

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

BARBARA
HUFFERT

*Hot
Rush*

ELLORA'S CAVE *Quickies*®

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Hot Rush

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HOT RUSH

Barbara Huffert

Dedication

Thanks to Regina Carlisle for talking me through the anger and helping me to see the story within it and to Amarinda Jones for the gentle shoves to get this finished. You ladies are the best!

Trademarks Acknowledgement

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The Lone Ranger: Classic Media, Inc.

Chapter One

"All right. Where's my fucking canoe? I want it and I want it now!"

A second before the screaming started, the door banged open to reveal the most furious redhead Rick Jensen had ever seen. And the most weirdly gorgeous in a he-couldn't-put-his-finger-on-it-and-now-wasn't-the-time-or-place-to-analyze-it way, too. Who the hell was she and what the hell was she doing, barging in on a full contingent of armed drug dealers in their lair as they were preparing for one of the biggest distributions they'd put together in months?

"Come on, I said now, damn it!" the woman screeched.

And more importantly, how the hell was Rick going to keep her alive long enough to get her out of there without blowing his cover or the operation, which was the culmination of many months of hard work by multiple organizations all coming to a head hopefully that night?

All eyes and most guns turned to the woman. Rick heard the clicks, signifying that they were ready to fire even if she didn't. He had to draw their attention away from her.

"Hey, darlin'. I thought I told you not to interrupt me when I'm working." He put himself between her and the array of weaponry, turning to face the room. "It's cool, boys. She's mine."

The spitfire wasn't having any of it and tried to shove him out of her way. "Yours? Ha! You wish. Look, all I want is what I came for and then I'm outta here."

"I dunno, homes. It don't look like it to me," one of the armed men said, not lowering his gun.

"She's just pissed. Come on, Lucy. Don't do me like that. You're gonna make me look bad in front of my boys." He grabbed her hair, forced her head back and planted a wet kiss on her startled mouth.

The slap that followed earned a round of boisterous laughter and lewd comments but it also managed to get the men to stow their weapons. "Don't you 'Lucy' me!"

"Feisty bitch," Rick declared before kissing her harder. "Look lady, I'm trying to keep your sweet ass alive here so work with me, would ya?" he whispered so only she heard.

"Huh?"

"She always gets this way when she's gone without for too long, don't ya, darlin'?"

Before the woman could respond, the obvious leader asked, "What'd she say about wanting a canoe?"

Rick forced a chuckle, all the while racking his brain for something plausible. "Oh that's just what she calls my cock." Not the best answer but hopefully the men would buy it and she'd play along.

"Fuck, like you got something like that," another joined in.

"Tell 'em, Lucy."

"What? Are you out of your mind?"

"Only when it comes to you." He winked at her. "Come on, darlin'. You can't still be mad because I didn't make it last night. Not after I told you I wouldn't be there when I had to be here. The boys can all vouch for me if you don't believe me." She was starting to look confused. He had to cut off her questions before she started. "You can ride my canoe later."

She sputtered at his inference. "Yeah, right. Like that'll happen."

Perfect. Keep her mad and off balance until he could get her safely out of there.

"Ooh, got some mouth. You gonna put up with that, Ricky?"

"Look at her, Carlos. Girl's got a rack like that you take a little lip from her, even in front of your boys."

"Yeah, true dat."

"Hey! Quit staring at my boobs," she snapped, crossing her arms which did nothing to hide anything.

"Aw stop, darlin'. You got 'em. You can't hide 'em so don't bother trying." He reached out and ran the back of his hand over the side of her breast. He had to get her out of there. "Now why don't you be a good girl and go on home and wait like you should have in the first place?"

"I think she should stay," Carlos announced.

"Me too," Joey, the other man who had commented moved closer.

"Fine, she stays. But don't blame me when you get sick of her mouth." Rick cringed internally. This was not good. Bad enough he was walking a fine line himself. Adding an innocent civilian who needed his protection was not making the whole situation any easier.

"Stay? Oh no. No, no, no, no, no. Un-uh. I don't think so," she protested, trying to back away like she'd decided they were all crazy.

Rick caught her before she could escape. He pulled her against his chest, tightly gripping her ass through her jeans pocket. "Settle down, darlin'. It's been a long few days. The boys just want a little something to break things up."

She squirmed until he was afraid she'd bruise herself. "Are you all brain damaged? You must be if you think I'm staying here. Just give me what I want and then I'm gone."

"See? I told you. One-track mind when she's feeling deprived," Rick teased, keeping the fingers of his other hand clamped firmly around her wrist. "Don't worry, Lucy. They weren't suggesting I share. They just want you to decorate the place a little while we work, right boys? Carlos? Joey? Victor?"

"Right," they all agreed in unison.

"Well that's all fine and dandy but I want my canoe and I don't want to stay."

Rick forced himself to remain calm. "Sorry, darlin'. The guys want you to stay, you stay." He squeezed her wrist for emphasis. "And this really isn't the time or place for what you keep asking for. Besides, I wasn't expecting to see you so I don't even have any condoms on me." He shrugged. "If that's not reason for her to not be jealous I don't know what is," he said to the men around them.

"Not a problem." Carlos laughed. "Use the office." He and several of the others pulled out their wallets and tossed condoms onto a pile next to the bags of white powder and scales on the table.

Just the opening he was looking for although convincing the woman to cooperate was not going to be easy.

"Oh hell no!"

"Lucy." Rick grabbed the condoms. "For once in your life just quit running your mouth and come with me."

He tossed her over his shoulder and carried her, kicking, screaming and swearing, up the steps to the office overlooking the old warehouse, ignoring the catcalls and guffaws that echoed from below.

Chapter Two

"Who the hell do you think you are?" she shrieked, on the verge of hysteria. All she'd wanted was her dad's canoe back because of all the happy moments they'd shared in it and now she'd gotten herself into this mess. And what a hell of a mess it was! Yes, she'd definitely done it this time. Would she never learn to think before she rushed headfirst into things? Next time she would stop and consider her actions like a rational person would. If there was a next time.

Rick planted himself against the closed door. "Lady, do you have some sort of death wish or are you just stupid?"

"How dare you?" She was still too panicked to think clearly. And the fact that this stranger who'd whisked her up here where she was thoroughly trapped was the most incredible man she'd ever seen wasn't helping matters.

"I dare because right now I am the only thing keeping your ass alive so why don't you just shut the fuck up and listen?"

"What do you mean, keeping me alive? Why would anyone want to kill me? All I want is my canoe and then I'll get out of here and leave you all to whatever it is you're doing."

He shook his head in disbelief. "Do you have any idea what you barged in on? Do you know who those guys are?"

"Sure I do. You called them Carlos, Joey and Victor." Her face went pale. "Carlos. Joey. And Victor. Oh my God. Oh. My. God. Ohmygodohmygodohmygod." She started to shake as the remaining color drained from her face. Yes, she did know who they were, an extended family of drug dealers. He was right. Her impulsiveness was going to get her killed this time.

"Damn." He shoved her into a chair and forced her head between her knees. All he needed was her to pass out on him. "Stay with me, darlin'. Take some slow deep breaths. I got you. You're okay."

She struggled against him. "What are you nuts? I'm not okay. Those guys have guns. They're going to kill me." He crouched in front of her and gripped her shoulders just a little harder than necessary. It was either that or give her a good shake.

"No, they won't. Not if you do exactly as I say."

She finally looked at him. "Oh and who are you? The fucking Lone Ranger?"

He couldn't help it. He had to chuckle. "Someone you can trust. Tell me how you know these guys."

"Trust you? After you grabbed me like that and said all those things? And made them look at my boobs. Oh yeah, let's not forget that one. You're nuts if you think I'm going to trust you." She knew she was the one sounding insane but couldn't manage to stop herself.

"I apologize for that, ma'am, but it was for your own protection. I had to make it seem as if we know each other."

She hesitated, wondering if he were setting some sort of trap for her even though he looked sincere. Boy, she'd really done it this time. When she snapped she snapped but good. Barging in on a whole building full of armed drug dealers was bad, even for her. Everyone always said her rash behavior would be the end of her one day. How correct they were! Maybe all the bad karma she'd earned for leaping into things without thinking first had finally caught up with her. Maybe she deserved whatever happened.

