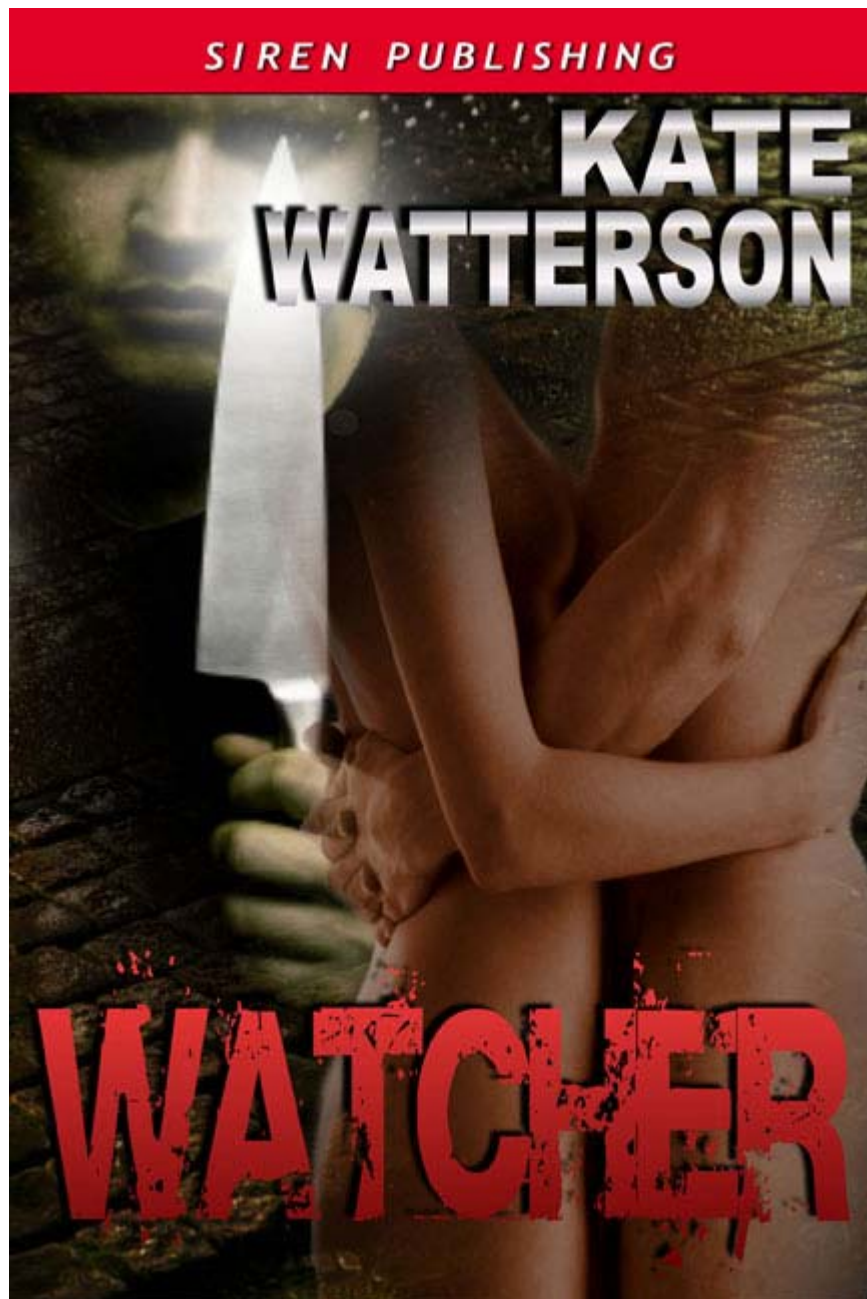


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**KATE
WATTERSON**

WATCHER



Sexual Studies 1

Watcher

Jana Johnson is not interested in dating a younger man, even if it is the hot graduate student everyone has dubbed The Incredible Quinn. His good looks aside, he's just too young, and besides, she has worked hard to have a settled, orderly life.

Jake Quinn does have an agenda. He wants to convince the gorgeous Dr. Johnson to give him just one chance. When the break comes, he takes it, and the results are beyond his wildest fantasies. The only trouble is the lady in question is still reluctant to date someone younger, and besides, he has an uneasy feeling that something else might be going on.

In fact, he is certain there is someone watching them...

Sensuality Rating: SCORCHING

Genre: Erotic Romantic Suspense/May-December

Length: Novel

WATCHER

Sexual Studies 1

Kate Watterson

EROTIC ROMANCE



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WATCHER

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WATCHER

Sexual Studies 1

KATE WATTERSON

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Chapter 1

A warm tear rolled down her cheek and fell on her hand. Jana Johnson stared at it for a moment, trying to will away the thickness in her throat. She didn't cry often, she wasn't the crying type, and where the sudden urge had come from she didn't know.

Well, that wasn't entirely true.

It was her anniversary. Or more accurately, it *would* have been. Another droplet fell in a small symbolic splash.

"Dr. Johnson?"

She stiffened, realizing that the door to her office had been pushed open. Hastily, she brushed at her damp cheek and kept her face averted. "Yes?"

"Sorry to bother you, but can I borrow your key to the supply closet? Professor Lawrence has already left for the day and I somehow managed to leave mine at home." Jake Quinn, the graduate student who ran the molecular biology lab, strolled in, operating on the reasonable assumption she would say yes.

Even though she didn't look up as she reached for the drawer where she kept her university keys, she felt it the moment he noticed something was wrong. Quickly, she fumbled through the

labels, found the one he wanted and extended her hand. "Here you go, I'm leaving for the day soon, so just give it back to me tomorrow."

"Tomorrow is Saturday."

So it was, and she felt a little idiotic. "Monday will be fine then."

He stood by her chair. She could see out of the corner of her eye his long legs clad in blue jeans, battered tennis shoes, and the hem of his lab coat. Unfortunately, he made no move to take the key and leave. "Are you okay?"

There didn't seem much choice and she glanced up and nodded briskly. "I'm perfectly fine."

"The tears make that a debatable point." He gazed at her with those sexy dark eyes that made all the undergrad female students act like complete idiots whenever they were in his vicinity. Tall, athletic, and undeniably good-looking, behind his back he'd been christened 'The Incredible Quinn' or I.Q., and considering he was an instructor in a lower level cell biology class besides his lab duties, that normally not-very-popular subject had some record enrollment this semester.

However, she was not a giggling freshman, and I.Q. could take his bedroom eyes and go. She really didn't want to talk to anyone and hoped he wouldn't mention to another soul that she'd been sitting in her office, wallowing in tears. "I'm fine," she repeated firmly.

To her chagrin, he went down on his haunches next to her chair so they were closer to eye to eye. Muscular arms rested on his knees. "Can I help?"

"No." She was brusque to the point of outright rudeness.

"I beg to differ." He had a very nice smile that crinkled the corners of those beautiful eyes. "We seem to have a small mascara issue."

"What?"

In answer, he took the balled up tissue from her hand and very gently wiped just above her right cheekbone. "That's better."

With as much dignity as possible, Jana said, "Thank you."

"Want to talk about it?"

