigh the good. Walking away was perhaps the only smart thing he’d ever done in his life. Not that she applauded the way he handled it. Still, it was quick though by no means clean.

Well, at least I don't have to worry about whiskey bottles under my front seat anymore.

She glanced out the bay windows. At least the rain was slowing down. She could move a lot of stuff in a few hours. Maybe Scott would pull up any minute in his blue pickup. After all, he'd promised he'd be here.

Kate buttoned up her jacket and headed back outside. The outdoor lights were coming on as day moved into dusk, giving the evening a gentle glow. The rain pattered softly against the dark asphalt, pelting the earth with cold little spikes of water. She didn't mind the wet. She usually loved the rain. She just didn't like moving her things in it. Of course, there was no sign of Scott. She should have known he'd let her down. Even when they were in high school, he'd always operated by his own schedule.

"I have a way of picking good friends," she muttered, then grimaced. That wasn't fair. Even though Scott had moved away from Texas years ago, they'd always managed to keep in touch by phone and letter. It was Scott's idea that she leave Montana behind and make a fresh start in Oregon. Driving down and touring the town where he lived, she'd agreed. It was the perfect place to have a fresh start in life. Since he lived in the first unit directly under hers, he'd promised to be around to help her get settled in. She thought it would be fun to live by her childhood pal again. They'd been such great buddies in high school. It would be nice to resume that old friendship. Plus...she was now a single woman. And Scott was now a very single guy since he'd recently found his fiancée in bed with another woman.

Poor Scott. That must have been a shock. Kate shook her head to clear it of all the straying thoughts. Scott was her buddy, not exactly romance material. Still, a girl had needs. Who was to say what the two of them might get up to one night, now that they lived in the same building?

Climbing over the trailer hitch, she hefted herself into the U-Haul and pushed boxes to the lip of the trailer.

Like a squirrel hoarding nuts, she began to carry them into her apartment. One by one, she toted the boxes, large and small, up the stairs, placing each in the room where

it belonged. Bathroom items, kitchen items, bedroom items. After trip number ten, she was cursing her decision to move into an upstairs unit. By the time trip fifteen came around, she was seriously considering abandoning everything and setting it afire instead. She was drenched to the bone, shivering with cold, her hands red and numb.

Crossing the parking lot again, Kate cast a baleful glance into the trailer's depth. Most of the smaller items had been moved inside, but a lot remained. The heavy stuff—computer desk, storage trunk, an extra chest of drawers, the kitty kingdom.

There weren't enough hands or help. It was going to take more than one man and one woman to move this stuff.

A touch of panic coursed through her. Tears began to well in her eyes. Freezing, wet to the skin and absolutely at the end of her rope, she sat down on the trailer hitch and started to cry, great heaving sobs that shook her body. She didn't care that she was sitting in the rain between a U-Haul of stuff she could not move and a station wagon stuck on a trailer. At this moment, she didn't care about anything but crying herself into a puddle. It wasn't just about the boxes anymore. She'd just given up her whole life in exchange for a new one.

It was too late for turning back. She'd ended the lease on her old apartment and quit her job. Cut ties with the old. Now she could only go forward.

Chapter Two

"Kate?" a male voice called out. "Are you okay?"

Startled and more than a little embarrassed, Kate raised her head and wiped her nose on her sleeve. Scott was sitting in the passenger seat of a Camaro idling beside the trailer that held her own beat-up Chevy. She brushed her wet hair off her forehead. Through the day, her braid had worked free of the band, leaving her long hair in wild shreds. God, what a mess she must look. Hair hanging, nose red, eyes swollen, clothes sticking to her body, she must resemble—she had to smile—a drowned cat. No doubt Monty and Larry would be thoroughly disapproving of the metaphor.

"Yeah, I'm fine." She gave a wan smile, glad to see a familiar face. "Just taking a break."

"Hey, sorry I'm late—my damn truck broke down. I had to hitch a ride. When did you get in?"

She shrugged. "Shit happens to everyone." She smiled back, flashing her best toothy grin. Honestly, there were no hard feelings. Right now she was just happy to see a familiar, friendly face.

Scott hopped out and ran around to the front of the car. "Thanks for the ride, man. See you later."

Kate's eyes ranged over her longtime friend as he approached the truck. His eyes were a brilliant blue, flecked with silver. Breathtaking. Bizarre that she was just now noticing this about him.

Tall, lanky and muscular, at twenty-nine, Scott Levenson was quite a piece of eye candy. His collar-length blond hair was tousled, looking as if a comb was a rarely seen thing. That black Metallica T-shirt fit him like a second skin and those faded blue jeans were snug in all the right places, especially around the generous bulge in the front.

From his tanned skin and callused hands, it was clear he was a working man. She couldn't fail to notice the way his cowlick fell casually over his forehead. She usually didn't like blond guys, but he was especially appealing. He had certainly changed for the better since high school. Gone was the gawky, thin geek with braces. He'd turned into a regular hunk. She squeezed her thighs tightly together at the thought of what he must look like without those clothes. She could feel her pussy dripping, wetting the crotch of her jeans. One rub on her clit and she would probably climax like mad. *Damn, it's been too long since I've been laid.*

The guy behind the wheel broke into her contemplations. "You need some more help?"

"Nah, man," Scott gave a careless wave, "I think we can get it."

"No, seriously," the driver insisted, "Let me help. No problem."

Hearing the conversation, Kate laced her hands together in front of her body and nodded vigorously. Anything to get this job done as fast as possible.

"Oh, yes, please. He may think he's macho enough to move all this, but I'm not too proud to beg."

The driver killed the engine and got out. "Far be it from me to let a lady labor alone, with only an idiot for help." He grinned. "Besides I'm not made of sugar."

"And shit floats," Scott muttered.

Kate laughed. Scott had always had a way with crude words. Already she was feeling better. It was nice to have her old pal around. And this second guy was a bonus, too. He definitely wasn't an ugly man.

Scott's friend gave him a poke in the ribs. "Asshole. Introduce me." He stuck out his hand. "I'm Josh Martin. I live on the second level too. Number Ten on the end."

"This is Kate, my best girl friend," Scott said, throwing an arm around her shoulders and hugging her close, bending her over and giving her head a playful

“noogie” rub. “Kate Hanson. You remember, I told you we went to high school together and she was moving up here.”

She giggled and broke free, giving him a fast punch in the arm.

Josh shook her hand seriously. His grip was firm, his touch lingering a moment more than was necessary.

“Hi, Kate. I know you’ve had a hell of a long trip. So no worries—you have two healthy male specimens to help get this job done.”

“Nice to meet you, Josh.” Without trying to seem too obvious, she gave him a quick once-over—and then made it a twice-over.

“The feeling’s mutual.” Josh’s mouth moved up into an amused quirk. He let his own gaze travel over her in an openly intimate manner. “Did anyone ever tell you that you’re beautiful when you’re wet?”

Kate blushed, feeling the heat creep into her cheeks. His close assessment was unsettling to a woman who wasn’t used to this kind of attention. Beyond displaying a professional demeanor at work, she usually didn’t much care how she looked to other people. Now, though, she was a ragged mess, and here was some stranger eyeing her like a kid spotting a candy bar.

“No,” she stammered, “no one ever has. I must be an absolute mess.” Some sparks were unexpectedly flying here and she wasn’t sure how to handle them. Would it be best to pretend she wasn’t attracted? Why was she letting her thoughts go on overdrive today? She needed to get settled, get into the groove of a routine before she could think about getting into a different sort of groove with a man. But she’d definitely keep this Josh in mind, too.

That’s if he doesn’t have a girlfriend, she reminded herself. A gorgeous guy like Josh wasn’t going to be left dangling for long. In fact, he probably had a new girl every week.

Josh looked to be about the same age as her and Scott. But unlike Scott, his brown hair was neatly cropped close to his head, the epitome of the company man. His brown

eyes were soft, though, and kind. A high forehead, strong jaw and fine mouth finished his face. In the body department, he was a hair shorter than Scott and otherwise well matched his friend. His slacks and shirt seemed to hug his broad shoulders, narrow waist and solid abs. His suit was scruffy – well-worn slacks, black tie, white button-down Oxford shirt spotted with some faded black ink marks around the breast pocket.

Office worker, she surmised. Probably management level, but has to do the dirty work, too. The car was an older model, in mint condition. He liked the flash without being obvious. Married? Her gaze darted quickly to his left hand. Nope. No ring. A good sign. He certainly had nice lips – very kissable. The confidence he radiated enveloped her. In her mind's eye, his clothes started coming off. She felt her cheeks growing warm again, her pussy starting to ache. Lordy! She was getting out of control. And when was the last time she'd blushed like this?

Scott jostled Josh aside, giving her an approving smile. "Don't be hogging my girl, dude."

"I was just having a word with the lady," Josh said gracefully.

Kate blushed again. Scott was almost acting like a protective big brother – or a jealous boyfriend.

"Well, I guess we'd better get busy if we're going to get this done before dark. I have to get this truck back tomorrow morning." She tried not to let the compliments fluster her. It had been a long time since anyone had called her beautiful. She certainly didn't think she was a pretty woman, but who was she to let Josh know that he needed glasses? "I was wondering how I was going to move those by myself. I didn't think Scott was going to show."

"Hey, that's not fair! I was on my way here when the truck just sputtered and died."

"You need to get rid of that piece of junk," Josh told him.

"Never. I'll drive that old blue truck until it's dead."

"That's the truth." Josh's eyes danced with amusement and Kate felt her heart do a flip-flop. "Well, never fear, Miss Kate. We'll have it all unloaded for you in no time."

Scott squeezed past her. As he did, his body brushed hers, hands lingering on her hips. Though it only lasted a moment, it was enough to set her afire. Her heart began to pound. Why was she feeling so curiously aware of him? Her sexual senses picked up on his masculine scent, his obvious strength. Every beat of her heart made her that much more aware that Scott was no longer a boy, but all man. She almost sighed with relief when he climbed up into the trailer. Did he know how aroused he was making her? She felt overwhelmed by his touch alone. Another moment and she would have begged him to throw her to the ground and fuck her silly. It had been almost three whole years since she'd been in bed with a man. She needed to have sex soon or she'd die of frustration.

Ruthlessly, she forced her thoughts back to the matter at hand — getting unpacked.

"So, what do we move first?" Scott wanted to know.

"Well, if you're going to work, you've got to at least let me buy us something to eat. Pizza okay with you guys?" Her own stomach rumbled at the mention of food, reminding her that she had not eaten all day. Though excited, she was tired. The trip had been a long one, over nine hours in all. She was running on pure adrenaline. The only thing she wanted to do was have a bath and then get some sleep.

"Great!" both guys answered at once.

"Throw in a beer and we're all yours," Scott said.

Chapter Three

An hour later, Kate, Josh and Scott collapsed in the living room. The truck had been completely emptied and most of the heavy furniture was in its place. Save for the boxes, it was beginning to resemble a proper home. The boys had made the moving a competition between them, each vying to show off his he-man strength and catch her eye. She and Scott joked and laughed about old times in high school. Josh made it a point to join in, yakking as if he'd known her all his life. It was clear he was trying to get to know her as well as Scott did.

Both Scott and Josh had made it a point to make physical contact with her—a hand brushing hers as they reached for the same box, holding her waist as she climbed into the trailer, brushing a stray lock of hair out of her face...all the little things men do to let a woman know they're thinking other thoughts. Physical thoughts.

She loved every second. It was fun and amusing to have two good-looking guys flirting outrageously with her. Always a little shy, she'd never been the type of woman to easily make friends. She'd always hung back, every bit the clumsy wallflower. But here was her chance to change, become daring, more outgoing. If she wanted to shake things up and live a little, well why not? She was single. Scott was single and hanging loose. And Josh? Well, she had yet to find out, though he was making it clear he liked gazing at her. He was giving *those* glances, the kind that practically undressed a woman from head to toe.

"I can't thank you guys enough. I was at my wits' end."

"Hey, no problem," Scott said from where he was sprawled out on the floor. "Glad to do it. Not like I had anything else to do."

"Me neither." Josh stood up and peeled off his tie, then unbuttoned his dress shirt to reveal an undershirt covering some very well-defined pecs. "Guess we should get out of these wet clothes. I'm going to get into something dry."

"I'll order pizza," Kate offered, not wanting them to leave too soon. "Where's the best place?"

"There's a Pizza Hut nearby," Scott said with a yawn.

"Be right back," Josh said from the hallway. "Heavy pepperoni," he called over his shoulder before he shut the door.

She glanced down at Scott and prodded him with her foot. "And what would you like, buddy boy?"

"I'd like to get out of these wet clothes myself." Scott sat up and wriggled out of his wet T-shirt.

Kate nearly fainted at the sight of his rock-hard abs and tanned skin. It was clear he was proud of his body and that he liked to show it off. But that was no gym job. His muscles were sculpted from hard labor. For the first time she noticed the barbed-wire-and-skulls tattoo ringing his right arm. *When did he get that? Wow.* Even though they'd been friends for years, there was still a lot to get to know about Scott.

Scott smiled, giving her a flash of white teeth. "What about you, Katie?" He took a playful swipe at her leg, wrapping his arm around her knees. "You must be soaked to the bone. Don't you wanna get outta those wet clothes? If you need some help..." He squeezed a little harder.

Though they had fooled around a little in high school, it had never been serious. Just two teens trying to explore their gawky sexuality. They'd each had their hearts pinned on different people, so nothing had ever gotten too heavy between them. Now, over ten years later, they were both experienced adults who had tasted a bit of life – and sex.

"Oh, I think I can handle myself." Kate stepped out of his grasp and unbuttoned her jacket. Shrugging it off her shoulders, she let it drop to the floor. Since she was

small-breasted, she usually went braless. Her perky breasts were standing front and center, erect nipples poking through the thin material of her shirt.

"Wow, Kate," Scott whistled.

She drew back her shoulders. "Think so?"

"Oh, I know so."