Searching his face, Casey decided she may as well get it over with and answer his questions. He seemed like the rest of them when they were downstairs but now there was something different about him, something that didn't quite fit. And he'd just called her ma'am. "My ex. He and Carlos were buddies and he talked about all of them. The Diego brothers. Drug dealers extraordinaire. Is Eddie down there too?"

"Yes. A few sons and cousins too."

A lone tear trickled down her cheek. Her face crumpled. "It's never going to end."

Rick's heart almost broke at the sight of her. He reacted without thinking and pulled her into his arms. "Sh, darlin'. It'll be fine. I promise. I'll get you out of here safe and sound. Don't cry."

"No, you don't understand. It's not that. Well, not just that. It's everything. I thought I was done with all this and then I saw the canoe. Stupid me couldn't just let it go. Oh no, I had to chase after it. What the hell was I thinking?"

"Yeah, what's up with that whole canoe thing anyway? And what's your name?"

"Casey. Casey Carmichael. Although Lucy's probably more appropriate with all the dumb things I've done."

"Casey's a nice name. Suits you but while you're here we're going to have to stick with Lucy." He smiled, squeezing her hands reassuringly.

Casey looked down at his hands covering hers before meeting his eyes. She nodded her understanding. "Who are you?"

"I'm sorry. Detective Rick Jensen at your service. But the boys know me as Ricky Hernandez, which is my mother's family name."

He was a cop. That explained a lot. And made Casey feel somewhat better. Maybe she would live through the day after all. Without conscious thought, her eyes dropped to his groin. With how he was crouched in front of her it was easy to see the bulge at his crotch. She couldn't help it. It was so wrong but the thought that he might actually be canoe shaped stuck in her mind and a giggle escaped.

"What?" Rick asked in complete confusion.

"I'm sorry." Another giggle. "Are you really built like a canoe? Why'd you say that anyway?"

Rick laughed with her. "Oh, that? Maybe, maybe not. First thing I came up with that might cover what you were doing here."

"Kind of lame, don't you think?"

"Yeah but it worked, didn't it? Besides, you're curious now."

"As if." Casey rolled her eyes. "Just like a guy, thinking all women are interested in your cock."

"Well you are, aren't you? You keep looking at it." Rick was pleased to see the blush spread across her cheeks. But as much as he liked teasing her it was time to get things back on track. "You know, I really wasn't expecting you to barge in here, screaming about your canoe like that. What's going on, Casey?"

"Oh. Right. I was driving home from the bank. I took out the last of my 401k to pay down some of the debt my ex got me into." She let out the most pathetic sound he'd ever heard. "Yep, I'm honestly penniless now. Probably homeless soon too. Maybe I deserve this for being so damn stupid. Maybe they should just shoot me and save the rest of the world from having to put up with me. I was always a little impulsive but ever since my dad died a few years ago I've been getting worse. It's like there's no one left who can calm me down like he used to."

"Shut up, Casey. I can already tell it wasn't you." Rick didn't need to hear the details to know she'd been taken advantage of by some lowlife scum. Though he wanted to hear all of it, this wasn't the time or place. "Get back to the canoe."

"Yeah, you don't want to hear that anyway."

"Yes, I do. There's just something about you that makes me want to know you better. Only we can't get into it right now," he said seriously.

"Wow, you mean that." She seemed stunned. "Anyway I was stopped at a light and looked up and realized I was behind this car that had my dad's canoe on top of it. I just started following it without thinking. I don't know. It was like the last straw. I don't even know when my ex took it. I guess he must have traded it for some drugs. Stupid me thought it was still tucked away in the back of the basement where we put it after my dad died. It wasn't until after I finally tossed the creep out a few months ago that I finally noticed it wasn't there. Along with a lot of other stuff. But like I said I saw it and I got really, really pissed and I decided I didn't care. I was getting it back no matter

what. I may not have my dad anymore but I wanted the canoe anyway. It reminds me of him because we had a lot of good talks in it as I was growing up.

"What were they doing, driving around with it?" Casey sniffled as a lone tear slipped down her cheek.

Rick caught it with his thumb. "Some of the kids were restless so Joey sent them fishing before Carlos shot them. I think he was hoping they'd tip the canoe and that would cool them off."

"Fishing. I'm going to die because they went fishing." She was crying.

"Casey," Rick soothed unsuccessfully. "Casey." She wasn't listening. "Casey."

Finally, he did the only thing he could think of to get her attention. He kissed her. His reaction was so completely inappropriate. The timing couldn't have been worse. Her life, hell both their lives, were at risk and yet all he could think of was how good she tasted, tears and all. His brain knew he should stop but his body wasn't being exactly rational at the moment. His cock was on full alert. There was a warm, soft woman in his arms, kissing him back, making the sexiest little sounds and he wanted her naked, right here, right now, the hell with the heavily armed drug dealers less than twenty yards away at the bottom of the stairs.

It was Casey who eventually drew back first. "Wow," she whispered. "Why do you keep doing that?"

"What? Kissing you?" Rick stalled for time so some blood could return to his brain.

"Yeah."

"Well down there it was to get close enough to you to get your attention so you'd play along before you got shot."

"I was still too mad for that."

"Yeah, I kinda noticed." He rubbed his cheek as if her slap still stung.

"Oh God, I'm sorry," she gasped in horror.

"It's okay, Casey. I'm teasing you."

"Oh. Okay." She looked skeptical.

"Really. And now it started out as a way to stop you from crying."

"Started out?"

"Uh, yeah." Damn, this was getting uncomfortable. And he still had to figure out how to keep her out of the way once things got started later on. May as well get it over with. They didn't have time for him to be coy. "And then I decided I liked it. A hell of a lot more than I should, considering where we are right now."

Casey blushed. Her eyes flashed just before her face crumpled. Rick swore and caught her, pulling her to her feet for a hug before she could curl up within herself. "I'm sorry, darlin'. Usually I'm better at this. But we don't have much time here. I wasn't blaming you for anything. All you did was barge in here looking all pissed off and gorgeous. Not your fault I can't control myself even though I know this is just about the worst possible time and place to decide you're a woman I want to get closer to."

She laughed. "Stop it. I'm calm now. You don't have to get outrageous."

"I'm not, darlin'. I mean it."

"Oh." She realized he was serious and went pale again.

"Settle down. We'll put this one on hold until we have you out of here safe and sound, okay?"

"Okay."

"Hey, how did you get in here anyway? There are guys all over the place out there. You shouldn't have been able to."

"I saw some of them looking at me but I think they were afraid to stop me."

"Yeah, you did come charging in here looking like you were loaded for bear. Probably thought you were more dangerous than all the Diegos combined."

"Oh God." She buried her face against his chest.

Rick rubbed her back. "You sure surprised the hell out of them, I'll give you that. Got balls."

"No. I'm stupid."

"Nah, just having a bad day."

It was Casey's turn to laugh. Hysterically. So hard she had tears of a different kind streaming down her cheeks.

"Much better."

"Not really. They're still going to shoot me when I got back down there."

"Why? Do they know you?"

Damn, he hadn't thought of that possibility. Now what were they going to do?

"No. Like I said my ex knew them. He used to help Carlos cut up the coke into those little baggies now and then before he got to be big-time but I never went along. Are you going to arrest me too for knowing about it and not telling anyone?"

Rick studied her pale face and quivering lip. "No, I'm not going to arrest you. Not as long as you tell me everything else you know once we're out of this." The perfect excuse to get together.

"Okay. I will. I swear. Everything. I never did any drugs you know. But he did."

"I believe you, Casey." He hugged her again.

"Why?"

Rick let her sweat for a minute. Maybe it was wrong but something inside him needed her to feel as dependent as possible on him for her safety. He really wanted to see her once this was all over and if he had to use her gratitude to accomplish that so she'd give him a chance and get to know him then he would. "Because we're in a bad situation and you're too stressed out already to bullshit me now when I'm the only one who can save your sweet ass."

Rick heard footsteps just before someone pounded on the door and instinctively positioned himself between Casey and the door. He drew his gun and released the safety.