She could faintly smell his cologne, and the width of his shoulders at this close proximity was impressive. Since he didn't work for her, she didn't know him except casually, and she wasn't eager to discuss the sudden breakdown anyway. It was foolish to begin with because Brian had been dead for two years and she really had adjusted to life without him.

Occasionally, though, it just hit home he was gone and she was alone.

"No," she said truthfully, but he was being nice, so she managed a wobbly smile and a reluctant explanation. "Today would have been my fifteenth wedding anniversary. I found a card in my desk from my husband that I'd forgotten was there. It reminded me and, well, that's it. No big drama, just a memory."

"Oh yeah, I see. Ouch." He still didn't straighten, but shook his head slightly. Thick dark hair, worn a little long brushed his collar. "Who could blame you for a tear or two?"

"I'm going to go home and have a stiff drink," Jana told him wryly. "Maybe more than one, and that should cure the whole thing."

Finally, he stood up. "The proverbial drowning of the sorrows? That's an excellent idea, but not all alone. Have one with me instead. I'm buying, Professor."

The very last thing she expected was that invitation. Nonplussed, she stared at him. Then she said facetiously, "Are you old enough?"

"Hey, I'm twenty-five." One dark brow went up in reproof, but he grinned.

"I was kidding." She shook her head. "I think it's very nice of you to offer, but you're a student and—"

"I'm a PhD grad student in his last year, and I have a teaching position, so what's the problem? It's just a drink, after all. If you can give me a minute or two, I'll shut up the lab and we'll go. I'll be right back."

He vanished out the door and Jana stifled a small laugh at how smoothly it was done. She really should still refuse. Well, though, he did have a point, it was just a drink between two colleagues. Certainly most women would prefer a drink with a gorgeous young man like the Incredible Quinn than a lonely cold house and an evening avoiding the past.

Automatically she picked up her purse, took out her compact and repaired another small streak of wayward mascara, and got up to get her coat. By the time she locked the door to her office, Jake Quinn was back, this time his broad shoulders covered with a leather jacket. He said, "It's cool out now so if you want to drive that's fine, but we could probably walk."

Maybe a short walk would help ease her slight headache from that unwanted burst of emotion. "Let's walk," Jana agreed, still a little amused and disbelieving that she was even doing it. "There are certainly plenty of bars close to campus, but you'll know them better than I do."

"I really don't drink much," he said as he politely opened the door for her and motioned her through, "that I left behind when I applied to run the lab. It isn't conducive to working with a hangover. Let's go to Lenny's if you don't have a preference."

She didn't. It wasn't like she even went out anymore. "That's fine."

* * * *

Finally. Oh man, finally.

He really couldn't blow this. Jake fingered his glass, letting his fingers run down the sides through the condensation, wondering

just what to say. Usually he was comfortable enough around women he didn't even think about it, but this was just a little different. He was having a drink with the entirely remote, stand-offish, cool Professor Johnson.

My God, she was gorgeous. He admired the glossy fall of dark hair that swung perfectly at her shoulders, striking dark blue eyes, and an ivory, pale complexion that served to emphasize her vivid coloring. Her features were feminine and strikingly delicate, with high cheekbones, a straight nose, and dark arched brows. She was one of the few women he knew he would describe as actually beautiful.

Not to mention her body. Willowy, full in the right places, and slender in the others. At this particular moment she wore a cashmere sweater and dark skirt, both tasteful, conservative, and all too concealing.

Naked, he guessed she'd be something to remember, and he would love to find out. But word had it she was as unapproachable as the moon, even though she had been widowed now for over two years. Several of the other professors had tentatively made overtures and no one had gotten anywhere. That was believable, because she was one of the most singularly self-possessed women he had ever met. Maybe it was that cool exterior that turned him on, but whatever it was, since the very first time he'd seen her, he'd been interested.

Actually, he'd been extremely interested. Yes, she was probably about ten years older, but that didn't bother him, quite the opposite. He liked the idea.

"...University of Michigan?"

Jake glanced up, a little abstracted, and hoped she hadn't noticed him studying the way the soft material of her sweater molded to her breasts. They were shapely and high, the fullness enhanced by her slim waist. "Excuse me?"

“Larry said that’s where you did your undergrad degree.” She looked at him over the rim of her martini glass. Her order had surprised him. With her overt femininity, he had expected white wine, not a gin martini. Maybe the missed anniversary called for something a little stronger.

“Oh, yeah.” He took a quick sip of his dark beer and inwardly cursed himself for not being smoother. “I’m from Mt. Pleasant, near Lansing. It was a natural choice.”

Her eyes were a deep sapphire color, framed by long lashes and just the smallest smudge of errant eyeliner from her earlier breakdown. Her cosmetics were as understated as the rest of her and apparently not much needed. For a woman in her mid to late thirties, she had smooth, perfect skin and the soft pink of her mouth was only emphasized by a little touch of gloss. “Good school.”

“Very good,” he confirmed, “and resident tuition is always a plus. I went on a scholarship and it really helped my parents out.”

Mentioning his parents was an utterly stupid thing to do. How better to remind her he was over a decade younger? He said hastily, “I graduated in three and a half years and began working right away on my doctorate.”

Professor Johnson sipped her drink and narrowed those incredibly lovely eyes. “Very impressive.”

What was impressive was how her composure had returned. If he hadn’t seen it himself he would never have believed she was in tears just a short while before. She looked like she always did, serene and totally unreadable. Only the slightly vulnerable set of her mouth betrayed that anything at all was wrong.

“I applied here because the program has a first class reputation.” He gave her a small grin. “But then again, you know that as you’re part of it. I heard about your last paper. Congratulations.”

It was true, she had some notable credentials, and in addition to being published regularly, she taught two four hundred level biology courses, and was the only professor at the university to teach undergraduate genetics, which meant every pre-med and pre-veterinary student had to take her class.

In other words, the lady wasn't only a knockout, but she was extraordinarily intelligent. Some men might find it intimidating, but Jake thought it was sexy as hell. Well, okay, it was a little intimidating, but still a turn-on.

"Thank you." She sipped her drink with what looked like a determination to be true to her word and numb the anniversary memory. "What plans do you have after you defend your thesis and graduate? Teach at the college level or go into the private sector?"

"Research, probably," Jake admitted. "I really like it."

"Lawrence tells me you're good at it, too."

"I hope so."

He had to speak up a little because the place had started to fill up and even though they sat at a small table in a corner, the volume of music and conversation had started to rise. Professor Johnson however, finished her drink well before he did and when the waitress came by, she ordered another.

By halfway through the second drink, her slender shoulders were not as tense, he noticed. She also actually laughed once or twice, and it lit her face attractively, which did not help his current state of sexual infatuation. When she excused herself to go to the restroom, without too much of a twinge from his conscience, Jake ordered her another martini.

It wasn't exactly an elaborate or original plan, but he was pretty sure that he had to make an impression on this unofficial date. He had a feeling while she'd agreed to have a drink with him on a colleague-to-colleague basis, Jana Johnson would turn him down flat if he actually asked her out. Just for the drink she tried to

say no. If he hadn't happened to walk into her office at just the right moment, he would be having a beer in his apartment all by himself. In the act of sliding back into her chair, she saw the replenished drink and lifted one ebony arched brow. "I doubt a third one is a good idea. I still have to drive home."