Daring to go a step further, she lifted her own T-shirt over her head, baring her torso. It wasn't as if they hadn't seen each other half naked before. Dropping it, she shook her head, running her fingers through her hair, letting the gentle waves brush her shoulders. It was a wonderful sensation of freedom. She felt very sensual. Very female. It was totally out of character, but what the hell. She was definitely attracted to Scott in a physical way. But what was wrong with that? After all, she might be a divorcee, but she wasn't dead. And the way she'd been living these last few years, she might as well have been a corpse. Would it hurt to have a little flirtation with an old friend?

"Like what you see?" she teased, unable to ignore the stirring of interest in her own body.

"Oh, yeah."

Even now, her clit was literally pulsing. She could feel the moisture between her legs. For a moment she wondered what would happen if he kissed her. Would she freeze, or would she pounce on him and rip off his pants? She almost laughed aloud at the notion. Damn, things had certainly changed between them, and she hadn't even been aware of it until this moment. She didn't need this sexual awareness popping up every time she talked to him.

Before she knew what was happening, Scott was standing up, drawing her into his arms. Delicious warmth, like being dipped in honey, spread over her body. Closing her eyes, she gave herself to the moment. It felt so good to be in the arms of a man who desired her. The sensations were so intense. She leaned into him, feeling his hard male body pressed against hers. By the pulse of that generous erection captured in his pants, she could tell he was as aroused as she was.

Scott's hands moved, sliding up her sides, under her arms, over her breasts. His touch was light, sensual. A rush of sexual warmth filled her. Her nipples hardened anew, the tips peaking. Catching her gaze, he bent down and kissed her, his fingers making slow sensual circles around the pink areolas of her nipples. Her skin dimpled and the fine hairs on the back of her neck rose.

"I don't usually do this," she started to say when their kiss was broken.

Scott flashed another of his lazy grins. "What?"

"Sleep with my friends."

"Me neither." He took a deep breath then continued. "So maybe we should quit being friends..." He lowered his head so his mouth could find her left breast, and he sucked her nipple deeply into his mouth. His tongue made quick circles around its softness, flicking and teasing. His hand sank lower, tracing over her belly, then lower still until he found her crotch. He began to rub through her jeans in slow, easy strokes. The combination of wet material and her own personal heat was a scintillating sensation. It was clear he had learned many new tricks since high school.

"I think we could be more than just friends." A distinct moan floated from her parted lips. Her clit was beginning to ache, her pussy growing moist with the juices of her arousal. He fumbled to unbutton her jeans and his fingers settled between her folds, instigating an excruciating tease. Her breasts began to throb with the desire to be kissed, suckled, and he claimed them with his lips and teeth and tongue. She drew in a deep ragged breath, digging her fingers into his hard shoulders.

"Katie," he breathed, "I've been meaning to tell you that there's a reason I asked you to move down here —"

The sound of two angry Persians clawing at the bedroom door interrupted further conversation.

Snatching up her wet clothes and pressing them to her chest, she hopped over boxes, making her way to the bedroom. "My boys! I totally forgot them!"

"Your boys?" Scott echoed, a hint of frustration in his voice.

"I told you about the boys. Meet my kids." When she opened the door, the twin cats rushed out, ears pinned back, faces turned on to full frown, two sets of coppery eyes narrowed in suspicion.

Scott stared down on the two hissing felines and then burst out laughing. "What happened to their faces? Have they been chasing parked cars?"

Kate bristled. "They're Persians. They're supposed to be like that."

"They look like mops." Then, seeing he had hurt her feelings, he continued, "But they're very, uh, cute."

She lifted her chin. "You don't own a cat until you've owned a Persian. These boys are of the highest pedigree."

"Cats?" Scott snickered, hunkering down to cat level. "I thought they were gremlins." He knelt down, crooking his index finger. "Here kitty, kitty. Nice kitties."

Larry hissed and immediately hunkered down on all fours, ready to pounce. Monty, the braver of the two, headed toward the new human invader. He sniffed Scott's proffered hand and then allowed Scott to scratch his ears. Finding the new human acceptable, Monty rolled over onto his back and splayed out his legs, obviously begging for a belly rub. Scott laughed and obliged the cat. Seeing his pal getting the better deal, Larry hurried over for his share of the petting.

Kate had to smile. The twins usually didn't take to strange people any better than she did, but animals knew when people liked them. Scott had obviously won the twins over.

"Their names are Montgomery and Laurence."

He scrunched up his face at the pretentious monikers. "Don't tell me. Let me guess. They're named for Montgomery Clift and Laurence Olivier?"

"Yeah, they are."

"I remember how you like the old movies. Remember when we had to watch *King Lear* with Olivier for senior English? God, mind-numbing."

"I thought it was a fine production," Kate said, impressed that he even recalled seeing it. As she remembered it, he'd snoozed through almost the entire two hours.

"Yeah, finely boring."

She rolled her eyes to the ceiling in mock exasperation. "Some things never change."

Realizing that she had better get dressed before Josh came back and found them, she hurried into her bedroom. Digging into a box labeled *sweaters*, she put on the first one she pulled out. Sitting down on the bed, she took off her wet boots. It felt good to get those off her feet. She'd been wearing them since this morning and the pinch on her little toe had been driving her crazy. She rubbed her toe.

Scott called out, "Hey, should I order the pizza?"

"Yeah. Get what you like and spare no expense!" Her stomach growled again, reminding her that she had not eaten in quite a while. This morning's wheat toast and tea were just a memory. Her chest felt tight, her muscles heavy. The day was beginning to catch up with her.

Spurred back into action, she unbuttoned her jeans, wriggled out of them and found a dry pair. She zipped them up. She made a quick visit to the bathroom, pawing through the boxes until she found a butterfly clip. Pinning up her wet dark blonde hair, she cast a glance to the full-length mirror. Lips parted, skin flushed, a hungry, wanton expression coloring her features. She came across like a woman ready to be fucked. No, a woman who needed to be fucked. Now.

A weak laugh escaped her throat.

Turning to the side, she sucked in her tummy, not that she really needed to. Her stomach was flat, having only a slight curve above her pubic mound.

She gave another turn, examining her rear end. She ran her hands over her butt cheeks. Thankfully still tight despite all those hours of sitting behind her computer. It was the bicycling that kept her firm. Her legs were her best feature, long and slender.

I am just not a beautiful woman. Too tall, too thin, too small-busted and I've got a big mouth with a goddamned space right between my front teeth. Nope. The word beautiful was never used to describe her. Cute. Perky. Those were the words men used with her. But not beautiful. She could easily give the girl next door a run for her money. Put her hair in a ponytail and she appeared to be all of twelve years old.

Perky at thirty. Men didn't want perky. They wanted mature, striking, beautiful.

Brushing powder over her nose to kill the oily shine, she headed back out to the living room. Scott was just hanging up the phone when Josh walked in, dressed in jeans and a polo shirt and carrying a paper sack. Setting it down on the counter, he opened it and pulled out a six-pack of sodas.

"Hope you don't mind, but I took the liberty of bringing a couple of drinks." He popped the top on one and handed it to Kate.

"No, it's great. Thanks." She took a long drink.

Josh's eyes skimmed over Scott. "You going to wear those wet pants all night, asshole? You'll catch pneumonia or something."

Scott shook his head, tossing his wet T-shirt over one shoulder. "Just on my way out to change. Pizza will be here in thirty minutes. Guess I have time." Throwing Kate a wink and quick smile, he sauntered out the door, whistling.

Chapter Four

Seeing that there was a new man to be checked out, one of the twins jumped up on the counter. It was Monty. Kate could tell the cats apart only by the little white blotches on their noses. Larry's was on the left, Monty's on the right.

Josh reached over and petted Monty's head, scratching the huge Persian behind his ear. Happy that there were new hands around to offer unlimited petting, Monty caught Josh's hand with his paw, barely using his claws to get a grip, and gave his fingers a light nip. It was a hearty sign of approval.

"Monty," Kate scolded halfheartedly, "You know the counters are a no-no."

Monty ignored her and gave his attention to his new friend. Josh scratched the big cat from head to tail, then set him down on the floor. Monty sauntered over to his food dish as Kate set it down.

"He's giving you the eye. I guess that means that you've passed Monty's approval."

"I like cats." Josh grinned. "He's not the only one sending the eye around." He took on a mock scolding tone. "Scott's giving you the winks, or haven't you noticed?"

Kate tried to look nonchalant. "Oh? I hadn't really given it any thought. I mean, well, we're best friends. We couldn't get serious." That sounded so lame. She took another gulp of soda. Where she had been freezing a moment before, now she was burning up.

Josh nodded. "Oh, I know Scott. When he sees a girl he wants, he's all over her." His eyebrows rose, as if he knew what she and Scott had been up to.

"Nah. Not Scott. We go back years."

"What about you?" Josh asked, fingering his soda can. "You looking?"

She pretended to think. "I'm keeping options open. I like the single life." That sounded like the right answer.

"Well, since you're into options, maybe I should let you know Scott isn't the only guy around."

She drew herself up, feeling that certain pull of attraction in her loins. Yes, every time Josh gazed at her with those smoldering brown eyes, she felt the pull of a serious attraction. A serious mutual attraction.

"Meaning?"

He hesitated, then said, "Meaning I might be looking, too."

Kate weighed his words. What a day! Two men interested in her. And she was definitely interested in reciprocating.

So, which to choose?

Should she take a chance with her freewheeling buddy Scott, or should she give her attention to the more quiet, reserved Josh? Definitely a conundrum, but a very desirable one. If no one got too serious, then why not both?

Oh, but there was the problem. In a love triangle, someone was going to eventually be left out in the cold. Would it be better to let Josh know she liked Scott and cut him loose before it went any further? After all, Scott already had the advantage of having seen her half naked.

Kate took a sip of soda to give herself another moment to think of a good reply, to get away from the desire in his compelling eyes. Oh, God, was it wrong to want both men? She wasn't the kind of woman who played games, but it was interesting to think about what it would be like to have two men courting her. Or even better, two men making love to her—at the same time.

Oh, stop that! she admonished herself. It wasn't like her to think of having sex with two men at once. Or was it? She wasn't incapable of fantasizing, had certainly done her

fair share. But this particular fantasy was one she usually pushed to the back of her subconscious, indulging only rarely.

If the opportunity presented itself...

She wasn't even back on her feet yet from the last relationship. Her biological clock wasn't ticking right now, but what if it sprang into action in a year or so? She'd want a solid man in her life, a man who worked hard and planned for the future. Scott was the freewheeling type, out to grab his fun where he could.

Josh, on the other hand, seemed more stable, more the stay-at-home family man type. Maybe he'd be the better choice. But how was she going to find out unless she shopped around and sampled the wares? The thought came insidiously that she'd like to see what it felt like for Josh to kiss her, to touch her.

"A handsome guy like you can't be single, Josh," she teased, trying to hide her frustrations. "There must be lots of girls beating down your door. Any competition I should know about? Other girls who'll be over here tomorrow to pull my hair and scratch out my eyes in a fit of jealousy?" She tried to make her own voice light, bantering. No reason to get too serious too quickly.

His face took on a haunted expression. "I'm not into psycho women. Those jealous types just aren't for me. Really, there's not much going on in my life since Cindy divorced me."

Kate felt her heart lurch but quickly recovered. So he *was* single. Were the women of Oregon blind, deaf and dumb? Was Josh secretly a creep who kicked dogs and took candy away from babies?

"How long ago?" she blurted without thought.

"Three months."

Uh, oh. Rebound boy. Never a good thing. Best to tread slow here.

She reached out and patted his arm. "Hey, I know how you feel. Me, it's been a little over three years. Took me quite a while to get back on track. Sometimes I think I'm not quite there."

For a moment Josh's eyes traced every inch of her. That slightly lopsided smile tugged at his lips, and his brown eyes stared into hers with an unexpected intensity. His brown hair was thick, with just a hint of curl now that the rain had washed it.

"I think you're all here." His voice came soft and low, like a lover's caress in the midnight hour. He reached out and stroked the soft pulse at the base of her neck.

She drew in a deep breath. "Why, Josh..." She batted her lashes playfully, "Are you hitting on me?"

"I wouldn't want you to think I hit on every girl who comes along." His gaze locked with hers. "But I have to take a chance and do something before Scott steals you for himself."

She gulped. "What?"

"This."

Without another word, Josh leaned in and closed the distance between them, covering her lips with his.

Kate welcomed the instant pleasure. She liked the way his lips were moving over hers, hot and oh so in control. His tongue traced her lips, licking them, then slipped deep into her mouth. He gave her lower lip a light nip, then sucked away the brief pain. Their hips drew together and she could feel the ridge of his penis pressing against her. A million butterflies took flight in her tummy, sending a warm shiver all the way through her body. She could feel her nipples raking against the scratchy material of her sweater. When his hand cupped her breast, she moaned softly, pushing her body against his. Her heat built as conscious awareness faded. Josh teased her nipple, tugging at the hard tip and causing sensations to flood through her that almost bowled her over.

"Wow," she said when their kiss had broken. "That was...wow."

He grinned. "Want to do it again?"

She grinned back, basking in his compliment. "Yeah."

His mouth captured hers with more intensity. She closed her eyes, giving herself to the lovely moment. He was a great kisser. Even better than Scott. She liked the way he sucked on the tip of her tongue before drawing her in for a deeper kiss.

Suddenly, Josh drew away. His hands cinched her waist and he lifted her onto the counter, maneuvering his body between her spread legs. His impressive erection rubbed against the split in her thighs, straining to break free of the cruel material keeping their bodies apart.

Reaching out blindly, she slid her arms around Josh's neck. Holding on, she pulled him closer, opening her mouth to let his exploring tongue back in, letting him lead the dance. Before she knew what was happening, his hands had slipped under her sweater, gently kneading her breasts.

Dimly, Kate heard herself moan. She remembered how attractive she had found him from the second she first laid eyes on him. She couldn't believe how hot he was making her. If he wanted to kiss all night, well, she was ready, willing and able. She tugged on his shirt, wanting to feel his skin against hers, wanting to please him as much as he was pleasing her. He obliged, and she heard the sound of his pants unzipping. How she longed for a man who'd take control of her, capturing her arms, his muscular body pinning down her smaller, slender one, his legs parting hers—

A knock sounded at the door.