"Yo. Check it, homes. I gotta get more bags from the cabinet," a voice called from the other side of the door.

"Hang on," Rick grumbled, resting his gun on the desk and whipping off his shirt. Quickly he unbuttoned his jeans so they rode low on his hips. "Shirt," he snapped quietly at Casey, tugging it from her body when she didn't react. "Hold it in front of you," he ordered softly as he shoved her onto the leather couch along one wall.

Gun in hand, Rick yanked open the door. "You better not be up here to look at my woman," he warned, pointing the weapon at the kid sent to retrieve the bags.

"No, bro, it ain't like that." The kid grabbed what he came for and practically fell over his own feet trying to retreat without looking anywhere except at Rick. "You know I don't roll like that, Ricky. C'mon. You know me, homes."

"Get the fuck out. Tell the boys anything else can wait until we're done." Rick slammed the door, locking it before he turned back to Casey. He crossed the room, putting his gun on the corner of the desk within reach. Even though the door was locked it was better to be safe than sorry, not that it would do much good against all the firepower downstairs but it was better than nothing.

Sitting down, Rick wasn't really prepared when Casey flung herself into his arms. "Hey, what's this about? You're fine, darlin'. I promise I'm not going to let anything happen to you. Sorry I had to be so rude about your shirt but I needed to make it look like we were about to get busy."

"It's not that," she sniffled.

"Then what is it?" He was concerned about the way she was shaking. He needed her to stay calm if they stood a chance of pulling this off.

"You really would have shot him for me. That kid. If he'd tried anything, I mean. I never had anyone protect me before. Other than my dad, I mean." Casey was beyond amazed. Sure, it was technically part of his job but he was really willing to do it. She'd never experienced anything like that in her life. The feeling was unbelievable. Now this was the kind of man she'd always been hoping for.

"Oh. Well, yeah, if I'd had to but I wouldn't have killed him. And it wouldn't have come to that. Julio's not a bad kid yet. He's one who might come around after he's busted tonight if I have any say in where he gets sent. So far he hasn't been involved in too much of the hard stuff so he still has a chance at making it. But yeah, I'll protect you however I have to as long as we're here so don't you worry, okay?"

She nodded. "What do I need to do?"

Rick hugged her for the open trust showing on her face. He couldn't remember a more beautiful gift in his life. "Don't exactly have that worked out yet, darlin' but I will before we leave this room."

For the next few minutes Rick tried to give Casey a quick rundown of what was going on but it was obvious she wasn't paying attention.

"What?" Rick asked when it became obvious her attention had wandered.

"I'm sorry," Casey apologized. "I'm just not used to anyone like you. Figures." She shook her head with a sad grin.

"What figures? You lost me."

"Well, the few friends I have left that the ex didn't manage to chase away keep telling me I should go out more and meet someone new, someone completely different from how he was. Do you think this counts?"

"Ah." He chuckled with her. "I see what you mean. But sure, why not? I'm new. Different. We met, right?"

"God, you were right to call me Lucy. I'm always getting myself into things because I don't stop to think like normal people do. Who else meets a guy like this?"

"Normal's highly overrated and downright boring. Besides, think of the story we'll have to tell the grandkids," Rick teased.

"Grandkids! Aren't you getting a little ahead of things here?"

He shrugged. "I guess. And just so you know, I'm old-fashioned so we'll have to wait to start on the family until after we're married. But we do have a whole pile of condoms." He gestured to the handful he'd tossed on the desk.

"You're not serious!"

"No," he sighed. "I suppose not." Rick struggled to hide his disappointment. The timing still sucked as much as it had a short time earlier but he couldn't deny how much he wanted her. Especially now that she'd lowered her shirt to her lap. That lacy excuse for a bra of hers did very little to hide her nipples—her very erect nipples—from his view. Damn, he wanted them in his mouth so bad he ached.

"Oh. Okay."

Her eyes dropped to his chest. When the tip of her tongue flicked across her bottom lip, his cock twitched. "What?"

"It's just that, um, well." She twisted her shirt nervously until finally looking up at him. "Damn. I figured with how you almost shot that guy they're going to leave us alone and we do have all those condoms," she trailed off.

"And?" Rick couldn't believe what he thought she was saying.

"Look, I haven't had sex in years, okay? There, I said it." The whole situation was so surreal that it was probably a dream anyway. Why not make it a really good one? After all what was the purpose of inventing a dark-haired, tanned, buff as hell hero with piercing brown eyes to save her if she wasn't going to take advantage of him?

"Huh? I thought you said you just got rid of your ex a few months ago."

"I did. But we stopped having sex long before that. I found out he was cheating on me so I refused to let him touch me. I didn't want to get anything since some of the bimbos I saw him hanging around with were pretty skanky. I'm damn lucky I didn't anyway because I'm sure it started before I began to suspect him. And yes, I was tested so I'm positive about that."

"Hey, I believe you. You're right. You are lucky. I don't understand why any man would treat you like that, Casey. I'm sorry."

"Don't look at me like that. I didn't tell you so you'd pity me. I told you because I think you're damn hot, sitting there without your shirt and with your jeans half open. You've been staring at my boobs and I liked kissing you too. If I'm getting shot today I want sex one more time before I die. How about it?"

Rick was speechless. It was his turn to ask. "Are you serious?"

"No." Her lip quivered and her bravado slipped. "Just forget I said anything."

"Oh hell no. You don't say a thing like that and then take it back."

"I don't want a pity fuck. I'd rather die without."

"You think that's what it would be?" He had to lift her chin in order to have her look at him. "What the fuck did that asshole do to you? Casey, listen to me. Any man would be damn lucky to have you." He took her hand and covered his hard-on. "Does this take care of any doubts? You're gorgeous, darlin'. I wanted you the moment you stormed in here. I'm just not sure it's the best time, is all. But, as you just pointed out, we do have a certain window of opportunity." He grinned suggestively.

"You mean that? You're willing?"

"Willing?" His cock twitched beneath her hand. "I'd be begging if we had the time for that. This is so damn inappropriate though." He prevented her from pulling away. "Wait. That's not going to stop me if you're sure you want this. But first I need you to understand that there is absolutely no way in hell that I'm letting anything happen to you here. You're not getting shot and you're definitely not dying. I'll stake my own life on that one."

Casey merely stared. He really meant that. He would protect her with his life if it came down to it.

"Fuck it," he growled, yanking her to him, claiming her mouth in a searing kiss. "Say no now if you don't want this," Rick offered without giving her the chance to respond before resuming the kiss. When she pulled him closer, he had his answer.

It seemed like forever before Rick had to stop to catch his breath. He'd never needed to do that before. Something to think about. Later. Now was all about Casey and there was not a second to spare. The raw desire he saw in her eyes reflected what he was feeling. Good. At least he wasn't alone in the turmoil he was feeling. Damn, he wished they had the time to do this right. Later. Hell, who was he kidding? Even in perfect circumstances he suspected the first time with this woman would still be just as wild and out of control as it was about to be anyway. Probably the second and third times too. They'd get to leisurely exploring eventually but now he had to claim her.

Rick's hand followed his gaze to her chest. She seemed to be having as much trouble breathing as he was. Still, when his palm covered her breast, she stopped. Her flesh fitted as if made for him and his hands were large. Perfect, just the way he liked it. He closed his hand, leaving her pointed nipple protruding between his fingers. He squeezed, lifting her breast as he lowered his head. He didn't need to look to know that Casey was watching him. He could feel her eyes on him so he made sure she had a clear view of his teeth closing over her lace-covered nipple.

"Oh God," Casey cried. "More."

Rick shifted his hand so he could suck her nub into his mouth. "Damn right, more," he agreed after a moment when he decided he needed bare flesh and lifted her free of the cups of her bra. Framed like that, pushed up, he couldn't resist burying his face between her breasts. He knew he should, the stubble of his day-old beard would leave scratches but she was moaning, not complaining. Casey's arms wrapped around his head, holding him in place as she arched toward him, pulling him in tighter, not pushing him away.