"That argument doesn't work, Professor, because if you were worried about that, you shouldn't have had the second one. I'll make sure you get home okay, so don't worry about it. I've only had one beer."

"I don't want to inconvenience you." She looked at him with sudden sharpened attention, as if some inner radar had finally turned on and warned her he just might be a predatory male.

He gave her what he hoped was his most disarming smile. "It's a Friday night and I have no other plans. Believe me, it's no inconvenience and I practically dragged you here anyway. You are saving me from working on an extremely dry and boring paper or grading today's exams."

"Grading exams." She made a small face and reached for the frosted glass. "That will drive anyone to drink. My last test was a disaster and the average grade was less than sixty percent."

You don't exactly teach the easiest courses," he pointed out, relieved she was not going to insist they leave.

"One student got a ninety-eight," she argued, "and it never fails to amaze me that there can be such disparity. It isn't how I'm teaching it, but how they are individually processing the information."

"Maybe Mr. Ninety-eight is just exceptionally bright. There are star students in every class."

Dr. Johnson pinned him with a very direct, accusatory look, but her mouth twitched a little. "It was a she, for your information. That would be Ms. Ninety-eight."

“Whoops.” Jake laughed and held his hands up in mock surrender. “That was an arrogant assumption, I suppose, but don’t get me wrong, I am a very great fan of the opposite sex.”

Her lashes lowered slightly and she took another small drink before murmuring, “Is that so?”

“Oh, yes.” He lifted his beer glass and took the last sip.

Chapter 2

She was late, but that happened often enough he hadn't been worried about it at first. If there was one thing he prided himself on, it was his patience.

The pretty professor worked long hours, and he admired that. So did he. It was often dark when she walked out to her car, and that made the wait completely worthwhile.

In that darkness, there were possibilities.

It made him excited just to think about it. The slenderness of her neck, so pale and vulnerable...

The Watcher checked his watch and frowned.

Where was she?

* * * *

She certainly hoped the slight wobble in her walk came from her heels and the uneven sidewalk, but Jana had a feeling that wasn't the case.

Three martinis? Yes, she felt better about just about everything and her headache was gone, but three was a little over the top since she rarely drank more than the occasional glass of wine.

"My apartment is only a block or so away," Jake Quinn explained as he very casually took her arm. Obviously he'd noticed the little stumble for his long fingers curved supportively around her elbow. It was a clear autumn evening with just a slight breeze that ruffled his hair. It wasn't fully dark yet, and the fading light

slanted across the clean lines of his face; lean jaw, straight nose, high cheekbones, and those almost smoldering dark eyes.

“Your apartment?” Jana felt a flicker of confusion.

“I usually walk to campus because it is so hard to find a place to park.”

Well, that made sense. They would have to get his car so he could take her home. Tomorrow she’d have to find someone to drive her over to where she’d left her BMW in the faculty lot. In the meantime, it was nice of him to be the responsible one, since she was currently at least a little impaired.

Actually, he seemed very nice young man all around, besides being the hunk of all those co-ed fantasies. Pleasant, intelligent, and considerate enough to make an effort to cheer her up. Despite his claim to have nothing to do on a Friday night, someone who looked like him would have options for entertainment that did not involve discussing the biology department.

He was almost disturbingly attractive.

I’m a great fan of the opposite sex. She believed that, for he fairly exuded a purely male aura that had nothing to do with the fact he was a good-looking guy. It was innate and she’d met a few other men who had it. Something about him made a woman think about sex, and it really wasn’t a subject she had dwelled on much in the past few years.

Her heel suddenly caught in the crack of the sidewalk and she might actually have fallen if he hadn’t had a firm grip on her arm.

Oh great, stumbling drunk. That was not exactly something to be proud of in front of someone she worked with. If there was one thing she worked hard to maintain, it was a professional, impeccable reputation.

“My heel got stuck,” she explained defensively, and then when she saw the slight glint of amusement in his dark eyes, she added ruefully, “And I suspect my reflexes are a bit off. Thanks.”

“No problem. This is it anyway.” He gestured at a large frame Victorian style house that had obviously been divided into apartments. “Watch your step. I need to get my car keys and they are inside.”

Before she could object, his arm slid around her waist. The gesture was familiar, disconcerting, and brought sharply into focus the muscled strength of his arm and warmth of his tall body.

He urged up her the front steps. A moment later they were inside, and he unlocked the first door on the left. His apartment had a big window facing the porch, which probably let in lots of light during the day, a mélange of mismatched furniture, and a small galley style kitchen at one end. It was surprisingly neat for bachelor quarters and managed to have a comfortable homey feel despite the fact it had obviously come furnished.

He hadn’t removed his arm. Jana could smell the faint hint of his cologne and the slight scent of the beer he’d drank. The feel of his lean body so close made her feel a vague panic. Though she was above average height for a woman, he was still a good six or seven inches taller, and she suddenly felt very vulnerable.

And irrationally excited in the way a woman reacts to an attractive man. It stirred in her stomach, a coil of sensation she hadn’t experienced in a very long time.

No. He was a student. He was too young. She barely knew him other than in a strictly professional sense.

She must be intoxicated, or the wayward notion wouldn’t even have popped in to her head.

It was prudent to try to edge away and put some distance between them. “This isn’t bad for being so close to campus. In fact, nice.”

“Thanks.” His hold tightened, just a fraction, keeping her close. “The couch is about to fall apart, but the bed is comfortable at least.”

Why in the hell had he said that?

Her gaze collided with his when she looked upward. There was a mesmerizing intensity in his eyes that literally made her speechless for a moment. He said softly, "I'd really like it if you stayed for a little while. I could make some coffee."

Considering her sudden heightened awareness of him, that really wasn't a good idea. She shook her head. "I'd better get home and make myself something to eat or else I'll feel those three drinks in the morning."

"I could make us something. Or we could order in."

He still hadn't let her go. His mouth, curved in a small very attractive smile, was all too close. For a moment, Jana stared his lips and wondered what it would feel like if he kissed her.

Wonderful probably, and she had the unsettling feeling he was thinking the exact same thing. In fact, considering the expression on his face at the moment, he was thinking about much more than a simple kiss.

She was used to men hitting on her, but she certainly was not used to reciprocating the interest and it shook her normal poise. When he very lightly caressed her waist, she felt an almost dizzying flash of reaction.

The Incredible Quinn was definitely trying to get her into bed.

"Chinese or pizza?" he asked, and there was the smallest flicker of triumph in the question that told her he knew just how he affected her.

It made common sense come back, even if it was temporary.

"I don't do things like that," she said flatly, proud of the fact her voice only cracked slightly.

"Eat take out?" His voice held a hint of laughter, but the focused expression on his face didn't change.

Jana took a deep shuddering breath, still locked in the circle of his arm. "Come on, you know exactly what I meant, Jake. I don't date students, and I certainly don't go to their apartments. I had a

feeling that third drink was for a purpose and I think I've just figured it out."

"Cut me some slack. I've been trying for months to figure out just exactly how to approach you." He leaned down so his breath fanned her temple and turned a little to press her close against him. They were now front to front, her breasts touching his chest. "Can you blame me that now that you are here, I don't want you to go? Help me out, please, and give me a hint at what would work. If honesty stands a chance, I'll be happy to tell you bluntly that I get a hard on every time I even look at you."