Josh uttered a short oath, immediately moving aside to let Kate down off the counter.

"You guys were the ones who wanted pizza," she said with an embarrassed giggle. She wiped her swollen mouth and tried to arrange herself into some sort of composure, fanning herself with her hand. She definitely wanted to keep exploring his body, though.

"That pizza guy needs a punch on the nose." Josh cursed, pulling his shirt back over his head and reaching for his wallet as he headed toward the door.

"Hey!" Kate called, rushing after him. "Pizza's on me."

Josh gave her a lascivious grin. "Oh, you're going to pay me back, honey."

"With what?"

He gave a sly wink. "I'm sure you'll think of something." Opening the door, he was met with a surprise. Scott stood outside, a six-pack of beer in one hand, pizza in the other.

"I paid the guy already." He sauntered inside, completely oblivious to the daggers shooting from Josh's narrowed eyes. "Who's hungry?"

Kate had to laugh to herself.

Oh, goodness. I've gotten myself into double trouble.

And it felt damned good.

Chapter Five

The rest of the evening passed with fun and not-so-subtle flirting. Kate couldn't remember a time when she'd enjoyed herself more. It was with reluctance that she sent both men home for the night.

Alone, she decided a hot bath would be just the thing to take the twinge out of her toes, the numbness out of her butt and the tension out of her shoulders. She needed warmth, heat. She wrangled a towel from a box marked *Linens*. Digging through her cosmetics bag, she took out her toothbrush and other necessary items.

The adjoining bathroom to her bedroom was large and luxurious. Bending over, she put the stopper in, turning the tap and adjusting the water to the perfect temperature. She poured a capful of bubble bath into the steaming water. The scent of lavender wafted up as she began to strip off her clothing. In a moment, pants and panties followed her sweater. Naked, she slid into the tub, sighing heavily.

The steaming hot water felt wonderful on her tired bones. She sank down until her chin touched the bubbles.

Her feelings about being in Oregon without any close family had been seesawing from anxiety to anticipation these last few weeks. Here she was, moving yet again to a strange new state all by herself. The idea had upset her mother greatly. When informed that Kate was moving for the fifth time in as many years, her mother had replied as she always did, "Why haven't you married again? Found a steady man? Had a few kids? Moved back home?"

Married again, indeed. After the last disaster, she wasn't sure she wanted that piece of paper ever again. It was such a pain in the ass to be legally tied to someone.

Still, at this point in her life, her professional resume was slightly better than her romantic one.

For one thing, she'd had to work full time since she graduated high school, even while attending college to earn her Associate's degree in graphic arts. That took a lot more than eight hours out of a girl's day right there. And two, she put every spare minute into her art, something both of her parents most firmly did not support, no matter her minor successes.

The ring, the kids, the house with its white picket fence. That was what her mother wanted for her. There was something missing from her mom's equation, though. A reliable man who didn't suck up the booze.

Oh, she had dated since she and William parted ways. But nothing ever got I-love-you serious. What she presently wanted was to find a single guy for a simple fuck, no strings attached. She was not seeking another marriage, just some satisfaction.

She smiled. So why couldn't she indulge in a quick fling with Josh or Scott? Or, come on, both? Hell, who said a woman in this day and age had to settle for a single lover? She knew all about birth control and how to use it. Maybe she should stock up on condoms. Something was going to happen with someone. Soon.

Reaching out, she quickly unwrapped a small bar of soap cadged from the last hotel she'd stayed in. Relishing the warmth lapping against her skin, she lathered up and began to wash herself. Starting at her shoulders, she began to work her way down, pausing when her hands came to her breasts. She gave each a long, soapy caress. She traced the tips of her nipples with her fingertips, feeling tiny electrical shocks go through her body as the steam enveloped her. Her nipples puckered, then hardened, as she gave each a gentle twist.

Masturbate, here? Now?

Why not? She had a little itch that still needed to be scratched. Both Josh and Scott had lit her fire, and the flames weren't going to be easily banked without a little helping hand.

Her breathing grew deeper, more ragged. She slid her hand down her belly. Her thighs parted. She slid her fingers between her legs, stroking her clit. Closing her eyes,

she fell back into her new favorite fantasy, the one where two guys were making love to her. The thought sent a rush of pleasure through all her nerve endings.

Feeling wonderfully wanton and fierce, she traced the folds of her labia, rolling the tender flesh between her fingers. Her fantasy had her on her knees, sucking Josh's cock as Scott slid into her cunt from behind. She groaned at the imagined sensations of the two men simultaneously filling her pussy and her mouth. Her clit was pulsing with pleasure at the thought of two cocks available to tease and please her whenever she wanted. Both men would be eager to satisfy her, to make her come in every way possible.

Her free hand cupped and caressed her left breast. Her body began to quiver with tension, to burn with urgency. Nearing climax, she delved two fingers deep into her pussy, pressing them into the center of her passion, meeting each slow delicious wave by arching her back as the first shivers of her orgasm washed over her. She continued stroking her swollen and sensitive clit. The needs of her body beat relentlessly against her senses. Water splashed over the edges of the tub, soaking the bathmat.

Just as she reached the brink, incandescent pleasure exploded through her. As her inner fever broke, she moaned loud and long. Her neck rolling on the edge of the tub, she again caught sight of herself. A fine flush had risen up on her skin, heightening the sparkle in her eyes. She was satisfied, like a cat with a belly full of cream. She gasped, running her tongue over her dry lips. Her throat was parched and her lips were rasped raw by her heavy breath.

Quickly finishing her bath, Kate lifted her body out of the water. She grabbed her towel and wrapped it around her body, taking another to dry her arms and legs. She made a mental note to shave down her hairy trunks before letting anyone see her naked again. How long had it been since she'd last taken a razor to her legs? Months, she was sure. She gave her teeth a good brushing.

Without bothering to dig out her pajamas, she padded naked through the apartment. That was the freedom of being single and living alone. Because she didn't

want the guys to think she was a total pig, she'd only eaten two slices of pizza and drank a Coke—and it hadn't been enough to satisfy her appetite. Scott had razzed her unmercifully about her birdlike appetite, reminding her how she used be able to scarf down a whole pizza herself. She had to cringe at the memory. She'd been a pudgy teenager, carrying more than her share of baby fat. Then, at fifteen, she'd shot up like a beanstalk to five feet nine as her body reshaped itself. Except for tits. She didn't have nearly enough to make a decent rack.

In the fridge was some leftover pizza, so she took the box and settled into bed. She loved cold pizza. Eating in bed was a bad habit she'd developed as a single person. And why not? With the twins on their pillows, a good book in hand and a snack, bed was the perfect place to have dinner alone at night. Begging for tidbits of meat, the twins leapt onto the king-sized bed, immediately heading for the pizza box.

She shooed the cats away. *Solo sex*. She giggled. *And good food*. What more could she ask for on her first day in Oregon?

How about real sex with real men?

Taking a slice, Kate fed each cat a morsel of pepperoni and began to eat, munching as she gazed over the bedroom. Scott had taken it upon himself to dig out the bedding, making up the bed with great flourish. He'd winked and half-whispered to her, "I'd like to see you in this."

Plugging in the lamp by the bed, Josh had caught his friend's words. "With me," he had finished.

Already it was clear that the boys were drawing their lines in the sand where she was concerned. She'd given each the go-ahead. She felt a little guilty for leading them both on. The stresses of the move had affected her, made her act like a hussy dying to be fucked by the first man who came along. She needed to make it clear that she wasn't that way at all, that she usually didn't lose her head around men.

Yeah, she might know Scott, but it had been a long time since they'd spent a great amount of time together. What if it turned out that she didn't like him anymore? People changed. Friendships blossomed or they died on the vine.

She'd been eager—maybe too eager—to go with his idea that she should move to Oregon. After all, what did she have holding her in Montana? Not much. Some friends, but no one close enough to stick around for. Going back to Texas and the small town her parents lived in? Unthinkable. So she'd taken him up on the suggestion. Quit her job, packed her bags and rented the U-Haul.

Not once when she was packing did she ever consider going in another direction, one that would take her back to Texas, back home. That part of her life was long gone, sealed away in the box of memory, rarely opened. Though her parents had often urged her to move back to where her family lived, she'd always declined the suggestions and opportunities to do so. Snowballs would fly in hell before she moved back to that godforsaken area. Muleshoe, Texas—and yes, there really was a place named that—was no more than a blot on the dusty, barren plains of west Texas.

Kate had spent almost twenty years of her life in that town. A bookish little girl, she'd never managed to fit in with the rest of the kids she went to school with.

Scott was the sole exception. They had probably drifted together because neither of them fit in with the popular groups. Scott was not athletic, a skinny kid built like a twig with a shock of blond hair and a face that could delicately be described as homely. His own family was in pieces, and his parents were going through a bitter divorce that would end in gunplay when Scott's dad shot his mother's lover on the front steps of the courthouse during their divorce proceedings. The man did not die, but Scott's dad got a long prison sentence for aggravated assault, pleaded down from attempted murder.

Kate, on the other hand, had been pudgy and shy. Scott liked to read, make up adventure stories. She liked to draw. Together they would spend many hours planning to write their own comic book series. Scott would write it, Kate would draw it. Like many childhood dreams, it never came into being.

Like all school friends, they had drifted apart when childhood faded and real life rudely intruded. To escape his own tainted past, Scott had up and moved to Arizona after he'd graduated, the first of the many traveling construction jobs he would pursue through the years.

Once again she was starting over, and once again specters of the past were tugging at her. The past had ghosts, too many of them, ghosts who had come into being before she was even conceived. She supposed those ghosts had something to do with the fact that she was a naturally standoffish person and rarely exhibited the bonhomie that seemed to come so easily to other people. People knew her, but they didn't really *know* her. She was always holding them at arm's length, determined not to let them know that she'd grown up in a household where her mother screamed insanely and her father drank himself into a quiet stupor, a defeated shell of a man, corroded by failure, resentment and hate. Perhaps she didn't know how to have fun as an adult because she'd witnessed so little fun in her childhood. Footloose and fancy-free didn't seem to be words in her vocabulary.

She sighed. It was time to put away all those memories. Not all of them horribly bad, but still hardly worth revisiting on a regular basis. It occurred to her that she'd spent a lot of time running away from her past, but no matter how far she went from that dusty Texas town, she'd never entirely escape it because she could not escape her own mind. She didn't want to take her mother's course, one of crippling depression and constant denial. No, it was definitely time to move on. To build new memories. To leave seriousness behind for a while and remember how to live.

Chapter Six

The feel of a heavy weight on her chest and a paw squashing her face brought Kate to wakefulness. Opening her eyes, she found herself staring into Larry's bright copper eyes. Ears twitching, tongue sticking halfway out of his mouth, the big cat looked incredibly silly. Then he did what he always did when he was upset. He sneezed. Pleased with himself, he turned tail and gave her a good view of his behind.

Kate laughed. "Cat butts. I'm always looking at cat butts." She caught the big feline up in a bear hug, rolling him over and making loud smacking noises and giving him "kissies". Larry squawked, highly offended by this undignified treatment. When she let him loose, he scampered across the bed, joining Monty, who was crouched at the foot.

Glancing at the clock, she groaned. It was well past noon. Why had she let those guys stay until almost three? She covered her face with one of the cat pillows, thinking that she wasn't ready to get up. She had slept well and just wasn't ready to get up. She lay savoring the warm cocoon her body's heat had created under the blankets. Speaking of heat...the images strung across her mind's screen as cobwebs drifted up to the forefront of her memory.

A slow smile crossed her face. Under the covers, her hands drifted over her naked skin, finding the peaks of her hard nipples, tracing them. Her right hand drifted lower, finding the soft curls of her mound. Her pussy was wet, slick, a little sore—probably from the pounding she'd given it with her own fingers. Her thighs were sore, as if they had been stretched wide—as one would feel after riding a horse—from all the bending and stretching from the move. After the last week, she'd never have to exercise again to keep her figure. She squeezed her legs together. Her body was still trembling from that absolutely incredible sexual dream she'd had. A dream so intense, it had seemed real.

Kate remembered how shamelessly she'd writhed between two hard male bodies, begging them to take her again and again. She sighed, remembering how both men had kissed her passionately, their mouths claiming her lips, breasts and clit with a hunger she hadn't expected. Her body now throbbed in aftermath, recalling how their hands had traveled her, seeking, finding, exploring every inch of her. She'd willingly molded her flesh to theirs, feeling the hardness of two cocks. They'd explored her with the experience of men who'd learned how to manipulate a woman's pleasure to its ultimate heights, taking her again and again, sending her insatiable body to pinnacles of orgasm, she'd never before attained.

How she wished.

She shifted slightly, and then rolled over on her side. What would it be like to wake up next to two men she'd just had sex with, to feel their strong bodies next to hers? She imagined how she would waken them, touching their penises, feeling both men grow firm in her hands. She would caress each softly, then slide down under the covers to wake them right.

But she was alone. Well, for now. She had the feeling she wasn't going to be sleeping with only the cats much longer.

She sighed. It was amazing what a move to a new place could do for a girl's life.

Feeling the familiar pressure in her bladder, she slid her legs over the edge of the bed and got up. She could waste all day sitting in bed, thinking about the great fun she'd had last night, but she had so much to do. Time to get up and get going. She was eager to unpack and get her home into some kind of order. Rain was still pattering on the ceiling, so today would be the perfect stay-inside day. Scott had offered to return the truck to the local U-Haul office this morning, a generous gesture, considering she didn't know where it was.

Twenty minutes and a quick shower later, Kate made her way to the kitchen, this time dressed in a pair of faded blue jeans and one of William's old flannel shirts, knotted at the waist. She'd pinned up her long hair, letting a few sexy strands hang

around her neck and around her face. She always looked best that way, hair slightly messy. No reason to mess with the makeup. Both Scott and Josh would be working today and probably had Friday night plans, she probably wouldn't be laying eyes on either. That suited her just fine. She needed some space to think. Two attractive and interesting men were just too much for one woman to handle.