Somehow he managed to rearrange them so Casey was on his lap, straddling his legs. It seemed like a good idea initially because it put her luscious breasts right at

mouth level and allowed him to feast. It also left his hands free to roam over the soft skin of her back. Damn, he wished he'd stripped her first so he had access to that sweet ass bare and not through denim. Rick was working down the zipper of her jeans, thinking to slip his hands inside when Casey started to rock back and forth on top of him. The contact even though there were two layers of clothes separating them, was too much, he was so turned on by this woman already.

"Whoa, darlin'." Rick slid his hands over her flesh and used her jeans to hold her away from him as he tugged her backward on his legs.

"What did I do wrong?" Casey's lip quivered. "Let me go."

"Fuck," Rick growled, slamming her to his chest and clutching her tightly so she couldn't escape. "Not a damn thing, Casey, not one damn thing."

"Then why did you stop me?" she asked between sniffles.

"Sh, everything's fine." He loosened his grip enough so that he could kiss her. "I slowed you down because what you were doing was too right."

She frowned for a few seconds until his meaning registered and then a tentative grin began. When Rick grinned in return, Casey's grew. She began to giggle but slapped a hand over her mouth in horror.

"I'm sorry."

"Why? It's okay. Go ahead and laugh," Rick urged, laughing with her. "Why wouldn't it be?"

"Well my ex..."

"Listen," Rick interrupted. "Let's get one thing straight here. I am not your ex. He was an asshole and everything he told you was a crock of shit. Got that?"

Casey nodded.

"I'm serious, Casey. What's his name, by the way?"

"Jethro Grimsy."

Rick's mouth dropped open when he couldn't hide his surprise. He shook his head. He finally recovered and said, "Darlin', he really is a first class asshole who's not fit to kiss your feet let alone anything else. But you're done with him now."

"Okay. Um, I should move."

"Why? Wait, don't tell me." Rick paused for a kiss. He slid his hands further into her pants, covering more of her cheeks with his large palms, squeezing them firmly as he did. "The ass had you convinced you were too heavy to hold, right?" She nodded. "That's because he's a little boy who didn't know what to do with a real woman when he had one." Rick gave the closest nipple a hard suck until Casey moaned. "Darlin', real men – as in me – prefer women with curves – as in you."

"Rick."

"What? You think I'm just saying that?"

"Yes."

"Fine. When we get back downstairs we'll ask the boys what they think."

"No!" Casey turned bright red. Now that she'd calmed down she was embarrassed enough by the thought that of them thinking she'd showed up to demand sex. It didn't matter who they were.

Rick chuckled. "Damn, you sure are cute when you blush."

"You were teasing?"

"Yes, although I have heard them talk about it. The general consensus is they don't like bony women any more than I do. Nope, the boys like booty too."

Casey laughed. "You're awful."

"Why? I'm being honest here." His hands roamed as much as possible within the confines of her jeans. "Your ex was a clueless ass. You're a gorgeous woman, soft and round in all the right places and when we're out of here I'm going to prove how much I like that by giving you running commentary as I explore every inch of you for days and then some."

Casey blushed again and dropped her head to Rick's shoulder. "You make me want things again," she said so softly he barely heard her.

At that moment, Rick knew he was never letting Casey go. She may not realize it yet but those grandchildren they'd been joking about were going to become a reality. He wrapped one arm around her back, holding her tightly to him, kissing her neck. The other he pushed deeper into her pants, stretching his hand as far he could so his fingers reached her moisture. It wasn't the ideal position but it was a start.

"Anything you want, darlin', it's yours. Today's just a preview of what's to come." His fingertip pressed against her opening, teasing to mimic his words. Casey moaned, trying to shift on his finger. "Mm, I love the feel of you moving on me," Rick told her when her torso dragged on his. "I can't wait to get you naked and all alone somewhere."

"Oh my God," Casey gasped, remembering where they were.

"Yeah, I know. Damn inconvenient, isn't it?" He couldn't help it. He had to laugh at the situation they were in even though it really wasn't at all funny. Fortunately, she saw the humor in it too and laughed along with him again. "Now back to what we were doing."

Casey surprised him by sliding backward. "Yeah, back to that." She finished unbuttoning his jeans and worked his erection free. "Commando."

"Yep. That's my excuse for wearing pants that don't hang halfway off my ass."

"Good one. I never got that," Casey gasped. She'd been stroking his cock which couldn't get any harder. "Holy shit, you were serious. You are shaped like a canoe!"

Rick threw his head back and laughed harder than he thought possible, considering the circumstances. The woman was priceless. He'd never given it much thought but yes, now that she'd said it, he supposed she wasn't altogether incorrect with her observation. His cock did have a wide, flatter area in the mid-section when it was fully erect. No one, including himself, had ever described it in terms of a canoe before.

"Hey, knock it off. I'm not joking here. Look at this thing. Have you ever seen it?" She blushed. "Well, duh. Of course you have."

"Lucy, I love you," Rick declared just before claiming her mouth with a sloppy, wet kiss. "You have to be the most amazing woman I have ever met."

"You mean stupid, don't you?" she countered.

"Nope. Don't put words in my mouth. I said amazing, I mean amazing. And yeah, you're right. My cock is kinda canoeish. Funny, I never noticed it before. Gives a whole new meaning to riding a canoe, doesn't it?" He winked as he captured her hand and covered it, stroking himself with her help. "Something else we need to do more of when we have unlimited time. If you want to that is."

"Mm. You'd let me?"

Rick had to laugh again. "Casey, for future reference there's very little I won't let you do to me."

She paused as if to check he was serious. "Wow. You're going to be fun to play with."

"Yep, that's me. Your very own personal playground, complete with attached inflatable toy."

"Oh that's awful. And shouldn't that be inflatable canoe?" Casey used both hands to pump Rick's cock from bottom to top. "Hope the boys have some extra large in that pile."

"I'm sure they do, judging by the size of their egos," Rick assured her. "Fuck that's too good again, darlin'." He stopped her. "You said it's been a long time. Let me make sure you're ready for this."

"How?"

Rick lifted Casey from him, stood, spread his shirt for her to sit on after he tugged off her jeans. "Hey, who knows what goes on in here," he said at her questioning look.

Before kneeling in front of her, he looked through the condoms on the desk and stuck a few in his pocket. As he positioned himself between her thighs he could sense her nervousness. "We don't have to do this."

"Oh yes we do. I'm just a little afraid I'm going to disappoint you."

"Like that'll happen. You already had me so close to coming I had to stop you twice. I'm the one who should be worried about disappointing you. But I promise I'll make it up to you when we're away from here. Deal?"

"Deal. Mm," Casey moaned when Rick's thumb found her clit. "Oh yeah." He circled, pressing it firmly. "God," she gasped, arching almost off the couch as her hands grasped his shoulders.

"That's it, darlin'." He penetrated her tightness with two fingers. "Damn, you're hot."

"Please," she cried, her pussy clamping down on his fingers as if trying to hold them there.

"Please what? You want more?" he asked, adding a third finger. He couldn't decide if he wanted to make her come or be inside her more. Probably make her come while he was inside her. Too bad there wasn't enough time to taste her first because damn if her pussy didn't smell sweet.

"Yes. More. Yes," she panted, bucking against his hand. So close.

"You ready for me?"

"Ooh. Yeah. I want that canoe. Now. Fuck me with your canoe cock."

Again, Rick had to laugh. No two ways about it, the woman was priceless. He ripped open a condom with his teeth so he could keep one hand on Casey's clit as long as possible. She was more than ready for him but he loved the little sounds she was making. Sheathed, he half-knelt on the couch, hooked one leg over his shoulder and, holding her gaze, docked his canoe with one solid thrust.

Casey screamed. If the boys hadn't heard them before they certainly did now. "Harder, Rick. More. I need..."

"More," he agreed, picking up the pace, slamming his cock into her clenching pussy.

"Rick-y," she screamed, her nails digging into his shoulders, dragging down his biceps, her back bent back sharply as she came.

"Beautiful, darlin'." His hips continued to rock, stroking his cock slowly through her wetness, calming her even though what he really wanted to do was pound away until he exploded. It would be better if she was with him. "Do it again."