That was apparently not just a line. She could tell he had the start of what seemed to be an impressive erection, the prominent bulge in his jeans unmistakable. Her head tilted back, she stared up at him, and somehow *still* made no move to pull away.

Oh God.

It was warm enough neither of them had fastened their coats, and through her thin sweater and his tee-shirt, she wondered if he knew her nipples had hardened.

No, she wasn't tempted...was she? "This is crazy," she whispered, shaking her head. "I'm not—"

"That kind of girl?" he supplied with that very subtle sexy smile. "No, you aren't a girl at all, Professor, and I can't tell you just exactly what that does for me."

He hardly had to tell her, the growing evidence of his arousal was at the moment hard and long against the plane of her stomach since he held her so close. More than that, her body had responded in the same way, and she could feel the dampness between her legs start to grow, moistening her panties.

That fast.

But then again, it had been a long time. Three years. Had it really been three years since she'd had sex?

His hand lifted and long fingers stroked her cheek and traced the line of her lower lip. He lowered his head and whispered, "I've fantasized about kissing you."

His mouth was warm, persuasive, and it felt like heaven. Jana closed her eyes, felt the light seductive brush of his tongue against hers, and reflexively slid her arms around his neck. Chaotic emotion held her prisoner as her mind screamed no, but her body traitorously demanded yes. He tasted and felt wonderfully male, and when they finally broke apart, she was breathing quickly.

"Stay," he said, his voice just a little unsteady.

No.

"Yes," she whispered, her breasts suddenly aching and her pussy embarrassingly wet after just one kiss.

"Oh God," he groaned against her lips, pulling her even closer so she was plastered up against him as tightly as possible. The next kiss was hotter, wilder, their tongues mating.

In his fantasy apparently the second kiss was a prelude to sex. It wasn't chaste, it wasn't restrained, and it wasn't tentative. His tongue possessed her mouth, graphically signaling what he wanted with overt, long strokes as his hands slipped down her back to cup her ass through her skirt.

He's twenty-five... a reproachful little voice in her head mocked her, even as Jana pressed against his stiff cock suggestively.

He's twenty-five... another voice whispered with an entirely different connotation.

Jake let her go briefly and shut the door. Within seconds he'd pushed her coat off her shoulders, stripped off her sweater, and unfastened her bra. Reverently, his hands cupped her bared breasts, squeezed lightly, and began to stroke and explore.

No, she wasn't doing this, wasn't about to have sex with some young grad student just because he had a nice smile and those gorgeous dark eyes...

Yes, she was. His thumbs rubbed her nipples and she made a low sound of enjoyment, letting her head fall back. “Oh.”

“These are every bit what I imagined. Jesus,” he muttered, palming the weight of each one, slightly lifting them.

With what he was doing to her it was a little hard to speak, but she managed to murmur wryly, “My breasts are also in your fantasies?”

He laughed, a short breathless sound of expulsion. “Professor, if you don’t think every single one of your male students—not mention all the staff and faculty—haven’t noticed your spectacular tits, then you aren’t as smart as I think you are. Come on, you know we look.”

Maybe she did...it was hard to think when he lowered his head and took one of her nipples into the heated adhesion of his mouth. Whoever might look at her breasts, he certainly knew what do with them. The light swirl of his tongue was accompanied by a gentle sucking that made her gasp. Her fingers sank into his hair and she felt a definite wobble in her knees.

“You mentioned something about a bed,” Jana managed somehow to say, the uneven hitch of her breath betraying her sudden intense need. She was committed—she’d made the decision the minute she’d looked into those beautiful dark eyes and understood exactly what he wanted—and now she needed him inside her as fast as possible.

“A bed? Oh, yeah.” His eyes glimmered, the heat palatable. As if to emphasize his superior strength, he actually picked her up in a slightly theatrical gesture that made her stifle a martini-induced laugh. Half-naked, wanting, she rested against his chest as he carried her to a wooden door and shoved it open with his foot. The bedroom was pretty sparse, with plain white walls and a dresser in one corner, but she focused on the important thing, a nice-sized bed in the middle of the room, still unmade from the night before.

As promised, the mattress was soft when he laid her on it, and the sheets smelled like spicy male. With eagerness she would guess would make her embarrassed later, she kicked off her shoes and lifted her hips as he unfastened her skirt and pulled it down the length of her legs. Next went her panties, his fingers hooking the pink lace and tugging it downward.

Entirely nude, she looked up at him and realized he was still completely dressed.

“Take off your clothes,” she ordered abruptly, heard how she sounded, and then amended, “Please.” Her pussy throbbed, she was very wet, and if she was going to do this, she wanted it all. That hard muscular, *young* body over her, his stiff cock thrusting inside her, and anything else he had to offer.

“Yes, ma’am.” He grinned and jerked off his shirt, ruffling his hair into a dark unruly mass, and then unfastened his jeans and pushed them down over his hips. She wasn’t sure what struck her more forcefully, his nice wide shoulders, the sculpted contours of his torso, or the remarkable size of his erection. Jake’s penis rose stiff against his flat stomach, engorged and large, the tip actually pulsing in time with his heartbeat.

Jana stared, fascinated and a little uncertain at this very last moment. Brian had been only the second lover she had ever had, and they had been married for thirteen years. When he became ill, all lovemaking had stopped.

She briefly closed her eyes. “Oh God, I have no idea why I am here now, doing this.”

“Yes, you do.” She felt the bed give as Jake joined her. A light practiced hand skimmed her mouth, her throat, and then her breast, circling the tight nipple. “No woman as beautiful as you should ever sleep alone, and believe me, I’ll be happy to keep you company whenever you say the word.”

Alone was the keyword to describe her life. She'd been so very alone in the past few years. "Just touch me," Jana said haltingly. "Anywhere."

He chose where she needed it most, his fingers finding the moist, aching spot between her legs. Willingly, her thighs fell apart, her pussy clenching at his deft touch, her mind reeling over what was suddenly happening. Two fingers pushed inside and she arched in enjoyment. Lightly he circled her clitoris with his thumb in a skillful motion, with just enough pressure to make her moan.

It felt marvelous. Like a revelation.

"You're already wet." There was an edge of arrogant male satisfaction in his tone. "Really wet."

"I know," she confessed, lifting into his touch a little. "God, that feels good. Whether I should be here or not, that...feels...so...good."

"Damn right it does." Jake leaned close and whispered wickedly against her temple. "Just wait. I'm going to make you come all night."

Was he? He certainly sounded confident over it. Not sure what to say to that outrageous comment, she simply enjoyed what he was doing, spreading her legs wider, running her hands over his well-muscled shoulders as he kissed her breasts and stimulated her with those long, graceful fingers. When his mouth slid lower, across her stomach, she felt a reckless sense of anticipation.

As good as it felt when his fingers rubbed her clit, it was nothing to compare with the sensation as he lowered his head between her legs and began to gently lick it. His hands cupped her bare ass, stroking even as his tongue stroked the most sensitive part of her body.

"You taste incredible," he said thickly.

"Don't stop," she gasped frantically, her hips lifting in supplication, so close to orgasm that her whole body felt as if it would explode. She reached for it, and when it happened the sheer

force of the pleasure made her shudder and utter a low scream, her womb contracting, her hands fisting in the tumbled warmth of the sheets as the moment seemed to last and last. Her pussy pulsed in time with the racing of her heart, and the explosion of sensation obliterated the rest of the world.