Peeking out her window, she looked down into the parking lot. Sure enough, the truck was gone. Her car was parked in its place. The keys would be under the seat, where she'd arranged with Scott to leave them. She had a spare set, so no big deal about locking them inside. Turning, she glanced down at the counter. On a piece of paper, Josh had scribbled his name and number before he left last night. Underneath that, he'd scrawled two words — *Call me*.

Seeing it, Kate felt the prickly excitement of sexual desire creep through her bones. The written request was definitely tempting.

But what about Scott? He had very clearly indicated his availability to her, too. Put side by side, both men were equally sexy, equally desirable. If she had to choose, she couldn't.

She wanted them both.

She tucked Josh's number into her wallet. Keeping it handy just in case she decided to call him up sometime.

Digging into one of the boxes labeled *Kitchen* she unpacked the coffeemaker, set it on the counter and plugged it in. Filling the carafe with water, she flipped it on so the water could begin to percolate. She didn't drink regular coffee, instead preferring the decadence of instant cappuccino. She'd love to have a real machine but just hadn't gotten around to messing with one. Maybe for her birthday she'd splurge. Still, instant wasn't too terribly bad. She certainly drank enough of it. There was nothing better than a hot mocha latte. That was, unless it was a mocha latte with whipped cream. It was her weakness in life and she simply could not get enough. She'd had to give up going to the local shop and having them freshly made when her monthly cappuccino bill began to

exceed a hundred dollars a month. She might not have anything else but cat food in the house, but by God, she would certainly have enough coffee to drink.

With the water hot, she put together her special blend. Two teaspoons of mocha, a teaspoon of English toffee cappuccino and a pinch of cinnamon, along with a generous dollop of Coffee Mate. Thick and rich, it was just the way to start the day, no matter the hour.

After Kate had set the kitchen in fair order, she bypassed the living room and headed to the bedroom. An unmade bed annoyed her. She set to putting the bedroom in order, hanging clothes that she'd simply left on the hangers and covered with plastic garbage bags. Other things like undies and socks were stuffed into the dresser with little thought given to arrangement. She usually bought white everything in the same style, so it didn't matter if socks were matched or not. She simply didn't have time to mess with little chores.

It took about an hour to arrange things the way she wanted between the bathroom and bedroom. Like kitchen items, things had been pared down to necessities only. One, she had put every spare penny into her savings account and two, a single person simply did not require a lot. A monk used to Spartan living would have appreciated her style of decorating. Nothing. Walls had no pictures, tables displayed few knick-knacks. She supposed that came from her childhood. Every time the family got settled, daddy would inevitably get fired and they would have to pack and move yet again so he could find employment somewhere else. It was easier to move when you didn't call a place home. Only people who had homes hung pictures on the walls.

Giving her twins a fond smile, Kate set to work unpacking her entertainment center, which consisted of a small boom box, a thirteen-inch color TV and a used VCR. Okay, so she wasn't much into having the biggest and best. What she had worked just fine. One advantage of working the advertising and classified department at the local newspaper was that you knew about all the sales before the general public. Though policy would not allow a paper's employee to make a call on the item before the paper

was out on the streets, having a heads-up and calling at 6 a.m. often secured the item in question.

Deciding that a little music would be nice, she popped a CD into the player. Beethoven's ninth symphony began to play. She especially liked the fourth movement, the chorale piece. Though she liked rock and roll and heavy metal, too, there was something about music's original bad boy that attracted her to the composer's work.

Just as she was thinking that now would be the time to take a break and venture out for something to drink, she was interrupted by a vigorous knocking on her door.

"Kate!" Scott bellowed, "Lemme in."

Smiling to herself, Kate wiped a stray lock of hair out of her face. Making her way around some of the boxes, she unlocked the door and opened it. Scott stood there, all smiles, a six-pack of Coke in one hand and Chinese takeout in the other.

"Food." He lifted the sack. "I didn't think you'd have time to get out and shop yet, so I took the liberty."

"Liberty appreciated." She motioned him inside. A quick peek outside showed no sign of Josh.

"Great." Scott set the food on the counter. "You hungry?"

"I'll start with a Coke."

His face took on a sheepish appearance. "Aw, shit, they're warm."

"And I have no ice."

"Want me to go get some?"

"Just stick them in the freezer for an hour," she said. "I need to unpack the computer and get my desk set up."

He shrugged. "Sounds good. Let me help you."

"Great. They're heavy."

Leading the way, Kate began to tackle the box containing her desktop computer. Scott bent over and lifted the heavy machine from its Styrofoam prison.

"Where do you want it?"

"Duh, desk." She followed with the heavy fourteen-inch monitor. Through the years she'd never bothered to upgrade it, as it had great color and how much screen did a person need to stare at anyway. The desktop was top of the line, though hardly a new machine after three years. She'd ordered it custom-made and paid on it for over a year. The monitor was a discontinued refurbished model, and she'd never had a day's problem with either. Keyboard and mouse were quickly added. That done, she unzipped the case that carried her laptop. This was newer, and she was still paying it off, fifty dollars a month. It would take three more years to pay it off, but she'd had no choice but to take the higher interest rate. As a graphic artist, she needed it as a tool of her trade. It wasn't a luxury.

Scott whistled. "Pretty nice setup."

"Thanks. I'd like a newer desktop, but that's not possible right now."

He laughed. "I don't even know how to use one of these things. Turning one on is a mystery to me."

"You should learn." She cocked her head to one side. "If you want, I can teach you. I used to make spare money tutoring and doing web design. I hope to start that up again here, if there's a market."

"That would be cool."

With the computer set up, Kate moved to the next pile of boxes, those that held her most cherished possessions. The cat plates, over one hundred of them, were still securely packed in their cartons. She'd collected them through many years but had never taken them out. Not because she feared Larry and Monty might break one, but because there was really no place to display them in the manner they should be. In the back of her mind she harbored the dream of having a whole wall of shelves devoted to their display. So far it had not happened. It hadn't happened through ten years. The plates were still new, opened only for her to see the design before being relegated to the growing stack in the closet.

"Holy shit." Scott picked up a container and cracked it open to examine the plate inside. "How many do you have?"

"A lot. Over a hundred."

"Where do you want them?"

"The utility room, please."

His eyebrow rose. "Not unpacking them?"

She shook her head. "Not until I have my shelves. That's my ambition in life. To have a place with an entire wall of shelves."

Scott began to examine the walls. "Where do you want them?"

She missed his hint. "What?"

"Your shelves, silly." He flexed his arms like a muscle man. "I could build them."

Kate felt flustered. "Really?" She wasn't sure what to say. It was such a sweet offer. Flustered, she fussed with each, making sure none were shattered. So far, no sounds of tinkling glass were meeting her ears.

"Sure. I am a carpenter, you know. It's what I do."

"You know, that's not a bad idea. How much could you do it for?"

"Pretty cheap. You buy the wood and the beer, and I'll do the rest."

A grin caught hold as her imagination took over. "That would be so cool, having my plates displayed. I've waited for years to be able to put them out. My last place just didn't have any extra space at all."

He eyed the living room. "No problem with that here. You've got plenty of room in here. Bedroom, too."

He smiled and Kate's heart did a one-eighty turn in her chest. Her knees suddenly grew weak and she wondered if she could remain standing. Scott was just so damn yummy. Needing to distract her mind, she picked up a box and carried it into the utility room. Scott followed and soon all her plates were securely stored.

Remembering the Cokes, Scott pulled two cold cans out of the freezer. "Thirsty?"

"God, yes!" She cracked her can and gulped down a mouthful of soda.

His husky voice was deep and warm. "Hungry now?"

She glanced at the clock. Was it already going on six? "Starved," she said. She grabbed a couple of forks out of the drawer. "I hope you don't mind informal. We can eat in the living room."

They spread the food out on the coffee table, sitting on the floor and leaning against the couch, just as they had when they were teens and would watch TV at each other's houses. She kicked off her shoes and sat down, legs sprawled out. Attracted by the food, the twins joined them. Two little faces with tongues comically hanging out peeped over the edge of the coffee table.

"Spoiled brats." She stifled the urge to giggle. "We haven't gotten a bite, and already you're asking for food. Beggar cats." She reached for one of the white boxes. He'd bought enough food for an army.

"What did you get?" She opened a box. Chicken fried rice. A favorite dish she loved to eat anytime. She opened another and squealed. "Oh, yes! Sweet and sour shrimp." Another box. Moo goo gai pan. Chicken with mushroom soup, egg rolls, fried wontons and fortune cookies finished the selections. All her favorites. "You remembered."

"You think I could forget? It's only all you ever ate back then." Scott dumped some fried rice onto his plate, followed by some egg rolls and Moo Goo.

Kate took most of the shrimp for herself. She forked up a mouthful. It was heaven. "Wonderful."

"I thought you'd like it," he said, chewing slowly.

Appetite won out over ladylike picking. She completely cleaned her plate and went for a second helping, pouring on more sauce and adding an egg roll.

"Heaven," she kept saying through bites. "I have died and gone to heaven." Each cat also got a piece of shrimp, finding the morsels delicious. The begging game was won, each feline having done his best tricks to persuade the humans to hand over more

food. They got more than their share. Finally, stuffed like a sausage, she pushed her plate away. The twins immediately attacked her leftovers, so she let them have the plate, laughing as the cats swatted each other's heads.

"How do they eat with those little squished faces?" Scott asked.

"As you can see by their girth, very well."

His smile widened. "How long have you had them?"

She sipped her Coke. "About three years. I fell in love with them both the minute I saw them. I begged to be put at the top of the breeder's list for four months. I think I wore her down with the bugging. I love Persians. They are the only cats to own. You have never had a cat until you have had one."

His smile wrapped around her heart. "They are cute."

"My flea balls," she laughed. "They're my kids."

"So, it's love you, love your cats?"

"Oh, yeah. You must love the twins if you're going to be with me."

Scott pushed his own plate aside. "So I bought dinner." He gave an evil grin and quirked his eyebrow evilly. "It's up to you to provide dessert."

She gave him a skewed look. "You have to be kidding. I haven't had time to get out and get any groceries."

"Maybe I wasn't talking about food."

"So what do you think you want?" she asked blithely, not getting the gist of his words. She should have. With his lusty stare, he was mentally peeling away her clothing piece by piece.

Scott leaned forward. His hand rose, fingers circling around the back of her neck to pull her forward. He slanted her head for better access. His kiss was gentle, not hard or demanding.

Too surprised to protest, Kate gave herself to the moment, enjoying the way his lips felt on hers, the way his tongue gently teased. His hand caressed her nape, lighting the flames of desire.

"I think this will do," he murmured, against her throat, his lips trailing over the soft pulse points. His mouth closed over hers a second time and Kate stopped thinking. She could only feel.

When their kiss broke, he gazed into her eyes. "About what I said last night. I was serious."

"About us being lovers?"

"Yes."

She shook her head, trying to clear her senses. Last night, she'd dreamed about Scott, about making love to that hot body of his. She wanted him—that was clear enough. Even now, her nipples were hard, aching to be sucked. Her clit pulsed, her pussy going moist with the juices of her arousal. But now that she was actually faced with him in the flesh, she had to make a hard decision. The leap from just friends to lovers was a long one. There was also the question of her attraction to Josh. If she and Scott became lovers, she'd be obliged to cut the other man loose. She wasn't sure she was ready to do that yet.

Also, she just wasn't that damned desperate for a *steady* boyfriend. Sure, she'd like some sex. A lot of sex, actually. But since her divorce, she'd found that she liked being single, liked providing for herself and deciding how to spend her money. She didn't have to answer to anyone and she liked that feeling of independence. She didn't have to consult a husband to see if it was okay to go out and have a few drinks with her girlfriends or arrange her day around someone else's wants and needs. It was actually nice not to have a man hanging around her neck.

Disturbed by her silence, Scott reached out and caught her hand, fiddling with her fingers. "I don't want to pressure you. If you're not ready..."

Kate sighed. "It's not that I'm not ready. Believe me, I've been thinking of you, too. I'm just afraid things might go wrong between us. I'm open to the sex part. It's the committing to one person part that I'm not ready for."

"So you want to keep it casual?" Scott lifted her hand to his mouth, briefly suckling the tip of her index finger. He traced the tip with his tongue.

Kate almost melted. She couldn't help the warmth that curled around her as she remembered how it had felt to be in his arms last night. She cleared her throat, hoping it would help clear her thoughts. "Yeah," she admitted, "I do."

"I know exactly what you mean," Scott said, "and I can handle that. Let's just have a little fun. If something else happens, that's great."

Kate schooled her features. "And if not, well, why stress?" she finished with a laugh.

He reached out, stroking her cheek. "But I'd like for something to happen now."

Kate hesitated for a single moment. "I would, too," she admitted, "but Scott, it's been a long time since I've been with a man. I'm just not prepared."

He seemed puzzled. "Not prepared?"

She felt an unwelcome heat creeping through her body, straight to her cheeks. Oh, why did she still blush like a virgin at the smallest mention of birth control? Was it because "good girls" weren't supposed to know about that sort of thing? Or because she wasn't used to engaging in sex without love?

"You know, with any contraceptives." She shrugged, trying to find the words to explain. "I haven't needed that stuff, so I haven't bought any. And I'm not on the Pill."

Before she could blink, he laughed and reached into his shirt pocket. "Are you going to hold this against me?" He laughed, waving a couple of condoms.

"I see you're still a Boy Scout at heart."

A smile tugged at his lips. "Well, does it hurt to be prepared?"

She licked dry lips. "What if I had said I didn't want to sleep with you?"

He kept a straight face, but a gleam still lingered in the depths of his eyes. "I wouldn't have said shit and got on out of here with my unhappy hard-on."

"Well, aren't you the gentleman?" Her heart skidded, then raced. Her breathing became difficult. It was going to happen. They were going to have sex.