"Oh my God," Casey gasped when he adjusted the angle slightly so his shaft grazed her G-spot on every thrust.

"That's it," he urged, pumping harder. "Come for me. Squeeze my cock with your hot pussy."

"So good, so good," she chanted, her entire body tensing as she clasped him to her.

Rick was almost there. From Casey's reactions he knew she was too. She needed just a little more to knock her over the edge so he pushed her knee closer to her side, spreading her wider, letting his cock go even deeper. With that, she came, once again screaming with pleasure.

"Fuck," Rick panted, Casey's pussy milking him, pulling him right along with her. It took all he had not to collapse on top of her. Somehow he managed to unhook her leg and ended up on the floor, his head resting on her mound until he could breathe again. Without conscious thought, he turned and kissed her wetness. Mm, he'd been right. She was sweet.

"Hey," Casey started. "Whatcha doing?" Nothing like asking the obvious.

"Sh. Nothing," he whispered, giving her a little lick. "Just getting a sample. For later."

She shivered. "Okay."

Rick looked at Casey's face. She was watching him with a dreamy yet cautious expression as if she couldn't quite believe he was doing what he was obviously doing. No doubt more of her bastard ex's handiwork. Something else he'd remedy in time. A fuller lick which elicited a gasp. He glanced at his watch. No time like the present to get started with that one. Quickly, Rick dealt with the condom so he could focus all his attention on Casey.

"You take some more?" he asked, swirling his tongue around her clit.

"I-I think so."

"Tell me if it's too much."

He tried to start out slowly. Really he did. He meant to. But Casey was so responsive it was difficult to control himself especially with all those sexy little noises of hers. He began by alternately thrusting his pointed tongue into her opening and then circling her clit. He might have continued had she not begged for more contact, lifting her hips in offering. How could he refuse?

Sliding his arm beneath her ass, Rick ran his hand along her side. Immediately Casey's hand gripped his. With his other hand, he parted her folds, giving his tongue better access to her clit. He wished he had more time to determine what she liked best but he added that to his mental list of things to explore. For now he tried flicking it rapidly. Casey's breath hitched. Hmm, good reaction but not the best. He latched onto her clit and sucked. She moaned, her hips bucked. Much better. He sucked harder and then scraped it with his teeth. Casey screamed and clamped her thighs around his head. Her hand crushed his. Yes, that was what more like it. Rick sank his tongue into her sweetness and struggled to breathe as they rode out her orgasm together.

"Wow," Casey whispered limply.

"Fucking right, wow. How you doing, darlin'?"

"You need to ask?" She grinned. "Why'd you do that?" Casey asked as she attempted to sit upright.

"Do what? Eat you?"

"Yeah." She blushed.

Rick chuckled, helping her. "Juicy pussy within licking range. What's a man supposed to do? I said a man, not your poor excuse ex."

"Oh. Okay. Thanks."

This time he laughed. "Darlin', you better not be thanking me for what I think you thanking me for. I'm the one who should be thanking you for the privilege. Got that?"

Casey studied his face for a moment and finally realized he was teasing her. "Oh you."

"Much better. You know the boys heard some of that, don't you? We're in for some big-time teasing when we go back down there."

"Oh my God." She hid her face in her hands.

Rick pried them apart and tipped up her chin. "Hey, what happened to the girl who stormed in here demanding her canoe? Correct me if I'm wrong but I seem to recall you insisting on it up here too."

"You're awful."

"Nope, just getting you ready for it. You can do this, Casey. I have complete faith in you."

"Well that makes one of us."

Rick put his hands on her shoulders. "Listen to me. You are an incredible woman. I know that without a doubt. Sure, your ex did a number on you and that has you a little intimidated at the moment but I have complete confidence in you even though you don't right now. Enough for both of us. We're going back down there and we'll get through this, no problem. And then, once this is all over and done with, I'd really like to come see you."

"Why?"

"Why?" He was stunned. "Because I'd like us to get to know each other better. We started something here today, Casey and I think we could go somewhere with it if we

give it a chance. Now come on. We better get back down there.” Rick didn’t like the expression on Casey’s face. He was afraid she was going to reject him so he figured the best thing to do was to explain what she could expect during the raid and get her out of the room before she had a chance. He’d made his intentions clear. She’d have some time to think about it and see that he was right before they talked about it again. She had to see that he was right, they could have something together and there was more between them than just good — no, great — sex. She just had to.

Chapter Three

Every time another delivery was packaged and sent out, Casey held her breath and fought to act as if she didn't know that the men taking the shipments were being followed and arrested once they reached their destinations. It was a fast-paced operation and Rick hadn't told her how many shipments there'd be before the raid so she didn't know how much time was left before it took place. The bags of what she assumed was cocaine seemed to be never-ending. No wonder the city was in such trouble. Upstairs, Rick had told her that he'd been involved in setting the delivery schedule to ensure that the largest amounts would go out first which meant the lesser dealers were the ones who wouldn't be caught this time. She supposed that was something and could only hope they'd get the rest sooner rather than later.

When Casey had questioned whether that was his only part in the operation he'd explained that his appointed role was that of a controller who supposedly came with the drugs from the source to ensure that everything went smoothly. He'd continued, telling her to stay as close to him as possible and what to do if they were separated. He'd also given her information that would clearly mark her as not part of the drug ring if he couldn't get to her immediately after they left the warehouse. He'd said that the last thing he wanted was for her to end up being questioned nonstop or thrown into a cell for the night.

She tried to prevent herself from dwelling on what was about to happen by thinking about Rick. Had she just done it again? Was she being a fool, rushing things with a man she really didn't know? But it felt so right with him, so incredibly good. This time had to be different. It just had to be.

Casey had been standing with him the whole time. He was lounging with one hip on a crate of some sort and would have appeared very at ease had she not been in

constant contact with his tensed muscles. When he took up his position as guard he'd pulled Casey along with him and whispered for her to stay behind him as much as possible. He told her to hold on but to leave his arms free in case he needed to go for his gun. She didn't think twice about running her hands over his back and shoulders, occasionally letting one slide around his waist since touching him had a calming effect on her. Probably why he'd instructed her to hang on in the first place. Not that he seemed to mind with how often he twisted his neck to claim a quick kiss.

What was wrong with her, standing there daydreaming about the things Rick had said about wanting to see her again after they were out of this mess? They could very well be about to be killed and here she was picturing them in all sorts of intimate scenarios. Life didn't work like that, or not her life. One simply didn't storm into a major drug deal about to happen and end up going off into the sunset with the undercover cop who just happened to be there to save her sorry ass. Not even if he had made her come harder than she ever had before in her life.

"Darlin', your hands are driving me wild," Rick whispered harshly. "If we had the time I'd drag you off to a dark corner and let you run them all over me."

Casey stifled a giggle and dropped one hand to his ass. With a squeeze she murmured, "Mm, I'd like that." She slid her fingers around his hip, stopping when the tips reached the bulge in his jeans. "But only if you don't make me stop this time. I want to explore you."

"Fuck." His cock twitched. "You want to play with my canoe?"

"Oh you know I do." She brushed his length as she bit his shoulder to contain her moan. Unbelievable, how he was teasing her like that. His body was responding to her lightest touch in a room full of people at the most inappropriate time imaginable. He must really want her.

"Hey Lucy, why you go so quiet over there?" Carlos asked, teasing her. "Ya sure weren't when you were upstairs with my boy, Ricky."

Casey felt her face heat. Rick had warned her to expect this but until now there hadn't been any breaks in the action so no one had paid any attention to her. She wanted to bury her face against Rick's back but reminded herself that she had to act as bold as they all thought she was.

"Jealous, Carlos? Bet you wish your woman would come take what she wanted like I did."

Before the others had much of a chance to react, the room was suddenly filled with all varieties of law enforcement personnel. Casey didn't know how they'd all gotten in there so quietly or so quickly. It seemed as if they'd just appeared but it was somewhat anticlimactic from after what she'd been expecting. There was no shooting. There was no teargas. There was the command for everyone to drop their weapons and to get on the ground, face down. It took a moment for it to register that the order included her. It might not have had Rick not hauled her down beside him.