“That’s one,” Jake said with a dark smile as he slid up her body and kissed her. “Not a bad start, was it?”

* * * *

He was pretty sure his dick had never been this hard. Jake could probably drive it through a wall it was so rock solid at the moment, but he had a much better place to put it.

The normally perfectly groomed Professor Johnson lay uncharacteristically disheveled in his bed, the black silk of her hair spread on his pillow, her amazing body flushed pretty tint of pink in the aftermath of what had seemed to him to be a pretty explosive and satisfying orgasm. Better yet, her long slender legs were spread apart, knees bent, her delicious wet pussy just waiting for him.

Was this really happening?

If not, it was one hell of great dream.

With a silent nod of thanks to whoever invented the martini, he moved between her open thighs and positioned himself. The throb in his lower body was almost painful it was so acute and he hoped he wasn’t going to embarrass himself with a complete lack of self-control and come the minute he entered her. After all, he’d wanted this since last fall—almost a full year—and in those fantasies he’d confessed to having, he’d always made love to her nice and slow and wrung every bit of pleasure possible from the act.

“Hell yes,” he said through his teeth as he sank the tip of his pulsing cock into the hot, welcoming give of her vaginal opening. From what she’d said earlier, he had the unbelievable impression

that since her husband died of a rare form of cancer, she had been entirely celibate until this moment. That she gifted him with the privilege of changing all that was a little humbling, but then again, he had used a bit of coercion in the form of gin and three olives.

It was absolutely crucial that she not regret it in the morning. He didn't really want to be a one night stand. What he did want—besides great sex—he wasn't sure, but making this a night she would remember was damned important to him. As he fully penetrated her, he said huskily, "I've never felt anything so wonderful in my life. You're so hot."

It was true. She was beautifully tight, and the breathless sound she made when he finally had his entire length sheathed to the hilt made him break out in a small sweat.

Beneath him, Jana had her eyes half-closed, her soft lips parted, the expression on her face hard to read. However, her hands swept to the small of his back, as if she would urge him in further if possible. "You're big."

He'd been told that before, but it was really nice hearing it from her. Jake flashed a grin. "If that translates to you like how this feels, then thanks."

Those long dark lashes lifted a little. As always, there was a self-confident challenge in her very blue eyes. "Don't worry, I like how this feels." Her fingers lightly caressed his back and it was the turn on of the world.

"I've never agreed with anyone so much." He slid backwards and then surged back, the friction perfect, primal, her pelvis tilting up naturally to help his gliding thrust go deep.

She moaned, those opulent breasts quivering as she exhaled deeply. "Jake."

"Oh yeah. I'm here, believe me."

He began to move with long, strong strokes and she was right with him. She undulated her hips to his rhythm, taking every inch of his hard cock with an enthusiasm that told him that not only was

the intellectual and successful Dr. Johnson a smart lady, she also had an underlying sensuality that embraced the earthier side of life. She responded in a way that was so uninhibited, he could hardly breathe, and that made it feel even better, if that was possible.

It made him lucky as hell and he certainly he felt that way at the moment because his testicles grew tighter despite his desire to hold on. He was going to lose it in a mind-blowing way, there wasn't much of a question.

Thank God, so was she.

His first clue was the initial ripple around his next thrust, her wet pussy gripping him with a betraying ripple of her inner muscles that made the breath whistle from his lungs. This time, there was no scream, but her lips parted and she turned her head away, almost as if the moment were so private he wasn't allowed to share it. Her body trembled, her nails dug into his biceps, and if he hadn't been so damned on a rocket launch to his own orgasm he might have actually been offended.

As it was, he came with pure unchecked carnal bliss, deep, deep within her glorious, previously unattainable body. They shuddered rhythmically together, his cock milked by her contractions until he was entirely spent.

In a drift of post-coital haze, he rested above her, a little weak, physically satisfied, and wondered suddenly with an unfortunate intuition if he had been the man actually making love to her.

"Jana?" he said tentatively, lifting his hand to her cheek.

Her lashes lifted and she looked up at him. His momentary doubt was banished by the shimmer of something in her eyes as elemental as their still intimately joined bodies. She said breathlessly, "You live up to your nickname. I think my heart stopped beating a minute ago."

Relieved she didn't seem to have been thinking of someone else, because a mourned husband was out of the realm of his

experience, Jake furrowed his brow. “I know exactly what you mean. But...er...what nickname?”

She laughed, which was an interesting sensation with his cock still buried deep in her pussy. “You don’t know?”

“Apparently not. What is it?”

“I’ll never tell.” There was actually a teasing note to her voice, another glimpse of a side of her that she kept very guarded and private. Her hands slid up his chest provocatively, brushing his nipples, gliding over his skin with sensuous purpose. “Unless,” she murmured, “you are very, very nice to me.”

He felt another incredulous burst of the sensation this might be the record wet dream of all time. “That can be arranged,” he promised with a dark smile.

Chapter 3

She hadn't ever come.

Sure enough, as The Watcher cruised by the almost empty parking lot again, the black BMW still sat there, mocking him with its sleek lines and shining paint. It was three in the morning now, but he was too restless to sleep at this unprecedented change in her routine.

Every night he followed her to the house in the expensive subdivision, watched her pull into her garage, and waited for the lights to go on inside. It was imperative he know where she was all the time. It kept him in control.

And he was definitely in control, even though she didn't know it. Every single day he granted her every minute she breathed, everything she did, because he was the one who could take it away.

If he wanted to do it .If he got angry.

She had never done anything like this before and it shook him.

A campus police cruiser drove by slowly and his hands tightened on the wheel, a slight sweat breaking out all over his body. He pulled away slowly, and when he rounded the corner, he sped off.

* * * *

Jana rolled over, opened one eye, and then stifled a small groan. Sunlight was blocked by a pair of curtains with a truly ugly pattern of zigzagged stripes, and the floor held several rumpled piles of clothes. She levered herself up on both elbows and opened

the other eye. Her slight headache was back, but she'd done that entirely to herself.

Jake Quinn on the other hand, had done a lot of things to her as well. It was all true, from the wreckage of the bed, her undeniable nude presence among those tumbled sheets, and of course, the vivid memory of just how incredible the young—virile—Mr. Quinn truly was. She might be thirty-six, but she had never made love so many times in just one night.

Not made love, she quickly corrected herself as she registered the smell of bacon frying. Had wild, uninhibited very satisfying animal sex. Her body felt well used, but then again, it had been.

As a lover, he certainly got high marks.

Just the same, she had the feeling this was a very big mistake. Her professional life was her whole existence at the moment, and sleeping with a student—even if he was closer to being a colleague—was a bit frowned upon.

What's more, she was—martinis or not—a complete idiot. Her thighs were sticky with sperm, which was not much of a surprise considering how many times they had made love, but she hadn't even thought once to ask him to use a condom. Sex was bad enough, unprotected sex made her stupid.

She dropped back down on the mattress and groaned again, but after lying there for a moment, knew it was best to simply get out of bed and see how quickly she could make as graceful an exit as possible. If there was one thing she was not used to dealing with it was waking up in the bed of a casual acquaintance after a night of unbridled intercourse. The protocol entirely escaped her.