"I still want my dessert." Scott cupped her face, leaning forward to kiss her lips softly. She tilted her head back, feeling his lips pressing against hers, the heat of his hands on her skin. She opened her mouth a little, allowing him to slip his tongue between her lips. His hands slid to her shoulders to her breasts, tugging at the ties around her waist in a slow, teasing manner. The brush of the fabric against her sensitive nipples felt wonderful. He unbuttoned her shirt, pushing it off her shoulders. She moaned against his mouth when his fingers found the erect nipples, rubbing the pebbled tips with his thumbs. She wanted to fling herself into his arms and beg him to strip her naked, kiss her bare flesh then fuck her with every ounce of his male strength. How she longed for him to swirl his tongue over her clit, lapping her nectar as he flicked and sucked those delicate pink petals.

"Kate, I want you."

She shivered and tightened her arms around him, reveling in the molten sensation of heat running through her veins. "I want you, too."

Scott stood up, pulling her to her feet after him. Without a word, he led her into the bedroom, closing the door behind them so they would have privacy. No need for two sets of copper eyes to watch this human mating ritual. Without bothering to pull back the covers, he picked her up and laid her down on the bed. The condoms followed, landing by her head—hers to control.

"Lie back." Pressing her down, he settled his body between her spread legs. He kept his weight atop her minimal, their bodies meeting only at the hip. His body against hers sent her senses soaring.

Feeling his erection pressing between her legs, Kate gasped, panicking. Her immediate response was to push him off and stop this, as it just wasn't right to fuck

your friends. But the needs of her body, the pull of pure unemotional, unattached primeval sex, was stronger than any protestation she could make. Here she was in the arms of a handsome man, a man who had sought her out because of his own burning desires.

"Maybe we shouldn't, Scott." Bravado fading, she was beginning to lose her nerve. He was staring at her, his gaze burning her flesh.

His eyes never strayed from hers. "I won't go where you don't want me to."

She stifled a groan. "But, what if we hate each other tomorrow? I can't—"

He held her in a gentle yet self-assured grip. His mouth captured hers again, silencing her. A sensation of warmth draped itself across her, a reassuring flash of intuition telling her that he would bring no harm, only extreme pleasure. Her chest was heaving, her breasts rising and falling. She could feel the ache in her nipples, hard, swollen, aching to be sucked. His cock through his jeans, stiff and heavy against the soft nest of her belly. The little imp of lust sitting on her shoulder took aim with his arrow and fired. Direct hit scored.

"Can't what?" he asked playfully when their kiss had broken.

She drew back, feeling the heat of the kiss against her lips. "Can't wait."

"No need to rush," he whispered. "We have the night."

His hand crept up to her left breast. She shivered under his touch when he gently rolled her nipple between thumb and forefinger, tugging and teasing. He nibbled at the softness of her neck, nipping at her earlobe. His breath scorched her skin. His head dipped. With slow, deliberate circles, he began to trace the pink circle of her nipple. His tongue flicked over the wet tip, beginning a delicious tease. He slowly swirled down over the plump mound, down into the valley between her breasts, then back up again to her right nipple. Suckling, licking, teasing, he gave each tiny bud ample attention.

Kate moaned and lifted her hips, pushing against him, her arousal dampening the crotch of his jeans. The ache between her legs was growing increasingly unbearable. Her mouth felt dry. Her stomach was doing flips, trying to keep up with her body's

intense need for release. Inhibitions melting like hot wax, she arched her back and let out a loud sigh.

“That feels wonderful.” Gasping, she tightened her legs around him. He started moving his hips slowly back and forth, grinding against her. His cock was growing harder and hotter through those tight jeans of his. She didn’t know how he could stand the incredible pressure.

Scott smiled. The gleam of anticipation in his eyes was unmistakable. “Patience,” he whispered, beginning to kiss and nibble down her chest, over her ribcage.

She sucked in her breath in anticipation as his lithe body moved lower. Was he going down on her? His hands settled at her waist, and she felt her jeans slacken as he unzipped them. He began to ease them down her thighs. In another moment, he had taken them completely off. Her panties quickly followed. He planted soft butterfly kisses down her flat belly, lower still to the soft curls of her mound. Very lightly, he kissed the insides of her thighs, causing her to shiver. Her breath caught in her throat when he ran his finger between her spread legs. His touch seemed to vibrate against the lips of her pussy.

Eyes scanning her naked flesh, his full mouth curved into a smirk.

“You have a beautiful body.” Scott stroked her, slipping one finger between her pussy lips and tracing the velvety length with a feather-light touch. Ever so gently, his finger slid up and down, spreading her apart and exposing her clit. He pursed his lips and blew, bringing an unexpected chilly sensation. Then he slid his hands under the cheeks of her ass and lifted her until her slit was pressing hard against his mouth. He ran his tongue lightly up her length, taking delight in the way it made her squirm.

Kate’s eyes shot open. Her breath caught and she moaned aloud with pleasure when the tip of his tongue began flicking against her pulsing flesh. She whimpered and squirmed, moving her hips against his face. She could feel her clit going deeper into his mouth. He sucked even harder, making it swell deliciously. She couldn’t mistake that

her body had missed a man's touch. She raised her hips off the bed, trying to meet his mouth. She'd reached her limits of self-control. He pulled back.

"Dessert. Relax and enjoy." His index finger tickled her soft flesh, making her jump. His finger moved down, making slow circles around her dripping pussy.

She reluctantly dropped her hips back to the mattress. Her breathing was still a little ragged, heart hammering in her chest. "I don't know how much of this torture I can take," she sighed, and then grinned. "But I'll certainly try."

Holy hell, but this was amazing! What had she been thinking in holding off from sex? There were so many wonderful sensations to be explored, savored. Her body was firm, ripe, full, bursting with pent-up tension. She moaned and tried to push down against him as he tongue-fucked her. It was so erotic to give herself to him. There were no issues or games between them, no obligations save for the needs of the flesh. It was the ultimate freedom.

"I've only just started, Katie." His hands squeezed her ass cheek, kneading the flesh. Then, his tongue flicked out in long slow strokes, teasing her puffy lips. His tempo quickened, his tongue hot and hard when he unexpectedly drove it deeply into her. His talented fingers began to delve between the cheeks of her ass. Spreading her cheeks apart, he stroked her tightly clenched anus. A little cry of pleasure escaped her lips when he slid his finger into her ass. He began to move his finger in and out in a slow, rhythmic manner. The sensation was strange at first, but not unpleasant.

Kate swallowed hard, the sounds of her frenzied moans and whimpers filling her senses. Watching his blond head buried between her legs only made her hotter. He released one of her thighs and brought his free hand up between her legs. He pressed his thumb against her clit, then with two fingers together, slid them up inside her. He wriggled his fingers, exploring her cunt. Her pussy muscles contracted around his fingers. She tossed her head and let out a loud growl. Her body tensed, then bucked violently. He pumped her harder, the tip of his tongue again teasing her clit with quick flicking motions.

She squeezed her eyes shut as her body began to shake uncontrollably. Pleasurable waves washed over her, threatening to sink her in the mire of orgasm. Unable to hold herself back for another second, she cried out, "Oh, God, yes!" She cupped her breasts, imagining his lips pulling at her nipples. Her moans became louder. Needier.

"Come for me." His skin glistened with her juices. "Come for me now." His tongue drove back into her slit. Seeking and delving, he was finger-fucking her hard, relentlessly and with no mercy.

As if on his command, she started to shake. Squeezing and massaging her nipples, she felt her orgasm sweep through her like raging fire. She let out a small scream, coming hard against his mouth. The rush was so intense, so utterly overwhelming that she vanished completely into the wonderful abyss of an absolutely earth-shattering climax.

After a moment, she opened her eyes and stretched lazily.

"Good?" he asked softly.

"Wonderful."

"Better than Chinese food?"

She smiled. "Much better." She reached out for him. "But you're not done yet."

Going to his knees, he drew a deep breath and shrugged off his shirt.

She sat up and kissed his chest, running her hands over his hard abdomen. Trailing her fingers across his muscular chest, she circled a dusky nipple. Her hands moved lower, unbuttoning then unzipping his jeans to free his penis, which was pressed tightly against a thatch of dark blond curls. His cock sprang free, proud and erect. Reaching down, he wrapped his fingers around it, teasingly licking his lips.

"Ready for a treat, honey?" Closing his eyes, he stroked the shaft, up and down, over and over. His breathing grew ragged. A tiny drop of fluid leaked from its head, glistening in the lamplight.

"Give me that!" She giggled and took over. His cock pulsed in her hand, warm and velvety to her touch. Even when flaccid, it was an impressive sight, filling well the cut of his trousers and giving the girls something to whisper about. Erect, it was a magnificent length, thick and round. Dipping her head, she began to flick her tongue over the swollen head. Using the perfect pressure, she stroked his cock in a steady motion. She was eager to take him, her tongue flicking out of her mouth to lick the pre-cum away from the tip of his penis. The salty taste excited her and she moaned softly, taking him inch by inch into her mouth, sucking ever so slowly to build his tension.

Scott moaned, taking her head, guiding her lower. "Go deeper."

She obliged him by taking the whole of his cock into her mouth. To tease, she used her teeth to scrape at his sensitive skin—not heavily, but just enough pressure to make sure he felt every sensation.

Scott's breathing grew harsh, labored. Kate kept rubbing his slick penis harder, giving him no respite. The friction on his erection grew heated, harder.

"You had better stop," he warned, "or I'll come all over you."

She lifted her head. "Wouldn't want that to happen just yet."

Getting up, Scott quickly shucked the rest of his clothes. Rolling onto the bed beside her, he held his cock, stroking it slowly. She watched the large purple head, her mouth dry at the thought of feeling him inside her.

"Last chance to back out." His voice was hoarse with his own need.

"No way," she countered. "I want all of you. Inside me. Now."

She scrambled to grab a condom, ripping open the packet with shaking hands. Pulling it out of its wrapper, she expertly positioned it over the tip of his penis, sliding the rubber down his length. As she did, he reached between her legs, teasing her slit with the tips of his fingers.

Scott moved back onto his knees. He took great delight in holding his cock over her pussy, hovering just inches from her. Grabbing onto the headboard, Kate lifted her body until the cleft of her pussy rubbed against his shaft.

"I can't wait much longer, baby," Kate breathed. The way Scott was touching himself was making her wild with want.

Placing the head of his cock against her slit, Scott slowly penetrated her. She watched the space between their bodies grow narrower. The farther in he went, the more she could feel him throbbing inside her. He placed his arms on each side of her body and leaned into her, moving his hips in a slow rhythm.

Kate let out a cry and rammed her hips up against his, urging him to drive his shaft deeper. Her pussy was sucking at him, greedily drawing him in as her muscles contracted around his length. She hung on to him, scratching hard at the bare flesh of his back.

"Harder," she gasped. "Don't you dare be gentle."

Scott started grinding his hips into hers, pounding hard against her clit. His balls rubbed against her ass, ripe and full, ready to burst.

"I can't hold it much longer." His eyes were focused on her face. It was clear he was enjoying watching her take her pleasure. Their lips met briefly, tasting each other. She savored her own female spice on his lips as his tongue tangled with hers.

"Just a little longer," she cried out, loving the feel of Scott's cock pounding into her again and again. As her desire grew, she became more demanding. Her hands moved a bit faster, rougher, spurring him on. She moaned and lifted her hips, feeling the tips of her nipples brush against his chest. He slowed his thrust, lowering his head and pulling a nipple into his mouth. Suckling gently at the sensitive tip, he gave one final long thrust. A quake of pleasure thundered through his entire body as he gave himself over to total release. His moans filled the air, his body trembling from the force of his orgasm. Hot semen shot from the tip of his cock. Teeth gritted, he gasped, struggling to bring his breathing back to a normal level.

In response, Kate's whole body began to quake. She felt her pussy muscles clench tightly around his throbbing cock, a flood of cream trickling down her thighs as a primeval growl of pleasure broke from her throat. She came with such force, she nearly blacked out from the pure gratification of it. She lay motionless for a few minutes, struggling to catch her breath as she lay under Scott's weight.

"God, that was great," she breathed.

He lifted himself up, giving her a quick kiss. "I agree." His own breathing was gradually steadying. Reaching down between their bodies, he caught the top of the condom and eased out of her. He made a quick trip to the bathroom.

Stark naked, he padded back into the bedroom. Stretching out beside her, he slid his hand across the smooth plane of her belly. His hand moved lower, fingers gently teasing her sensitive clit. He slipped a finger inside her creamy cunt. "Feel good?"

Kate moved her hips against his hand, writhing with the shivery sensations that began to build under his touch. "Mmmm, definitely."

Chapter Seven

The rest of the weekend passed without incident, and Monday morning came in due time – too early as usual for any human to think of even getting out of bed.

At seven, Kate got up and got ready for work, dressing herself carefully for her first day at the newspaper. Wanting to make a good impression, she put on her nicest work suit – charcoal gray slacks and jacket, white blouse, hose and black pumps. She pinned her curly hair up in a bun, thinking briefly about coloring it. A nice light blonde shade would compliment her pale skin better, she thought. Champagne blonde. No, paler. A sun-kissed blonde. She would stop at the store on the way home from work and pick up a kit. Maybe she'd even think about a frost job. At least she had curl enough that she didn't need a perm.

Making sure the cats had plenty of food and water, she locked the door, got in her car and drove to work. The sky was dismal as usual, pouring down tons of rain. The drive across town took about twenty minutes, give or take a few minutes due to morning traffic. She found the employee parking lot, parked and went into the lobby of the newspaper.

Inside, the receptionist greeted her with a stack of new employee paperwork. After the formalities were taken care of, the secretary led her down a long hallway, past the nest of reporters busily working on the day's stories and into the production and sales offices. Her new coworkers were introduced in quick succession. She didn't remember half the names, but she smiled politely and shook hands with the head of the advertising department and the sales people who would be bringing in the ads she would design for publication in the paper. It was nice to see that people not involved in front office work and meeting the public were dressed casually – jeans and sweaters, even some T-shirts. No more stuffy suits and having to take the time to dress up in the

morning. One of the ad designers even had a couple of curlers in her hair and not a smidge of makeup on her face.

The room where she would be working was filled with six cubicles, each having a computer. Her cube was number four, recently vacated. She sat down. The former occupant had left a few traces of his or her presence. Some silly cartoons were taped on the walls—one was of a dragon picking his teeth with a lance, the pieces of a knight's armor scattered around his clawed feet.