"Hey, five-oh," Rick said just as someone reached her and was pulling her arms behind her back. "Watch how you treat my woman."

With her head turned, she was able to catch the barely perceptible look and nod that Rick gave the man standing over her. It must have been enough because when the plastic ties were attached to her wrists they weren't at all tight. When she was helped to a sitting position it was done almost gently and the man, when she looked up at him, was watching her with an extremely curious expression. As soon as he spoke to another officer, it set off a chain reaction and they all eyed her with the same expression.

Now all she had to do was explain how she barged in there like the damn fool that she was and how Rick managed to keep her alive. Casey wondered how many times she'd have to profess her stupidity before she'd be permitted to go home and this nightmare of a day would end. She bit her lip to keep from crying.

Rick must have noticed because she felt his knee nudge hers. When she looked up, he winked. He'd told her to tell the truth, that she'd followed her stolen canoe, that he'd pretended to know her, that the Diegos had decided she had to stay. He'd promised

everything would be fine. He'd said she could trust him and she'd believed him an hour ago. She had to keep believing him now so when he raised an eyebrow she nodded to let him know she was okay. He'd said he'd try to be the one to take her information about her ex but that she'd be all right even if she ended up giving it to someone else and she had to trust him on that one too. It was simple. Rick said she would be fine so she would be fine. He'd promised and he was a man of his word. So far anyway. He'd gotten her out of there without getting shot and that was a good start as far as she was concerned.

* * * * *

Casey had never been inside a police station before in her life but wasn't surprised to find it was nothing like they were portrayed on television. She was dismayed however when, after an hour and a half, she was still seated alone in the same interrogation room where they'd deposited her shortly after arriving. On their way out of the warehouse, she was put in the back of a marked car, also alone. She assumed that had been because she was the only female as she did her placement in that room. Now, she half-suspected they'd forgotten about her. Oh, she was sure Rick hadn't but he didn't count. He must be very busy with everything else he had to do but certainly there must be someone among all the other people who had been inside the warehouse who had a spare moment to speak with her. Unless it hadn't really meant anything to him. Had he forgotten her already? Was sex with her just part of his job to him, something he did every day with whoever happened to be there? Was she being a fool for him this time?

At least they'd cut off the plastic ties before they'd put her in the room. There was a surveillance camera in the ceiling and Casey wondered if anyone was watching her. She also wondered if the door was locked. Maybe it was time to find out. If not, it wouldn't hurt to remind someone she was still there. At first, all she did was pace around the small room. When doing that didn't make anyone appear, she tried standing beneath the camera and waving. That didn't work either so she decided to stop waiting for them

to come to her and go find someone. She got as far as turning the doorknob before the door was pushed open, almost knocking her over. Yes, apparently they were watching.

"Ms. Carmichael? Would you come with me please?" A very disinterested, rumpled man who barely gave her a glance led her to another room and fingerprinted her.

The unidentified detective told her it was merely a formality before leading Casey to a desk in a room with multiple cubicles. There was some activity but she couldn't really tell what was going on around them. As they went, Casey tried to look for Rick but didn't see him anywhere.

The interview didn't start well. The first thing he asked for was identification. When Casey told him her wallet which held that was inside her car back at the warehouse he paused from typing into his computer to give her a tired look. After a sigh, he said she could show it to the officer who took her back there when he was finished taking her statement and proceeded with his questions.

"Hey Phillips, sorry to interrupt but I need to steal Ms. Carmichael for a minute," Rick announced, suddenly appearing beside her.

"Yeah sure, Jensen. Take your time." The detective didn't even bother to look up. "I could use a smoke anyway."

"This way please." Rick indicated that she should follow him. Casey might have been upset by his cool demeanor had he not winked. "In here," he said, tugging her behind him into what turned out to be a supply closet after looking around to make sure they were unobserved. "Casey."

Before Casey could say a word Rick had her pinned to the door and was kissing her. He had his entire body pressed against her and she felt his cock swell when one of her hands dropped to his hip. Without thinking, Casey wrapped her thigh around his and grasped his ass, pulling Rick in even closer.

"Damn, it feels like forever since I kissed you." Rick devoured her mouth like he was starving for her.

"Oh God," Casey moaned when his hand slipped beneath her shirt to cover her breast.

"Sh," Rick cautioned. "We need to be real quiet here."

His warning brought Casey to her senses. "Oh no, we can't do this here." She tried to squirm away but he didn't budge.

"Sure we can. The mop and broom won't mind. And there's no camera in here," he told her, reclaiming her mouth until she was once again breathless. "Long as we're quick about it." Rick opened her jeans and shoved them halfway down her thighs. "You deserve better, Casey, and I promise I'll make it up to you." His fingers delved into her already soaked core. "Damn, you're wet."

"Mm," Casey ground herself against his hand. "All your fault."

"You been thinking about me, darlin'? Like I have been about you."

"Yes. I was afraid you'd forgotten me."

"That's never going to happen." He lifted his head to meet her eyes. "Never, Casey. Now that we've met you will never be out of my mind," he declared seriously. "Trust me?"

"I do, Rick."

He chuckled. "Good." He curled his fingers as his thumb covered her clit. "Now where were we?"

Casey gasped but Rick instantly smothered the noise with a kiss. His tongue plundered her mouth as his hand continued to work its magic. In no time Casey felt the sweet pressure building to the point where she was ready to explode. How did he do that so easily? It was only the second time he'd touched her and already he knew her body better than anyone else ever had. It was so good now that she couldn't begin to imagine what it would feel like after they really got to know each other.

"Come for me, darlin'," Rick whispered harshly. His breathing was almost as ragged as hers.

"No," Casey moaned, struggling to resist. "Want your canoe again. Please. Let me ride it." She couldn't believe she'd said it but now that she had she was determined. She somehow forced her hands between them and found his buttons. It was difficult to concentrate with how Rick kept spearing her G-spot but Casey wanted to feel his cock pumping into her again and damn it, she was going to. "I saw you put condoms into your pocket."

For a moment Casey thought Rick might refuse. His movements slowed. The hand that had been tormenting her breast stilled. He lifted his head enough to look into her eyes and when he did she could see that his hunger matched hers. So why was he hesitating? Casey decided she wasn't taking no for an answer. She'd already demanded his cock and it couldn't get much more embarrassing than that. Finally, with tremendous difficulty she was able to free his bulging shaft from his jeans. Stroking him firmly, Casey leaned forward and nipped his lower lip.

"I want you Rick. I need you," she declared between kisses. "Please," she repeated.

"Fuck," Rick swore. He released her to dig in his pocket. "Don't help." He batted her hands away when she attempted to assist him with the condom. "Turn around," Rick ordered, already spinning her toward the door. "Push your ass out so I can get to your pussy."

"Yes," Casey groaned, doing as he said. "Now," she pleaded. With one solid thrust, Rick buried himself completely. "Oh God, yes."

"Quiet," Rick reminded her as he began to pump his rock-hard cock steadily in and out of her clenching sheath.

"Rick," she moaned, resting her head against her folded arms. "More."

"Sh," he panted as he wrapped one arm around her torso. Holding her tightly, he slipped his hand up to her face.

Casey sucked Rick's fingers into her mouth. They were the ones he'd just had in her pussy and she could taste herself on them. She ran her lips over them, drawing them in and out of her mouth, matching Rick's rhythm. When she did, he went wild, thrusting

harder and faster, pounding his cock deep into her over and over again. It was like nothing she'd ever experienced before, too much and not enough all at once. Her pussy gripped him tighter as if trying to hold him inside. She could feel every hard inch stroking back and forth.

"So good, Casey. Too good," Rick gasped. "Come with me."

That little bit of encouragement was all Casey needed to push her over the edge. She bit down on Rick's fingers to keep from screaming. Her climax triggered his and they rode out the waves of pleasure together. He slumped against her back, pressing himself deeper into her spasming sheath.

When Casey could breathe again she released Rick's fingers and rubbed her cheek against his hand. "Wow," she sighed.

Rick kissed her neck. "Hell yeah, wow." He slowly eased away, making sure she was steady before he let go. "You okay?"

"Mm, I sure am." Casey turned and tilted her face for a kiss. "That was amazing."