Her skirt was silk, and therefore a wrinkled mess, and apparently her sweater and bra still in the other room of the apartment. Jake's tee-shirt lay on the floor and she retrieved that, slipping it on and raking through her hair with fingers that shook slightly. Luckily the garment was big enough it came to about mid-thigh and she was decently covered, though why she cared was an

interesting question, because he'd already seen, tasted, and touched every bare inch of her anyway.

The memory of his mouth on her pussy made her skin flush slightly. There wasn't much doubt he knew exactly what he was doing when it came to giving a woman oral gratification. He'd been more than competent at the rest of it too.

Opening the door, she slipped out and was happy to see the bathroom right across the small hallway. It was tiny and modern, and once again surprisingly tidy. Either Jake was used to having overnight guests that stayed unexpectedly, or else he was anal about changing his toothbrush, because to her relief she found a brand new one sitting on the sink, still in its wrapper.

That was a nice gesture, and brushing her teeth and washing her face made her feel slightly more human. There was a comb in one of the drawers and she did her best with her hair. Finally, she reluctantly trailed out toward the small kitchen where from the aroma, he was obviously fixing breakfast.

"Hello," she said not so brilliantly, as he glanced up from the stove and saw her standing there.

"Good morning." He gave her that sexy smile and turned his attention back to the pan. Clad only in a pair of jeans, his chest bare, he looked pretty much like she remembered, all delicious young male, a pin up calendar boy with tousled dark hair and those hard beautiful muscles. "I assume you're hungry since we never ate dinner last night."

No, they hadn't, and no wonder the three drinks had hit her so hard. Though, if she were honest about it, she hadn't been *that* drunk, just definitely on the tipsy side.

"I...er...suppose so."

"Sit down, it's almost ready. Do you want coffee?"

"Like my life depends on it," she answered truthfully. There was a small table right next to the galley kitchen and she saw he had set out silverware and even napkins. Not knowing what else to

do, she sat down and watched him pour coffee from a carafe by the stove into a mug. He moved efficiently, deftly, and when he walked the few steps to hand it to her, their fingers brushed and she felt an inner quiver that was now a little familiar.

His dark eyes held a hint of laughter, as if he understood her discomfort and was a little amused by it. "You know, Professor, I've always wanted to see what you look like first thing in the morning, still a little sleepy and not immaculate and perfect."

"I can't think why," she muttered, recalling her tangled hair and smudged eye make up. As far as she could tell, she definitely looked a little the worse for wear.

"Sure you can," he told her meaningfully, the hint of a dark daybreak beard making him somehow more attractive, which was amazing. "Because if I get to see you first thing in the morning, that would mean we had spent the night together."

Jana gave him a level, straightforward look. "Yes, we did. Be careful, your bacon might be burning."

With a muttered profanity, he turned and hurried to the stove, scooping out the sizzling pieces and depositing them on a paper towel. She sipped her coffee, glad it was a little on the strong side, and wondered just what to say.

Damn, this was very awkward.

Why didn't he think so?

Probably because he was male, twenty-five years old, and had gotten laid the night before. On the other hand, she was a professional woman who prided herself on the fact that she was respected, defined not by her gender, but by the fact she had accomplished success in the academic world.

Oh Lord, what a mistake. A wild, wonderful, erotic mistake she would never forget, but still a mistake.

As she watched, he piled scrambled eggs on two plates, added bacon and toast, and brought it to the table. It actually did smell pretty good and she *was* hungry. "Thank you."

"I am not much of a cook, but I can do breakfast." He seated himself, and lifted his brows. "More coffee?"

"No, but thanks for asking." Jana looked him in the eyes. "Look, we obviously need to talk—"

"Sure, but eat first," he said calmly. "We can talk afterwards."

After a moment, she smiled coolly and picked up her fork. "Fair enough."

It was good, the eggs scrambled a little wet like she enjoyed them most, the bacon crisp, and he even made good toast, not burned, not soft. Jake finished before she did, and he sat sipping his coffee, waiting until she took the last bite before he said in a neutral tone, "Can I go first?"

Jana hesitated a moment, and then nodded. "I suppose so."

"You lived up to the fantasy. You are a very hot lady in bed."

Why did he have to say *that*? And in such a soft, sexy tone.

She took a deep breath. "That's very flattering, but—"

"But you are about to tell me you are not interested in having a relationship, partly because I'm still a student, but mostly because of my age, right?"

That was pretty on the mark. She said as reasonably as possible, "Last night was not the beginning of a relationship. I drank a little too much—in which you are not entirely blameless, by the way—and you brought me back here for a specific purpose you seemed to achieve. I am not going to deny I enjoyed it, Jake, for we both know I did—"

"All five times." There was a slight smug set to his mouth as he interrupted.

Five? Oh God, he was probably right. No wonder she felt deliciously tired.

Self-possession was a little difficult under the circumstances, but she reached for it anyway. "However many times it might have been, I am not interested in a repeat performance."

“That’s an interesting choice of words.” His lips quirked upward and he lounged back in his chair, giving her a very good, up close, and tantalizing view of his chest and flat abdomen. “And for the record, I didn’t plot to get you drunk or anything.”

She did her best to ignore the implied challenge in his statement and the fact he looked very gorgeous in a definitely Incredible Quinn sort of way. “No, fair enough. I suppose I set myself up for that one.”

“And now you regret it?”

Yes. It was what she should say. Unequivocal and firm. Jana hesitated a moment though, before she murmured, “I’m ashamed of my behavior. I had sex with a much younger man I don’t know that well—unprotected sex, no less—and though it is a biological fact we as human beings are programmed to be attracted to each other and intercourse is an entirely natural result of that genetic code, it was still imprudent and reckless.”

“How clinical, Doctor.” His dark eyes were a little mocking.

That sarcastic comment made her defensive. “I see you at some time or the other almost every day. Now I will feel very awkward.”

“I don’t know why you should. The sex was great.”

“Yes, it was, but that isn’t the point.”

To her chagrin, he simply looked unperturbed. “You are perfectly safe, Professor, by the way, because—believe it or not—I am normally very careful and you can rest easy that I don’t have any STD’s. I even was tested recently since the university offers it free and I figured what the hell, why worry. Concerns like that run both ways, but not in our case. Last night, Jana, I didn’t suggest or use a condom because I was confident you are just as healthy as I am.”

That was a bit of a relief, and she hoped she didn’t show it too much. “It was stupid of both of us, just the same.”

“With you, I wanted to feel everything as much as possible.” He said it softly and slowly.

That foolish romantic sentiment was so disarming she had no idea what to say. She was a scientist, a pragmatic realist who did not indulge in reckless sexual adventures.

Five times? Really?

Speechless, she stared at him. He asked again, “More coffee?”

Jana simply nodded and handed over her cup.

* * * *

On a late Saturday morning the faculty lot was nearly deserted, the only other vehicle a light blue pickup truck that probably belonged to one of the custodial crew because there was a man sitting in it, reading the newspaper. Jana looked openly relieved no one would see him bring her back to her car, and Jake felt his confidence slip another notch.