Sometimes the dragon wins, the caption read.

How true, Kate thought. There was a pad of old notes. She tore them off and threw them away. *Fresh start here. No old ghosts need apply.*

On a shelf above her head were two baskets, one labeled *In*, the other *Proofs*. When the sales people made a sale and had sketched out a rough idea of an ad, a runner dropped it into the *In* basket. It was her job to turn some bad scribbles and loose text into an actual ad. When she had a version ready, she would print it, then stick it in the *Proofs* basket to be picked up again by the people in sales, who would then go over her work, correcting typos and marking changes to make. The ad would again come back to her until it reached the stage where it was deemed perfect. At that point, it would be sent to the client for approval. If the client liked it, the ad went to press. If not, it went back to the drawing board. The idea was to do as many ads as fast as possible, filling as many column inches as possible with her work. A designer had to be good, reaching a point where an ad was flawless on the first or second print. All bonuses and pay raises would be based on that performance. The better the sales people liked a designer's work, the bigger and better ads they dropped into the designer's basket.

Though she'd presented a portfolio of her work at her interview, she had yet to prove herself to her new coworkers. The workload might be light, but it was going to be a hard, long week.

Putting her purse in the bottom drawer of her desk, Kate sat down and powered up her computer. A few of the sales people she'd been introduced to earlier had gamely

sent the runners over to drop a few smaller ads, so she set to work, laying out their ideas. An hour later, she had them done. Only one was returned from proofing, with just a typo to fix. *Excellent*. She might yet hit her stride today. She already knew she was good.

By the time the first two ads were okayed for print, things were starting to get busy. More assignments were coming in, larger ones needing extra detailing that took up more of Kate's time. The paper was a daily, so deadlines had to be met by late afternoon or the ad would miss its press time—which would, in turn, understandably piss off the customer.

Kate worked steadily, skipping lunch. When one of her cube mates tapped her on the shoulder and pointed at the clock, she was astonished to see that the day was over. After closing down her workstation, she grabbed her purse, clocked out and headed to her car. The first day down, she still didn't recall the names of half the people she'd worked with, but she'd done what she was there to do, and had done it successfully. Not bad for a new kid on the block.

An hour later, Kate pulled into her space. A glance at Scott's space told her he wasn't home. Since Scott worked in construction, it was not unusual for him to be out of town for several days on a job. That was good. A little space after sex was useful.

Her eyes drifted over to Josh's spot. Also empty. Boy, she was striking out double time tonight. She'd planned to invite Josh over for dinner, maybe rent a video.

Well, since that was a no-go, she might as well do her hair. She'd stopped off at the local drugstore and picked up a coloring kit, just the shade she wanted. Picking up the plastic bag, she hurried into the house. The night smelled fresh, the odors of the city's day washed away by the cleansing rain.

Monty and Larry were on hand to greet her, all meows and kisses. She gave each of the twins liberal hugs and kisses, letting them talk her into opening a can of tuna for a treat. When they were munching happily, she kicked off her shoes, changed into a robe, and went into the bathroom to do her hair.

Stepping out of the shower about forty-five minutes later and snagging a towel, she stared expectantly into the mirror. Her hair was now a lighter, lovely blonde. She'd decided on a rich buttery color, which would appear more natural than the cotton candy white blonde that just screamed fake. Combing through her hair, she wondered how it was that God could never put the right color on a woman's head. What had she done in a past life that cursed her to such a dull shade? Well, at least she'd remedied that. In the last few years, she hadn't thought much about her hair, especially since she hadn't been scoping out the opposite sex. Now that she had a few prospects, she wanted to fix herself up a little.

She let the robe slip from her shoulders to the floor at her feet, Standing in front of the mirror, she examined her reflection closely. She could still feel the tingles of Scott's moist tongue around her breasts. She shivered. As though having a will of its own, her hand moved down, caressing her flat stomach. She began to stroke her clit, closing her eyes and enjoying the sensations. Although Scott and their incredibly sexy romp loomed large in the forefront of her brain, she still had Josh on her mind. She'd had a little taste of walking on the wild side, and she wanted to have a little more fun.

First, the rest of the workweek loomed ahead.

Four more long days.

Then...the weekend.

Chapter Eight

Saturday was a quiet day.

Kate spent the morning putting the final touches on her apartment and dashing off a few emails to her friends and family, then the whole afternoon wandering out to learn about the town. To her delight, it was easy to get around. In no time at all, she found a branch of her bank, the public library, a veterinarian's office, several grocery stores and the mall. All she needed was only a short distance away. The best way to learn one's way around a new place was to drive it out, getting lost and finding a way out. She spent the whole afternoon doing nothing more than driving around, drinking Cokes and jotting down street addresses as she found the places that interested her.

Scott had had the sense to give her a little space after their night of incredible sex. They'd talked through the week, promising not to smother each other, not get too possessive. They'd agreed that their relationship should be an open one. They would date other people, not be too eager to settle for one another because they were both feeling a little lonely.

For Kate, this was a fine arrangement. If she didn't want to fix any food and just eat crackers instead, well, that was her option. If she wanted to go out, all she had to do was put out sufficient cat food and water for the twins. They had plenty of toys, plus each other to play with.

With the evening looming and no excitement in sight, she decided to set her new plan into motion and get to know Josh a little better. Earlier, she'd gone out and bought a scrumptious cheesecake, some fresh blueberries and a can of whipped topping. Josh had arrived home an hour ago. She'd given him an hour to relax and unwind from the day's stresses. Didn't want to seem like she was pouncing. She knew from their earlier conversation that he often had to fill in for employees who didn't show up or who quit

without notice. Also, she wanted to see if he had other plans. If any other women were going to show up or if he was going out for the weekend, it would be soon.

Casual, she told herself, wishing those butterflies in her stomach would be still. *Keep it cool.*

Putting up her hair in a twisty braid, she curled a few sexy strands around her face and neck. She put on a little makeup, lining her eyes with a flattering color and putting on a little lipstick. No blush because her cheeks were already too red—just some powder to tone down the color.

She put on her tightest fashionably faded jeans, liking the way they hugged her ass. Though it was a little chilly, she put on a cute white silky blouse, the one that showed just a bit of her stomach. It molded to her body, slinky and just a little bit more than enticing to the eye, the material almost sheer against her skin. Her nipples were raised, poking little pink dots through the thin material. A pair of flats completed her casual outfit. Over that, she threw on a light sweater. Might as well not seem totally ridiculous since it was chilly outside.

When the hour had passed, Kate took the cheesecake out of the fridge, arranged it on a nice plate, topped it with blueberries and whipped cream and covered it with a pie pan. She quickly dialed his number. The line was busy. Deciding not to wait to talk to him, she took gift in hand and made her way down to apartment ten. There, she rang the doorbell. And waited.

Looking a little harried, Josh threw open the door. The look on his face was fearsome. “What the hell do you want?”

Kate cringed and held out the plate. “Uh, sorry to bother you,” she blurted. “I just wanted to thank you for helping me move.” By the appearance of his half-unbuttoned shirt, she’d interrupted him from something.

Seeing her, his face lightened, brow smoothing. “Oh, shit, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to snap at you. I thought you were someone else.” His eyes grew kinder and an easygoing smile replacing the severe frown.

"Someone you're really pissed at." She paused, treating him to a sexy grin. "Anyway, you're busy, so I'll just leave this and go."

He shook his head. "No, not at all." He moved aside and made a gesture with his hand. "Come on in."

She shrugged. "If you're sure."

"I'm sure."

Tightening her hands on the plate, Kate stepped inside. She offered the plate again. "A little present for you, for helping me move." She lifted the pie pan. "Cheesecake. I hope you like it."

His eyes swept over the dessert, moving to her body—her breasts, her neck, up to her eyes. "Looks good to me." The wicked grin he flashed said everything that was on his mind. "I like the hair. Nice color."

He noticed! "Thanks. Since I'm making changes in my life, I was ready for a few changes in myself." She set the plate down. "So this is your place."

"Have a look around." He opened the fridge. "Like something to drink?"

"Yes. That would be nice."

"Beer or a wine cooler?"

"Cooler is fine by me." She wrinkled her nose. "I really never did take to the taste of beer."

Josh pulled out two wine coolers, offering her one. When he closed the fridge, Kate noticed the photo magnets on its face. There were a couple of Josh and a little boy, then a few of the little boy by himself, playing with toys.

"Thanks." She twisted off the cap. "Yours?"

"My what?"

She indicated the photos. "The kid. Yours?"

"Oh, duh. That's Jesse, my son. He's two." He opened and took a sip of his own cooler. "That's why I was so pissed when I opened the door. I just got off the phone

with Cindy. Because I got called in to work early and couldn't come by and pick up Jesse this morning, she's decided I can't take him tomorrow either." He made a disgusted gesture. "She doesn't even try to work with my schedule since she got this new boyfriend. I hardly ever get to see Jesse anymore. She's always dragging him off somewhere."

"That's not fair. You have to make a living."

The muscles in his face tightened briefly with anxiety. "Tell me about it. I guess we're going to have to go back to court and fight it out so I can have my visitations."

She laid a hand lightly on his arm. "I'm sorry for you. That must be hard."

"I love my son," he said. "But there are times when I wish that woman wasn't his mother. If it weren't for him, I'd have cut ties with her a long time ago." His face clouded again with anger. Just as quickly, his expression softened as he glanced down at her hand, still on his arm. Their eyes met for a moment.

Kate let her hand drop. It was clear that Josh was picking up the vibes she was sending out. "I feel the same about my ex," she said, "only I was lucky enough not to have kids with him."

"No love lost?"

She shook her head, biting down on her lower lip. "We were only married two years, and I doubt he even remembers it. He spent most of his time drinking beer and missing work."

"Oh. Sorry to hear that."

She waved a dismissive hand. "I was getting tired of it. I think if he hadn't packed up that I would have. When he lost his last job, he packed up and went home to Mom. Never could cut those apron strings, I guess. Anyway, never laid eyes on or heard from him again. Did the whole divorce process by myself."

"Ouch, you must have been pissed." He grinned weakly. "I hope you don't think all men are assholes. We're not all total pigs, you know."

"I was beginning to think so, but maybe my mind can be changed." She rolled her eyes in mock exasperation. "No, really. There was no love lost between us by that point."

He nodded, satisfied with her answer. "And so you never remarried? How did you escape the guys?"

She laughed, flattered. "By the skin of my teeth, believe me."

Josh cleared his throat, taking a sip of his wine cooler. "So, got a minute to sit down?"

"Got all night," she answered cheerily, as if she didn't have a care in the world.

His mood lightening, he gestured for her to follow him with one hand and led her into the living room. As expected, his apartment was similar in layout to hers. The living room was large and comfortably furnished, with a deluxe entertainment center against the far wall. A laptop sat on the kitchen table, the face of which was otherwise overrun with papers. It obviously served as a makeshift office. His fireplace was well-used, neatly screened in with pieces of wood stacked within, ready to be burned. A comfortable sofa sat across from the entertainment center, covered in a tweedy fabric of blues and whites. The coffee table and end tables were nice but had seen better days. Small nicks, scratches and stains covered their faces. Most of the damage was covered with strategically centered mats and other knickknacks. But where her walls were bare, his were covered with movie posters. Not just taped to the wall, but framed and hung in neat symmetry. Beside each poster was a smaller eight by ten frame, displaying a glossy photo of the star of the movie. Each one was autographed.

Drawn to the photos, Kate walked around, examining each. The posters were reproductions from older movies. Humphrey Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon*. James Cagney in *The Public Enemy*. Gary Cooper in *High Noon*. Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven Year Itch*. James Dean in *Giant*. She studied the photos, awestruck. "Are those real autographs?"

"I hope so. I bought them as certified authentic. But I suppose anyone with a ballpoint pen could have signed them. Anyway, I like to believe they are."

"So you like old movies?"

"The old ones are the best. The stars of today just can't touch the actors from back then."

"Oh, I agree," she said. "I just love old movies. Hollywood before the 1950s is my favorite reading topic. Marilyn's a favorite of mine. I've read every book I can find on her. I have all of them, if you'd like to borrow one let me know."

"I'd like that. Though, I have to admit, I don't have much free time to read." Josh sat down on the couch, beckoning for her to take a seat.

Kate slid out of her sweater and took the chair opposite the couch. Part of her had just wanted a friendly visit, a chance to get a glimpse of his life. Being around him, though, made her very aware of being female. A female with a certain hunger for her hot neighbor, a neighbor whose best friend she'd fucked just last week. Still, she was attracted to Josh. No one had hit him with an ugly stick. His body was compact and trim, muscled in all the right places. The well-cut dress shirts he wore—like the one he had on now that was still half-unbuttoned—outlined his trim waist, and God, those nicely cut slacks practically screamed that he was well-hung.

Crossing her legs tightly and trying to get her mind out of his crotch, she asked, "Job keeps you busy?"

He rolled his eyes and ran his hands through his hair. "On call, twenty-four-seven," he replied. "I swear to God, I am getting into another line of work as soon as it becomes open. Convenience stores are just not for me. Too many problems. No one wants to work for minimum wage, people steal every chance they get and owners are so greedy they won't pay for maintenance on the stores. It's a constant hassle."

"Sounds like it. I wouldn't like being on call. When my eight hours are over, I want to be off work."

He fiddled with the bottle propped between his legs. "What do you do?"

"I'm a graphic artist. I put together the ads you see in the newspaper. Not much of an artistic challenge but it pays the bills." She took a sip of her cooler. "In my dreams, I'm a famous artist living off my paintings."

"I think that's a nice dream to have."

She snorted. "Artists come a dime a dozen. Anyone can do it."

"Now that's not true," he countered. "I can't draw a straight line with a ruler. I am talentless."

She reached out with her foot and prodded his leg. "Everyone has a talent or hobby they're good at. What do you do to relax?"

"I spend too much time downloading music and burning CDs."

"Hey, me too. I love music." She turned toward the entertainment center. "What do you like?"

He tapped a fingernail against the bottle. "You'll think I am a total nerd."