"No, you're amazing." He kissed her more thoroughly. "Beautiful."

"Rick."

"I mean it, Casey. You are beautiful. I'm going to tell you that as often as it takes until you believe me."

Casey blushed and rearranged her clothes. "Hey what did you want me for anyway?"

"Nothing official. I just wanted to make sure you were okay."

"Of course I'm okay. I'm in the police station."

"So? Something else you need to get used to is that I'm still going to have the urge to protect you even when I know you're perfectly safe. That's how I am with people I care about. And I do care about you."

"I care about you too." Casey's heart swelled. What an unexpected day it had turned out to be.

"Thank you, darlin'. Now I better get you back there before they come looking for you. Ready?"

"I guess. You know I'd rather talk to you."

"I wish you could too but you'll be okay. Remember what I said. Phillips is a good guy. Tell the truth and give him as many facts as you can about your ex."

"I will."

"C'mere." Rick pulled her close and wrapped his arms around her. He kissed her forehead. "Don't worry, you'll be fine. I promise. You can do this. Hell, you faced down the whole Diego clan so this'll be a piece of cake."

For a minute, Casey held on tight. Then she forced herself to smile. "Okay, I'm ready."

For over two hours, Casey repeated her explanation of how she happened to be inside the warehouse, how she was familiar with the names of the Diego brothers but had never met any of them, who her ex was, how long he'd lived with her, when she'd thrown him out, who his other friends were, everything she knew about any of them, and all the information she could supply on the possessions he'd stolen from her. Finally, Phillips announced he was finished with her and told her they'd be in touch if they had any additional questions. He made a call and a uniformed officer appeared to take her to her car.

Back outside the warehouse, Casey got in her car, locked the doors and cried. She couldn't believe the day she'd had. She'd started out making herself closer to out of debt but literally penniless. Then she'd almost managed to get herself shot with her impulsiveness. And she'd had sex with a total stranger. Twice! Well, that part wasn't so bad. Nope, not bad at all since he'd made her feel better in those few stolen minutes than her ex had in the last year they'd actually had sex. Still, he was someone she didn't know and would undoubtedly never see again no matter what he'd said. To top it off, she'd been in the middle of a major drug raid and now had her fingerprints on file and was associated with major drug dealers. Yeah, hell of a day all around.

Suddenly Casey was laughing instead of crying. Hysterically. Not that she would ever tell anyone anyway but even if she did who would believe her?

Chapter Four

It was Wednesday and Casey still felt like she was on an emotional roller coaster though not quite as much as she had. When she went to work Monday morning she spoke to her boss and arranged to have the week off. She had vacation days coming and this seemed as good a time as any to use it especially since she wouldn't be taking any trips that year. Armed with the newspaper article that boasted of the largest drug coup in the city's recent history, it didn't take much more explanation for her boss to approve the time off.

Casey had all but convinced herself it was ridiculous to feel rejected. She was being foolish, daydreaming about him nonstop as she was. The taste of his lips, the feel of him under her hands, the way he'd touched her, the things he'd said to her, the way they'd teased about his canoe-shaped cock. She and Rick had both been caught up in the moment. Even though he had given her the most incredible experiences of her life it was still just sex. It hadn't really meant anything. To either of them. She was silly to even think for one second that it ever could. No reason to sniffle about it. After all, he had given her the opportunity to say no and she hadn't. She had encouraged him instead. The truth was she had wanted him, there was no denying it. They'd used condoms so there was no problem. It was over and that was that. Probably for the best since that kind of beginning was not the sort of thing to build a lasting relationship on anyway.

After abandoning the idea of vacuuming, Casey was in the process of choosing a book when the doorbell rang. She was tempted not to answer but her curiosity got the better of her. Opening the door, she got the surprise of her life. Standing there was Rick in full dress uniform along with two other men, one obviously another policeman,

probably his captain judging by the decorations on his sleeves, the other she had no idea about.

A moment later she was still there, gawking so Rick came to her rescue. Again. "Ms. Carmichael, this is my boss, Captain Walsh, and this is Ted Fisher from Crime Watch. May we come in and speak with you for a minute please?"

"Oh, yeah. Sure. Come on in," she mumbled, stepping aside to give them room to enter. As he passed, Rick winked, his knuckles brushing hers, his brief touch enough for Casey to release the death grip she had on the doorknob.

"I may as well begin," Ted spoke first. "Ms. Carmichael, on behalf of the local Crime Watch organization, I'd like to thank you for the information you came forward with." He shook her hand enthusiastically.

"Huh?" Casey glanced at Rick who just smiled.

"It's citizens like you who are helping make this city a safer place for all of us. Thank you." He handed her a sealed envelope.

"Um, you're welcome," she replied, clearly confused.

"I'd like to extend my thanks too," Captain Walsh took over. "'Detective Jensen filled me in on how instrumental you were in broadening the scope of our sweep last week. The tips you provided helped us pull several more established links of the drug chain off the street. I wish there were more people brave enough to get involved like you did."

"Well, uh, thank you, Captain Walsh. It was nothing. Really."

"Told you she was modest." Rick grinned.

"That you did. Since you were such a tremendous help to us, I wanted to personally make sure your canoe got back to you."

"M-my canoe," Casey gasped. He wasn't serious? He brought her Rick? What the hell had the man told them? Her face was burning and she couldn't speak which was fine since she had no idea what she'd say if she could.

Rick coughed but she could tell it was to cover a laugh. "Yes, your father's canoe, Casey," he managed with a semi-straight face. "It's on my truck. You can show me where you want it in a minute."

"Oh, right. My dad's canoe." Casey fought back a giggle. "Thank you." She couldn't look at Rick.

The captain exchanged a look with Rick that said he knew there was something going on but that he wouldn't ask. Rick nodded his appreciation and opened the door, seeing the men out for Casey without delay, sensing how much trouble she was having containing herself. As soon as the door closed, she burst into laughter and flung herself into his open arms.

"Oh my God," she could barely talk. "I can't believe you're here."

Rick was laughing as hard as she was. "You're too much."

"I thought he meant you."

"I know. You should've seen the look on your face." He had to stop for another outburst as he hugged her tightly to him. "What were you going to say?"

"I have no idea. I couldn't imagine what you told him that he would say that." She dissolved into giggles again. Eventually they slowed and then stopped altogether when she noticed how he was looking at her. "Hey," she whispered, smiling up at him.

"Hey yourself."

"What are you doing here?"

"Officially, returning your canoe and helping to thank you on behalf of the city along with my captain and Crime Watch."

"That's it?" she prompted when he didn't continue.

"Nope."

"You going to tell me?"

"You need me to, darlin'?"

Casey studied his expression and frowned. "I, uh, yeah. Could you? Please." Hope swelled within her heart but she squashed it quickly. Rick had said a lot of things in the warehouse that day. But it was just to get her calmed down and distracted so she wouldn't panic over the situation she'd gotten herself into. And then, in the police station, it was the sex talking. She couldn't expect him to actually mean any of it. Could she?

Rick sighed. "Sure. As often as it takes for you to believe me." He cupped her face and kissed her forehead. "Why don't you tuck that away somewhere safe and then we'll talk?"

"Oh. Okay. What is this anyway?" She'd forgotten all about the envelope the Crime Watch man had given her.

"Open it and see," Rick suggested cryptically.

Casey tore open the envelope and stared. "It's a check."

"Mm-hmm."

"For ten thousand dollars." She had to be dreaming. This couldn't really be happening. Rick being back in her life was overwhelming enough. His arranging it so she could finally be out of debt was too much to believe.

"Yes."

"Made out to me." She refocused on the check to ensure it really had her name written on it.

"Yes."

"From Crime Watch. Ten thousand dollars for me."

"Yes."

"Why?" She was totally baffled as she stared blankly up at him.

"Because, darlin', the information you provided really did help. We busted a whole other crew, including your ex, two of his brothers, and three of his friends from what you gave us. They were all tied in with the Diegos but not directly enough for me to

hear about them even from the inside. It was a splinter group through Carlos and your ex."

"You're serious?" she squealed. "He's going to jail?"