Maybe he’d succeeded in his quest to get something started, and maybe he’d failed. Oh yes, the lady had liked what happened, of that there wasn’t a question. She had certainly had multiple orgasms, made the right—very sexy—noises, and no woman could properly fake the way her pussy tightened during real climax.

However, if all he’d wanted was a quick lay, he could have that any time. From her he wanted more.

Jake pulled into the university parking lot and stopped his car in the spot next to her gleaming expensive sedan. This wasn’t some underclassman with wide eyes and the usual sexual eagerness sitting next to him in the passenger seat. This was a mature woman who normally guarded her private life and he was completely out of his league in some major ways.

“I had a good time,” he told her, and immediately flushed in embarrassment at his choice of phrase.

Smooth, Quinn, very smooth.

Jana’s dark brows lifted in an ironic arch. “What should I say now? You’re welcome?”

Jake turned and looked at her, his arm braced over the back of her seat. "Why would you say that? Was last night some kind of gift?"

"No." She had the grace to look away and her cheeks suffused with color. "I'm sorry, that wasn't really what I meant to imply. I am obviously not good at this. Maybe it's why it has never happened before."

"Or maybe you hadn't met the right guy?"

"Don't complicate things. I'm a little hung over. I can't answer that question." She started to get out of the car.

"Wait." Jake's hand shot out and snared her wrist.

Jana glanced back. Even with no make up, her shining hair in disarray, she looked deliciously pretty and very appealing. "Why?"

"It feels wrong to just leave it like this," he admitted, gazing at her mouth. It was soft and tasted wonderful, and there was just no way on earth he could stand to never kiss it again. Not to mention those spectacular breasts and how hot and tight she felt as he thrust between her long luscious legs...

"Look." Jana Johnson visibly set her shoulders. "Last night happened, yes. That's it."

No, he really wasn't in agreement over that. "So you said, but I want to see you again."

"You will. Monday morning we almost always pass in the hall after my first class. Besides, you need to return my key."

Dammit.

He tried again. "What happened between us in bed aside, I had a good time talking to you is what I meant to say before, Jana. Yes, I'm attracted to you, I think most men who are breathing are attracted to you, but I also *like* you. You're smart, which is the number one thing I look for in a woman, believe it or not, and when you relax a little, you have a great sense of humor. I wasn't just looking for sex. Give me a chance. I'd love to take you out to dinner tonight."

She gently tugged her arm free. "You are twenty-five, Jake."

"You're going to have to bear with me, because I don't see how in the hell that matters. I'm a grown man and in a year or so, will have the same string of letters behind my name as yours."

Her sapphire eyes widened just slightly at his vehemence. After a moment, she sighed. "Dating someone you work with is also a problem, and you know it. It's fine as long as it all works out, but terrible if it doesn't. My policy has always been I would never become involved with someone from the university."

"Your husband was also a professor. How did that happen? It seems to me I heard he was actually *your* professor when you met." It was kind of a low-down tactic to bring it up, but he could feel his chances slipping away. "He was quite a bit older too, wasn't he?"

"It isn't at all the same thing."

"Explain to me how, then."

In response, she shook her head, her smooth hair brushing her shoulders. The day was clear, but cool, and despite her rumpled clothes, she still managed to look elegant and lovely in the crisp autumn sunshine. "I'm fairly certain you could have your pick from any number of interested young women, Mr. I.Q. Why are you bothering to be so persistent? If all you wanted was a conquest, it seems to me last night you got it."

The hint of amused capitulation in her tone made relief wash over him. Jake smiled. "If you can figure out why one man is attracted to a certain woman more than any others, that would be an interesting scientific breakthrough, Professor Johnson. In my case, let's just say there are a few fantasies still unfulfilled."

"I didn't say I'd ever sleep with you again. I believe you asked me out for dinner."

"So I did," he agreed readily. "Having dinner with you is one of the fantasies I just mentioned."

That was much smoother.

And thank God, it worked.

Jana gave him one of her clear-eyed looks. He could hear her keys jingle as she took them out of her purse. “All right, I’ll have dinner with you on one condition. Can we keep this all quiet, please?”

“I won’t say anything, if that’s what you want, but in case you haven’t noticed, I don’t go around talking about my love life anyway.”

Jana nodded crisply and pressed the button to unlock her sleek car. “Be at my house at seven then. And instead of going out, if you don’t mind, I’ll cook.”

That was definitely a dream come true. There wasn’t a man on earth who preferred an impersonal restaurant to a beautiful woman fixing him dinner.

He said evenly, “I’ll be there.”

Chapter 4

He drank a beer, and then popped open a second, trying to calm down.

The television was on, but The Watcher had the sound muted, and he blankly watched the images dance across the screen.

Who the fuck was the dark-haired guy?

He didn't recognize him, but then again, the man hadn't gotten out of his car either. It wasn't one of the other profs, he knew that parking lot like the back of his hand by now, and exactly who drove what car. The guy who dropped off the pretty professor drove a fairly generic mid-sized sedan, not new but not old, nothing at all like her expensive ride. They had some sort of small argument, too, though when she got out of the car, she was smiling.

The bitch had stayed out all night.

Order was what kept the world going. Things needed to be neat and tidy, and he hated it if his routine was pushed off track.

He'd been convinced she was different, not just another friggin' slut. That classy exterior was apparently just a front.

This ruined everything.

* * * *

The sunshine held in an Indian summer record succession of days, which was nice.

She had forgotten entirely about the soccer game, and as Jana hurried across the grass toward the bleachers, a quick excuse formed in her mind.

Work was the usual and easy one, and certainly her sister would believe it. Of course, using it meant another lecture on her lack of a personal life and how much time she dedicated to her job. With an inner grimace at the dilemma, she climbed up the metal stairs and slid into place next to her older sibling. "Sorry I'm late."

Crystal said amiably enough, "I was sure it had slipped your mind, but it's sweet of you to come in the first place, so no harm, no foul. Thank goodness it is almost over because we're getting slaughtered, but Marcus did score a goal."

"Good for him." Jana looked out over a sea of unruly seven-year olds running wild across the field, and wondered how anyone knew what exactly was going on, though several fathers acting as officials appeared to be trying. She finally picked out her nephew, running amuck with the rest of the children, trying to kick the errant ball.

Her sister gave her a speculative look. "I stopped by last night to drop off some pictures. You weren't home."

"I worked late."

"Really?" Dark-haired and petite, Crystal looked skeptical. "It was after nine because Ethan took me out for dinner finally for our anniversary about three months late. I had him make a detour on our way home."

She really wasn't ready to tell anyone about her reckless sexual encounter with Jake Quinn, much less her inquisitive sister. "I must not have heard the bell. I think I was in bed."

Now that was true.

"I also called your house phone and cell." Crystal lifted her brows. "Guess what, no answer."

"Sometimes people are not in the mood to be social, Crys."

“If you were avoiding me, I’m offended, by the way. I stopped by to make sure you weren’t all alone. When Ethan mentioned our forgotten anniversary, it reminded me of yours.”

That had been thoughtful, and Jana felt a little guilty for lying. “I went out for a drink with someone from work,” she said with what she hoped was a composed expression. “One turned to three and that’s why I didn’t answer the door. You know I don’t drink much.”

“Well, at least you weren’t sitting alone in that big house the entire evening.” Crystal looked a little mollified.