"No, I won't. Even if it's seventies funk, I won't crack a grin."

"Not quite funk." He offered a shy grin. "Classical."

"The three Bs?"

"Beethoven, Brahms and Bach," he finished. "Beethoven and Bach, mostly, though I do like the Hungarian Dances of Brahms."

She raised her eyebrows. "Wow. You're serious about music."

"It was my major in college."

"Did you graduate?"

He shook his head. "Nope. Turned on, tuned in and dropped out. I liked the weed more than I liked my grades."

Kate felt her stomach go queasy inside. Was Josh still a druggie? If so, that instantly killed her attraction. She'd already gone through a marriage with a drinker. "Still smoke?" She tried to sound nonchalant.

Josh shook his head. "No, a bust and jail time cured me. Nine months in county convinced me that there was no future in prison. I got myself clean after that."

"Well, at least you learned your lesson."

"So how about you? Any brushes with the law?"

"Only a traffic ticket." She placed a hand over her heart. "I'm a good girl."

He gave her a sly smile. There was a spark in his eyes, a teasing light. "Are you really?"

His words started a slow throb inside her body, which only added to her desire to kiss him again. She could almost feel the touch of his mouth on hers, the feel of his hands caressing her breasts. Her nipples grew hard, the tips rubbing against the thin material of her sheer blouse. She wondered how to wrangle her way over to where he sat without seeming too brazen. Her body clearly wanted more—her skin craved his touch, her hard little nipples yearned to be sucked.

"Oh, I have my moments." She pretended to look around for a clock. "I've probably kept you from your evening for too long," she said teasingly, starting to rise.

He made a quick gesture. "You're not keeping me from anything now. Why don't you stay? Still got that cheesecake to eat."

She grinned. "Only if you'll put on a little music. I'm dying to hear a few of your selections."

"You've got a deal."

Getting up, he crossed to the stereo. "Beethoven. The Fourteenth Sonata is a favorite of mine." The gentle chords of a piano piece began to play, low and soothing—and very seductive.

The *Moonlight Sonata*. The piece was one of her all-time favorites, so haunting and tormented that one could sense the composer's pain through every chord. It was a piece that had often made her weep with its beauty and intensity. And now its steady, flowing rhythm was resonating in her body, making her pussy ache and her clit throb.

That was it—the music sealed the deal for her. Josh was definitely worth chasing after. And the fact that he had a high-pressure job that often kept him away from home for many hours also meant he would appreciate her not being too demanding—and he wouldn't be hanging around like a millstone all the time. This could be very workable.

Workable in that there was room for Scott to fit into the equation.

Kate knew when to take a hint and back off. After that little display on her kitchen counter, though, she had a feeling that Josh wasn't going to back off easily. After all, he'd made the first moves, given her the come-on. She was just following up.

Kate got up, pretending to examine the posters again, wandering her way around to the fireplace. Bending down, she reached out to touch the grate. "You ever light yours?" she asked, knowing perfectly well he did, for a good-sized iron basket held wood, kindling and paper all ready.

"All the time," he called from the kitchen. "I love a good fire. Especially on rainy nights." In a few moments, he brought two plates of cheesecake back into the living room and handed her one.

She forked a piece and popped it into her mouth. "I'm dying to light mine." She gave him a flirty smile and batted her lashes. "I've always wanted to make love in front of a roaring fire."

Josh slowly swallowed his own bite, searching her eyes to see if she was serious. "I can light one right now." He put his plate down on the mantel.

She drew in a deep breath. "I'd like that." She shivered, a gesture that wasn't completely staged. "I'm a little cold."

He knelt down and claimed the fireplace matches. "In that blouse, you don't exactly have much cover."

Kate inwardly smiled. Good. He'd obviously noticed.

Moving aside the grate, he opened the flue and touched the flame to the newspaper and kindling. In a moment, the wood was beginning to burn. He put the grate back in place.

She plopped down beside him and watched the flames rise. The growing warmth of the fire passed through the air between them, and the nearness of his body served to make her that much more aware of her own. She'd been working her way toward him with conscious effort, shrinking the space between them until they were too close to be proper for anyone but lovers.

"Cheesecake?" She offered him the bite.

"I'd rather have this." He leaned over and touched his mouth to hers. He tasted of blueberries and whipped cream. Delicious.

She had only a moment to think before his arms were around her, pulling her across his lap. She giggled and fed him the piece of cheesecake, then kissed him again. They shared her piece, taking turns until it was all gone.

"You like?" She put the empty plate aside and resettled herself in his lap, where she found his erection ready and waiting to press into her crotch. She wasn't a bit cold now.

"Mmm, I like." Josh's hand brushed the back of her hair. Finding the band that held her braid together, he tugged it off and ran his fingers through her hair, bringing it down around her shoulders. He ran his fingers through the mass, spreading it around her face. Her hair was naturally curly, falling in lovely ringlets around her face. He brushed a stray curl off her cheek.

"Me, too." She wanted to gather him to her, bury her face against his strong, hard body and lick, touch and taste every inch of him.

Josh's hands came up, rubbing her shoulders through her thin blouse, then down across her chest, to her breasts, to her waist. She whimpered softly when he began to knead her breasts, teasing her hard nipples. Her every sense was focused on the waves of pleasurable sensations his touch sent through her. The heat of the fire against her back hardly matched the warmth of sexual need inside her body.

He nibbled at her neck, at the soft pulse point at the base of her throat. "Feel good?"

"Yes." Her pulse was racing. The need to make love to him was beginning to fill her. When he reached under her shirt and stroked her breasts, she gasped, "Don't stop." His touch sent flashes of heat throughout her body, warmth that settled in her core and began to simmer.

He smiled as if he'd died and gone to heaven. "I don't want to."

She tightened her grip on his shoulders. "I'm not asking you to."

He swallowed, then swallowed again, hesitating. "You know, I just got divorced —"

"And you're not searching for anything serious."

He dropped his hands, his body tense as if waiting for rejection. "Yeah."

"Neither am I." She began to unbutton her blouse, then tossed it aside. "I just want a little good loving now and again."

He whistled. "That's all?"

Her smile widened. "I'm not looking for my next ex-husband, Josh. I *am* looking for a little male company now and again. Interested?"

"Very." He made a soft sound, half gasp, half throaty chuckle. But he did not pull away and his dark eyes were full of desire. A look of longing crossed his face.

His hands slid up her hips, over her ass, up her back. Palms against her back, he guided her forward, tongue flicking out to tease her left nipple. Pleasure inundated Kate as she drew in a long breath and gave herself to the sensations. She could feel the ache between her legs, feel her pussy getting wetter and wetter as her juices dampened her jeans. What he was doing didn't even begin to satisfy that ache, but they'd work on it. When his mouth covered the nipple and began to suck, she almost exploded. Against her sensitive nipple, his tongue felt like silk, stroking her, sucking gently, then harder. Anticipation ran riot through her veins, her blood pounding a strange rhythm in her temples and groin. She felt a flame of desire shoot down to her clit, making it tingle, tighten. She guided his mouth to the other nipple. "Mustn't forget this one." He was

touching her in wonderful ways. It was impossible to think clearly. His hands slid to cup her ass, rubbing her through the right material of her jeans. Damn, but she'd never known how good it felt to be stroked through skintight jeans.

His mouth found the hard tip, rolling it with his tongue. He swirled his tongue around the nipple, gently biting, then rasping away the ache with his lips. He gave each breast equal attention, suckling deeply. She squeezed her eyes tighter, her breathing ragged from the sensual motion of his mouth. Then, he began to draw languid circles around her nipples with his tongue and fingers, never quite touching the sensitive tips.

Kate tangled her hands in his thick dark hair, enjoying the fresh scent of his skin, the feel of his hair sliding through her fingers. She could feel his erection getting harder still, becoming more and more insistent against her crotch. His cock was throbbing, a thing alive. Regretfully pulling away, she finished unbuttoning his shirt, sliding it over his shoulders. As expected, his was a well-toned, muscular build. She ran her hands over his chest.

Her need was raw, exposed, sweeping her away. "I wanted you the minute I saw you."

"The feeling was very mutual," he returned, drawing in a breath as she teased his nipples with her fingertips. Kate pressed herself closer. Boldly, Josh squeezed the soft swell of her left breast, rubbing round circles with his palm. They began to writhe with the motion of lovemaking as she pressed her mound against his pulsing cock. His penis was at full salute, pressing against the confines of his trousers, eager to break free, to slide into that hot, needy cunt of hers. She was already dripping in eager anticipation of taking his cock into her.

She smiled, secretly pleased. She'd conquered him as easily as a cat lapped up cream. Speaking of cream, there was a particularly sweet cream she wished he'd lap from between her legs. Her clit was pulsing furiously in anticipation of his tongue fucking her. She felt the unmistakable urgency of sex that radiated from her body. She wanted him to screw her until she wept with pleasure.

Standing up, she reached for her jeans. Rising to his knees, Josh brushed her hands away.

"Let me." Unbuttoning her jeans, he drew the zipper down slowly. Since her jeans were so tight, she hadn't bothered with panties. He tugged them down her hips. She giggled and balanced herself on one leg, kicking off one shoe, then the other. He helped her step out of her pants, leaving her standing naked before him.

"God, Kate." He ran the palm of his hand over her flat belly, following it with soft nips and kisses. "You're so beautiful." He ran his hands over her hips.

Kate shivered. She wanted him to lick, suck and taste every inch of her as she hovered in a state of peak sexual arousal. The air around them was sticky, scented from the wood crackling in the hearth and the sizzling heat of their raw desire.

Josh eased her legs apart. Dipping his head, he leaned forward and slid his tongue into the slit between her legs, teasing her clit. At the same time, he ran his palms up her inner leg. His left hand found the tender slit between her legs, that velvet treasure every woman possessed. Delving past the coarse curls, he slid his fingers along her clit, stroking. Her pussy seemed to arch toward his fingertips. She was already dripping. He ran his fingers along the lips of her labia, searching for her clit. Finding the tender nub, he moved his index finger in a stroking motion, beginning a sensual tease. He dipped one finger inside her, swirling it. When he entered her, sucking muscles spasmed around his fingers. Her cunt was so slick, so warm, so ready.

She dug her fingers deeply into his shoulders. He was none too gentle, doing as he pleased with his fingers. She met the thrust with increasing fervor, her wild need intensifying the light contractions deep within her vagina. She could feel her clit throbbing against his fingers, her juices dripping down her legs. She gasped when he lapped his tongue along her labia, awakening something in her that had never been touched before.

Trembling with pent-up desire, she pressed her legs together, capturing his head snugly between her thighs. His fingers delved deeper. She moaned loudly, coarse

language spilling over her lips. His lips opened and closed around her clit, his tongue brushing the area with intense strokes.

He stood up, catching her around the waist, pressing his hips to hers. "You're perfect," he murmured, kissing her long and hard. "So wet – and so tight."

"That felt amazing." Wanton fierceness made her voice tremble. She wasn't aware of the subtle movements that brought their lips together. But Josh was kissing her, giving her a taste of her female musk, and the effect was like fire racing through her body. She pressed into his chest and returned his kiss with a sweet fervor. She didn't want to stop moving her lips over his, didn't want to stop teasing the corners of his mouth with the tip of her tongue. The expression in his eyes was naked. She quivered with tension, more than ready to explore his body.

"Let me please you." Her voice was so rasping and deep she almost didn't recognize herself speaking.

They quickly traded places, Josh standing up where she had stood a moment before. He began to ease her to her knees. She went down easily and willingly, lower and lower until her head was level with his crotch. She was loving it, knowing that his penis was just inches from her face.

She watched him unzip his slacks. "I want you to suck me, Kate." His words were rough, earthy, commanding. "Rub your hand up and down my cock."

The crude language added a fresh rush of fluid to her heated pussy. She nodded and complied. The flutter in her stomach was not nerves or wine cooler. It was anticipation.

With unsteady fingers, he freed his erection—thick and long, dark red and straining. She caressed his shaft, inhaling his male musk as she nuzzled it with her cheek.

"Harder," he breathed, his hand covering hers. "Take me in your mouth, honey. I wanna feel that hot mouth all over me."

He gave her no time to think twice about her decision, guiding her mouth to the engorged head of his penis. She allowed him to slide the tip between her lips. Sucking came naturally to her, and she began to tongue him eagerly. Her teeth scraped his private flesh, adding to the delight—a tiny bit of pain to feed his deep-seated carnal desires.

Dipping his head back, Josh moved his hips gently forward, fucking her mouth. She didn't gag as she took him to the root, pulling away and then plunging down again. One hand she wrapped firmly around the slippery shaft. Her free hand cupped his sac, squeezing, tweaking and fingering his tender balls. She could tell by their tightening that he'd almost reached his limit of self-control. If she wasn't careful, in a very few moments ecstasy would claim him.

Gritting his teeth, Josh eased himself away from her hungry lips. A fine sheen of perspiration had begun to shine on his skin. He quickly stripped off the rest of his clothes.

"I want to fuck you," he grated. "Now!"

Kate rolled over onto her stomach on the carpet and pointed toward her jeans. "Condom."

He fumbled in the pockets of her pants, pulling out the three foil packets. "Sure of yourself, weren't you?"

It was impossible not to smile. "Let's just say I had a feeling."

"Oh, you're about to have a feeling, all right." He ripped open the packet and rolled the condom down over his erection with an experienced hand. As she was still on her stomach, he positioned his body behind hers, grabbing her around the waist and pulling her up on her hands and knees, making her spread her legs wide. His fingertips ran lightly over her ass, and then he spread her cheeks apart. When the tip of his tongue started moving down into her crack, she let out a loud moan. His tongue poked and teased all the way down her slit, then stopped. When his mouth left her body, she wondered what he was going to do next. He squeezed her ass, kneading her flesh. He

guided his cock up against the cleft of her butt cheeks, teasing her. "You want it, don't you?"

"Yes." Her body shook as he placed the head of his cock against her slit, sliding it against her soaked lips. With a single thrust, he drilled his hard shaft deep into her cunt. She cried out when he dug his fingers into her hips, pulling her relentlessly back against his hard body. Her fingers dug into the nap of the carpet, holding onto the floor for support. He slammed into her and leaned against her back, his hands moving up and grabbing her breasts, pulling her nipples.