"Sure is. I'd say it'll be at least five years before he's eligible for parole. Tomorrow I should be able to take you to where he was staying and let you look around to see if any of your things are still there. Don't get your hopes up but there's always a chance..."

Casey didn't let him finish before she was crying all over him. "Rick." There was so much she wanted to say but she didn't know where to start.

"Sh, I know." He held her tightly and rubbed her back. "I know." He took the crumpled check from her hand, put it on the nearby bookshelf, urged her to the sofa and pulled her down with him. "It's okay now, Casey. It's over. He can't hurt you anymore. You don't have to worry about bumping into him anywhere."

"It's over. And with that money, it's really over," she sobbed. "Oh my God, Rick, it's over. Thank you."

"Don't thank me, darlin'. You did it."

"Me? All I did was barge into that warehouse like an idiot."

"And then tough it out like the brave woman you are. I read your statement. You had a lot of facts."

"But I wouldn't have told if I hadn't ended up there."

"I'm not so sure about that. You might have eventually. Anyway, it's done now. You can put it behind you. Or did your dad have a camper or something else you didn't mention that you might pass on the street one day that I have to worry about?"

Casey laughed as she knew he'd hoped for. "No, just the canoe." After a moment she added, "But why would you worry about that anyway?"

"Because I like you. I told you I want to get to know you, remember?"

"Well, yeah."

"But you thought I was just saying that."

Casey nodded, feeling guilty. "I'm sorry."

"No, don't apologize." Rick's finger caught her chin before she could lower it. "You had a rough time before me. You're not going to learn to trust again overnight especially after I disappeared on you Friday. I hated doing that. I wanted to call but I wouldn't have had time to do more than say hi and when I talked to you again I wanted to have enough time to really talk. Was that wrong of me?"

"No," Casey said in a small voice.

"Yes, it was. I can see it in your eyes. Casey, for this to work, and I really want this to work, we're going to have to be honest with each other. Okay?"

Was he for real? Casey certainly had never been involved with anyone like him before. It was going to take some getting used to. "Okay. You're right. I was a little disappointed I didn't hear from you."

"I'm sorry. Next time I'm tied up at work I'll make sure I call, even if it's just to say good night." He took her hand and kissed the palm.

"Wait, you've been at work all this time?" She linked her fingers through his and squeezed.

"Pretty much. I went home to grab a few hours' sleep here and there but I wanted to get everything wrapped up so I could take a few days off." He grinned.

Casey's couldn't help but grin back at him. "You have a few days off?" Rick nodded. "Me too."

"I know. I discovered that when I called your job this morning." His grin widened. "Have any plans?"

"No. You?"

"Nope. I was kind of hoping you'd invite me to hang out with you."

"I'd like that. You're a little overdressed though."

"You don't like my uniform?"

"I didn't say that. I think you're very handsome in your uniform. It's just a bit much for hanging out in."

Rick flashed a suggestive look. "That your way of saying you want me to take it off?"

Casey felt her face heat. "Oh God, I set myself up good there, didn't I?"

He hugged her and chuckled. "Teasing you, darlin'."

Casey felt ridiculously disappointed and it must have showed on her face.

"Unless you want me to. I certainly wouldn't mind especially if you get naked too."

"Damn." She hid her face in her hands, embarrassed beyond belief.

"Hey, none of that. Where's my woman who storms in and takes what she wants?"

Casey lowered her hands and peeked at him.

"You want something? You looked like you might have a minute ago." He reached into his uniform and handed her some folded papers.

"What's this?" she asked, reading them but not quite sure she was really seeing what she thought she saw.

"The results from my last physical. I brought them since you said you were tested."

"Wow."

"Good wow?" He seemed unsure.

"Yeah. I think that's one of the nicest things anyone's ever done. You're amazing. This, my dad's canoe, the check. You said you'd call and I bet you really would."

"I will. Get to know me, Casey. When I tell you I'll do something, I will. You'll get used to me if you let me stick around."

"You really do want to stick around?"

"Very much so." He leaned forward and kissed her.

"Mm," Casey sighed, melting against him. "Rick."

"Hmm?"

"What you said about taking what I want?"

"Yeah?"

Casey delayed her response by deepening the kiss. Then she got distracted because my God the man could kiss!

"Darlin'?"

"Oh. Yeah." More kissing. "I was going to suggest we see if we have as much chemistry without the threat."

Rick slid his hand beneath her shirt and found bare skin. His thumb caressed the bottom curve of her breast. "You have any doubts we will?"

Casey shivered. "No, not really. You got any condoms stashed in that uniform anywhere?"

"Yes," Rick responded as Casey began working on the buttons. "Can I request that we move to your bed first? I want you completely naked and all stretched out with plenty of room to explore."

She had his shirt open and her hands on his chest. "Mm, sounds good to me. Come on."

Casey led Rick upstairs, telling herself not to be shy. He'd already seen her naked and had come back so there was no need for embarrassment. She'd noticed his erection when he stood up so he obviously wanted her. He encouraged her to take what she wanted so damn it, she was going to.

Once inside her bedroom she turned and, watching him, pulled off her clothes. She kissed him briefly and then sat on the foot of the bed. "Your turn."

"Yes, ma'am," Rick chuckled. He seemed to like this boldness.

First, Rick tossed the strip of condoms on the pillow. Then, piece by piece, he stripped off his uniform.

"No gun today?" Casey asked.

"I didn't think I needed it," he responded. "It's locked in my truck with my handcuffs. Want me to go get them?"

Casey knew she was blushing at his implication. "Not now, thanks. Maybe some other time though."

He laughed as he continued to strip.

"Boxer briefs?"

"Yeah. These pants are damn uncomfortable without them," he told her, dropping them on the chair.

"Come here," Casey said, pointing to the floor in front of her.

His cock bobbed as he kicked off his shorts and stood, naked, where she indicated. Looking up at him, Casey took his erection in both hands. She started at the base and squeezed her way to the tip, reversing once she got there. Her mouth followed her hands back down his shaft.

It didn't take long for Rick's breathing to become ragged. "Fuck, darlin', I can't take much more of that."

"You said I could play with you."

"I did and you can." He had to wait for her ease up on her sucking before he could speak again. "Damn, that's so good."

"Good enough to make you come?" Casey tongued the slit and hummed her appreciation at the pre-cum she found.

"Oh hell yeah. But are you sure you want that now?" He didn't resist when she wrapped her arms around his thighs and urged him to thrust into her mouth a few times. "Wouldn't you like to come too this time? And then you can play all you want after?" She had him panting. "It's up to you of course but, aw fuck."

Casey released him and giggled. "Wow, are you fun to play with." She lay back on the bed and crooked her finger at him. "C'mere."

Rick joined her, drawing her thigh up as he stretched out beside her. Instead of delving right in as expected though, his hand found her breast. He kissed her until they were both breathless.

"Casey, you know I'm not just here for this," Rick said, pausing just as his mouth was about to close over her nipple.

Of course she knew that. But how sweet of him to make sure. "I know. And you know this isn't the only reason I asked you to stay," Casey responded.

"I know." His lips latched onto her flesh as his fingers penetrated her pussy.

Soon, she was panting as much as he had been. Damn, if he didn't get to it he'd have her coming alone. Not necessarily a bad thing but, since his point had been for them to come together and then play, that's how it should be. Right?

"Rick," she tried. "Ooh. Mm." Her back arched sharply as his teeth scraped her pointed nub. His fingers curled inside her. "Rick."

"Hmm?" He sucked the other side and focused some attention on her clit.

"Stop."

"Why?" He didn't.

"Because. Ooh." She ground against his hand. Wait. He told her to take what she wanted and she was going to. Somehow, Casey managed to get her mind to function enough to locate the condoms on the pillow and pull one from the rest. She tossed it at his head. "I want my canoe and I want it now, damn it!"

About the Author

For Barbara Huffert, reading has always been a favorite pastime. A few years ago, she started her first novel after one of the friends she trades books with challenged her to write something better than the last book they read. Barbara's been writing ever since. With her opinionated cats sprawled wherever is most inconvenient, she now spends her time happily wandering through the worlds of her characters.

Barbara welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and e-mail address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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