Kate cried out again and thrust herself back against him, determined to meet him thrust for thrust. She was close to climaxing like mad when he shoved a finger deep into her ass. She screamed out, not from pain but the total searing pleasure of the sensation. He slowed his thrust, enough that she felt her pussy muscles beginning to clench around his penis. Her clit was so swollen that she could feel it rubbing against him as he pumped her, his cock pulling out almost to the end, only to disappear back inside her moist depth.

Reaching around her body, Josh began to stroke her clit. "Come for me, baby."

She let out a loud moan, the sound starting from deep in her throat and working its way to her lips, becoming louder with every second. A long slow stream of molten heat coursed through her and she closed her eyes, enjoying the sensations of pleasure. Her body tensed for a moment and she quivered and then came with such force that she slammed back hard against him.

Pulling away, Josh turned her over and laid her down onto her back. Taking her legs, he placed them over his shoulders and then entered her again, fucking her in a steady motion. Her hands moved to his forearms and she held them tightly, digging her fingernails into his skin as he started to pound her with bone-jarring force.

She watched as he closed his eyes and hammered into her. She felt his body tense. Josh thrust into her a final time, and his body jerked as he released his semen. When the

last of it had been expelled, he dropped against her and rolled their bodies, pulling her on top of him. Neither said a word as they lay before the fireplace.

It took a solid five minutes to regulate her breathing, stop trembling and pull her thoughts together. She could still feel the tingles of her orgasm, her pussy aching from the pounding he'd given her.

"I should go," she said when a decent interval had passed.

"Stay the night," he whispered in her ear.

"Only if I can get another piece of cheesecake. I can see I'm going to need my energy."

Chapter Nine

Sunday morning, the doorbell buzzed, waking Kate from a deep sleep.

Who the hell could that be? she wondered through the blur of fading dreams. She slid her sleeping mask off her face. She had stumbled into her apartment well after midnight. By the clock at her bedside, it was nearing noon. She groaned. She hadn't told anyone to come over. Certainly not Josh. Certainly not Scott.

Just now, she didn't have the energy to think about which man she wanted.

Moreover, there was that thing called sexual attraction, and she was experiencing it with both men. One of the strongest drives known to mankind, sex had built civilizations—and toppled them. Caesar and Cleopatra. Antony and Cleopatra. Two men who'd shared one woman, and all three of them had been brought to ruin. She didn't want anyone to get hurt. But which guy to choose? Damn it, both had their good points and qualities. She couldn't imagine keeping both. Equally, in very different ways, they were a handful, and could certainly wear one woman out.

She needed to make a decision. Soon.

Rolling over, she yawned and stretched. Beside her head, Monty and Larry were stirring, standing up and stretching in that comical arch that cats always assumed upon awakening. Monty pushed his head under her hand, begging to be petted. Larry jumped onto her chest, nuzzling her with sloppy kitty kisses.

The doorbell buzzed again, with more insistence.

Grumbling, Kate threw a robe over the sport bra and panties. Not bothering with her house shoes, she shuffled to the door. Throwing it open, she was surprised by the sight of Scott and Josh standing outside. By the grins on their faces, both men were in a good mood. A very good mood.

"Morning, Katie," Scott said, lifting a cardboard container holding three cups of coffee. He slipped past her, giving her a light peck on the cheek.

Josh carried a sack of donuts. He, too, slipped past Kate, giving her a friendly wink.

Utterly confused, she closed the door and turned to the men, who were busily unpacking breakfast.

"What's going on?"

Scott was busy pouring creamer into one of the cups of coffee. When it was exactly the shade of light tan she'd always preferred, he handed it to her. She took it without thinking, taking a quick sip.

"Josh and I met up this morning and had a little guy talk about what's been going on in our lives lately," he said. "Turns out we both have been having a pretty good time."

Kate tightened her grip around the cup. "That conversation wouldn't happen to include me, would it?"

Josh nodded, a little red creeping into his cheeks. "Well, in a roundabout way, you did come into the conversation."

"In what way?"

Scott gave her a goofy shrug. "Well, in that way guys talk to each other when they're seeing an incredible woman, Katie. You have to brag. A lot." He could not suppress his grin.

"You told Josh we slept together? Scott, you asshole! Why'd you open your big yap about our business?"

Scott couldn't conceal his grin. "I didn't say we were *sleeping*,"

Kate stiffened. "You skunk! Now I know why I never had sex with you in high school." She turned to Josh. "And I suppose you had to open your big mouth, too?"

For a moment she was pissed that both of the blabbermouths had bragged about getting lucky – with her. But her anger quickly cooled when she considered that not having any secrets or lies between them might work to her advantage.

“Now calm down, Kate,” Josh said quickly. “It’s not like anyone’s done anything wrong here. We were just wondering how we were going to work this out.”

“Work what out?” Still pretending to be angry, she thunked the cup down on the counter, sending droplets of coffee splattering. “You guys need to tell me what’s going on here?” It was obvious by the huge grins on their faces that they had something in mind – something that involved her. She drew her robe closer around her body, acutely aware that she was half naked beneath it. And though she was trying to maintain her most pissed-off glare, she knew she was failing – failing because she wasn’t really mad at either guy. She had been a willing partner in her own seduction, falling off the celibacy train with a resounding thud. It was more than a little bit of a thrill to think she’d caught two men in the same week with her womanly wiles.

And, considering she’d also enjoyed every minute of it, she could hardly blame them for bragging. She realized that what was happening had been inevitable from the beginning. And unless she gave an immediate and negative response, this was about to go forward, no holds barred. *I’m looking forward to it*, she thought, trying not to smile too gleefully. *Don’t let them off the hook too quickly.*

“Well?” she demanded in the ensuing silence. “I’m waiting to hear what you two geniuses have cooked up.”

“We’ve decided –” Josh began.

“To share you!” Scott finished.

Her eyebrows shot up. “Share me?” she sputtered, her startled gaze fastening on both men.

“Of course,” Josh began to say, “Neither of us are happy about the competition, but...” He shrugged. “Hey, we’re all buddies here. We can keep things friendly.” His eyes sparkled mischievously.

"Oh?" she demanded in a half-amused tone. "How do you intend to do that?"

Scott flashed her a wicked grin. "Well, we thought we could alternate days. I get you Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Josh gets you Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays."

"And what about Sundays?" Kate had to ask with a smirk. "Going to let me rest a little on the seventh day?"

Josh filled in, "We *both* get you."

Her eyebrows rose higher. "*Both* of you, huh?" She rubbed her chin, pretending to think over the proposal. She stared at them both, cheeks flushed, hands trembling from excitement, still clutching the front of her robe together. "I don't know that I could handle one of you after the other."

"Which is why," Scott's grin grew even wider, "we'll get you at the same time. You get the threesome you've been wanting."

Kate balked, caught off-guard. "Now, I never said that."

"I think you did. I mean, you're sleeping with Josh and you're sleeping with me, so what's the difference?"

"Yeah, Kate," Josh said. "I've seen you naked and Scott's seen you naked, so why not a threesome?"

She backpedaled. "Well, you haven't seen each other naked." Pause. "Have you?"

"If you're in between us, there's a first time for everything." Scott's grin turned wicked.

"I could definitely get into this," Josh said. "Two men, one woman. Think of it. Not an inch of you will go untouched."

Still, she wavered. It did sound good. She smiled. Damned good.

"Then we'll all have what we want," Scott said.

"Well, I won't want you both at the same time *all* the time," she warned. "I'd need a break now and again."

Scott folded his arms, still grinning, the picture of male arrogance. "But no breaks today, Katie."

Abandoning the food completely, both men came forward, sandwiching her between their bodies. Scott stood behind her, his hands enveloping her waist. Josh stood in front of her, teasingly pulling at her robe.

"I don't know, guys," she started to say. "It still sounds awfully complicated to me."

"Nothing complicated about it," Scott breathed into her ear. He brushed her hair away from her nape and then began to nibble. He trailed hot kisses up her neck, then nipped lightly at her earlobe. His hands found and kneaded the cheeks of her ass.

"It's all in the synchronization," Josh said, leaning forward and giving her a light kiss. Keeping her lips busy, Josh slowly moved his hand between their bodies and rubbed his thumb across one nipple through her robe. She shuddered but didn't tell him to stop, so he cupped her breasts. She sighed lightly as he kissed the line of her jaw. He reached for the sash of her robe, untying it and pushing the folds aside to bare her body. Pushing up her sports bra, he dipped his head and began to flick his tongue over one bare nipple. From behind, Scott slipped her robe off her shoulders, letting it pool to the floor at her feet.

Kate shivered at the touch of four hands on her body. Here it was, her lonely fantasy coming true. It was all so overwhelming that she couldn't think through the double set of hands and mouths touching, petting and provoking her until she was all aflame with desire. Her heat built as all conscious awareness of her surroundings faded into a blissful blur. There was only Scott and Josh, holding her, caressing her, causing those most extraordinary sensations to flood through her.

"I think we need to work on this idea," she moaned happily, giving herself to the two men.

Suddenly, they were lifting her into their arms, carrying her into the bedroom. They fell onto the bed, sending the cats scattering. Scott stretched out on one side of her, Josh

on the other. Her body was rigid with the sexual tension that hung heavily in the air. She sighed against Josh's lips, then let him lift her sports bra over her head even as Scott was sliding her panties down her legs. Hands caressed her bare arms, shoulders, breasts and she welcomed every sensation.

"You like the idea?" Scott asked, kissing her stomach. He went to his knees and began to shuck his clothes until he was bare-ass naked.

"Oh, yes," she gasped, trying to catch her breath as Josh's lips brushed the soft hollow of her throat. His mouth went lower, covering one nipple. Whimpering, she squirmed with delight and agony. A low groan escaped her throat. She felt as if everything in the room had suddenly tipped sideways. Josh's mouth and teeth played with her nipple, his fingers teasing the hard tip of the other breast.

Scott had moved lower, starting at her feet. He ran his tongue against the sole of her foot. Letting out a little whimper of delight, she squeaked.

"Good?"

"Oh, yeah."

Spurred on by her vigorous nod, he pressed a row of soft kisses around her instep to the top of her foot, her ankle, going higher over her knee and thigh. When he cupped her bottom with his hands, she lifted her knees and opened herself to him. She felt his fingertips move between her thighs. His hand found the softly furred mound between her legs and began to move in soothing circles over her engorged clit. Each time he flicked his fingers over the little button, her heart fluttered, her insides tightened and a flash of pure heat surged through her.

Moving her hips, Kate moaned when Scott began to slip his fingers into her cunt, stroking her with an easy, slow motion. Increasing the friction, he pressed his fingers firmly against her slit. His head dipped and his mouth joined the fray. Kissing the insides of her thighs, he began to suck on her clit, driving his tongue deep inside her. He licked her dripping cunt, letting his tongue slide over her lips and her swollen slit.

Losing control, she shuddered and started to buck against his hand. Her cries of pleasure bounced off the walls, but she didn't care who might hear.

Pulling away from her breasts, Josh was out of his clothes in a flash. His cock was hard, surging with blood. He got back on the bed by her head and guided his swollen erection toward her mouth.

"Do you remember this, Kate?" he asked, holding his cock just inches from her lips. "Do you want it?"

"Yes...yes, I do." She opened wide and took him deep, sucking and licking, letting him guide the tempo.

Scott moved to his knees between her legs. Kate was briefly aware of the sound of him ripping open a condom wrapper. Holding his cock, he began to tease her with the tip, sliding it up and down her dripping cunt. She let out a whimper that melted into a throaty groan when he began to slide his shaft inside her. He started to pump her, slowly at first, letting the tempo build. Pressure building, he began to move faster, grabbing her hips and slamming into her body with full force.

She rocked with his motion, grinding herself against him. She felt Scott's fingers digging harder into her legs with a bruising force as he thrust up inside her, hammering his thick cock harder into her depth.

"Fuck, yes," she moaned around Josh's cock, meeting his thrusts with her own. "Harder." Her pussy tightened around his throbbing erection, pulling him in and holding him tightly as her muscles continued to contract around it.

Josh pulled his cock away from her clenching teeth, wrapping his hand tightly around his shaft and dragging it down to the base. His body tensed as his semen erupted from the tip, spurting over her naked breasts. She began to rub it into her skin, scenting herself with his seed. Bending over, he sucked a nipple into his mouth, licking around it with his tongue. Her body responded with shivers and jerks. When he bit down on the tender tip she felt herself losing control and slipping over the edge. Unable

to fight it, she gave in to an incredible orgasm. A low moan started in her throat, and by time it reached her lips it was a full cry of pure pleasure.

Scott held her, enjoying the sensations of her pussy sucking at his cock. He moaned, too, pushing into her one final time and holding himself deep inside her. "Oh, fuck." He gasped for breath. "Kate...honey that was so intense..."

Pulling out of her, he collapsed beside her on the bed. Josh lay on her other side, nuzzling her neck, stroking her breasts with a lazy hand. Finding her lips, he gave her a long, slow kiss. His erection was finding new life and she could feel its hardness again pressing against her thigh.

"So?" Josh whispered. "What do you think of our idea to share?"

Kate smiled and brushed his dark hair off his forehead. Her skin felt flushed, alive, pressed between the sinewy bodies of the two men who were now *both* her lovers. The image of their flesh on hers aroused her anew. Reaching down, she grasped both men's cocks at once, stroking the evidence of their arousal.

"I believe this arrangement will work just fine," she murmured happily, closing her eyes as two sets of searching hands again slipped over her body.

About the Author

Award-winning author Devyn Quinn lives amid the scenic Southwest Texas plains with her many cats, her four ferrets, and Shih Tzu puppy. A huge fan of dark gothic literature, Devyn is a recent Romantic Times Nominee and CAPA Award winner. Writing with a style that has depth, fire, and fiendish imagination, Devyn is currently working on her next goth-erotic title. Visit Devyn online for the latest details and upcoming announcements.

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

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