“No, I wasn’t,” Jana confirmed, recalling Jake Quinn’s naked body over hers, and the strong feel of his embrace. He’d somehow managed to be both tender and wildly intense in bed and she felt that telltale flutter deep inside when she thought about it.

Did she really think she could just have dinner with the Incredible Quinn—and he was pretty incredible in her opinion—and send him on his way?

What was worse, he probably realized she couldn’t resist another night like the one they had just shared. Her physical neediness was embarrassing in retrospect, and the initial reaction she’d felt that an affair with him would be a mistake still existed, but it was tempered by the fact she believed him when he said he wasn’t just interested in sex.

At least he’d seemed convincingly sincere.

Not that she actually wanted a relationship.

Crap, this was complicated already. She hadn’t dated a man in fifteen years and wasn’t sure she was qualified to judge if he was just a player who was pleased to find out she would fall into bed with him. Or was the uncomfortably handsome I.Q. really interested in her on another level?

She wasn’t sure how she felt about it, either way. He was too young for her, and it was difficult to reconcile in her mind. Brian

had been sixteen years older, so the idea of an eleven year difference the other way took some adjustment.

“So how is Suzanne?”

Jana tore her abstracted gaze from the field of running children. “What? Oh as far as I know, she’s fine.” Suzanne Heathman was a linguistics professor who had been a high school friend, also single, and they occasionally went out to lunch or a movie together.

Her sister’s eyes narrowed slightly. “Hmm. I assumed she was the friend from work of last night. Who was it?”

“You don’t know him,” Jana said evasively, feeling the warm sun on her back through her cotton shirt match the sudden flush in her face.

“Him? I like the sound of that. It’s about time.”

“Don’t get that look. It was just a casual invitation after work, nothing planned.” It had turned out to be anything but a few casual drinks, but she left that all out. She was still ashamed of herself for sleeping with Jake Quinn on what wasn’t even technically a first date.

“You could stand to have a personal life, Jana...oh no.” Suddenly distracted, Crystal cupped her hands around her mouth and yelled, “Block it!”

The other parents reacted in similar ways. Jana was never sure whether to be amused or touched by the depth of enthusiasm they all had for a game played by children who often didn’t even know on which side of the field their home goal was located. Predictably her nephew’s team did not manage to block it, and the game ended with both cheers and disappointed sighs.

“We’re cooking out tonight because the weather is so nice,” Crystal said as she gathered up her discarded sweatshirt and prepared to go down and comfort a disconsolate-looking Marcus as he trudged toward the stands. “Why don’t you come over about six?”

The offer wasn't surprising, since her sister might be a bit nosy, but she was well-meaning at the same time. She had a large perpetually untidy house, four busy children in various stages of elementary, middle school, and high school, and an amiable husband who worked for a big construction company. She and Jana were close in many ways, but certainly had polar opposite lifestyles.

Jana smiled. "Thanks, but no. I have plans."

"Really? Or are you just avoiding Ethan's overcooked hamburgers?"

She thought about Jake Quinn and his warm, sexy smile, and the heat in those dark intense eyes. "Really," she confirmed with a small inner quiver of anticipation.

* * * *

The neighborhood was definitely affluent. Jake searched for the right house number, driving slowly past big houses with impressive facades, neatly kept landscaped yards, finally finding the right one nearly at the end of a winding drive. Professor Johnson's house sat well back, and as he pulled into the driveway, he shook his head a little as he compared it to his more than modest campus apartment. Brick and timber, it had an elegant exterior, manicured grass, and several large beautiful maples flanked the drive, their leaves just touched with the beginnings of fall gold. The place was pretty spectacular, but then again, Jana's husband had been the Dean of the School of Science by the time he died, and Jake had a fair idea of her salary also. Most professors weren't rich, but smart ones could be well off. It was a beautiful house, but still awfully big, and the location was pretty private. He wasn't sure he liked the idea of her living there all alone.

It was hardly up to him, he reminded himself wryly, and somehow he doubted the sophisticated and self-possessed Dr. Jana Johnson would appreciate his protective male instincts.

He parked in front of the three car garage and got out, holding the two bottles of wine he'd selected, hoping he'd made a decent choice. The walk was brick and led to a small arched sheltered entryway with a carved door flanked by beveled glass panels. Jake pressed the doorbell, pleased to note that there was obviously an alarm system, the tiny red light going off just before the door opened.

"You're right on time, I.Q. Please come in." Jana's lips quirked a little in an uncharacteristic teasing smile as she stepped back.

That ridiculous nickname made him feel uncomfortable, but his mouth went dry for entirely different reason.

He followed, not even able to give a proper greeting because he was momentarily silenced by the fact she was dressed differently than he had ever seen her. She wore a red silk shirt tucked into faded jeans that hugged her long legs and fabulous ass, no jewelry, was barefoot, and if he was a judge from the provocative sway—and he was very used to looking at her breasts through clothing—wore no bra. The ebony silk of her hair hung lightly across her shoulders, loose and shining. Jake walked behind her through a two-story foyer with a skylight, and into a spectacular open area that held a sunken living room with a stone fireplace. Beyond was a wall of French doors to the backyard, and to his right the kitchen area, from which came some extremely delicious smells. Soft classical music played from an unknown source.

"I wasn't sure," he finally managed to say, proffering the wine, "so I brought both a red and a white."

"Thank you." She lifted a brow as she accepted both bottles and turned toward the kitchen. "Though I don't plan on overindulging again, I have to warn you."

Jake leaned against the marble counter, admiring the view as she bent over to put the white wine in the refrigerator. “A guy can dare to dream, can’t he?”

She straightened and her expression was neutral. “Maybe. Would you like a glass of wine? I have some already breathing.”

He’d drink stale salt water after that quixotic maybe. “That sounds great.”

There was a rack hanging above the polished counter and she retrieved two crystal glasses and deftly poured red wine while he removed his coat. She handed him both glasses, took his jacket, and gestured at the living room. “Have a seat while I hang this up. Dinner won’t be ready for about a half an hour.”

“It smells wonderful,” Jake said honestly as he went down two steps and chose the leather couch in front of the fireplace. The furnishings were both comfortable and elegant, an eclectic mix of antiques and modern pieces seamlessly blended into an inviting space. To his disappointment, Jana retrieved her wine glass and chose a wing chair a few feet away. She sat down, gracefully curling one leg beneath her, and sipped her wine.

“This is a beautiful house,” he said conversationally. Then he added, “It suits you.”

“Brian loved it the minute we saw it. We made an offer the same afternoon.”

Jake took a small drink from his glass, watching her over the rim. He commented without inflection, “He had excellent taste, but then again, I already knew that.”

She looked at him with those very blue eyes. Her dark lashes lowered a fraction. “I see you are going to use charm since I’m on my guard against the alcohol ploy. That was a lovely compliment.”

Jake leaned back and smiled. “That was the truth, Professor.”

A violin concerto was the only sound for a moment, the lilting notes rising and falling. Then she changed the subject, asking him about his family, and Jake obliged, explaining that his mother was

a secretary in an insurance firm and his father a dentist. He had two siblings, both younger, and assorted grandparents in various parts of the country. Each time he tried to steer the conversation to her he was neatly fielded, so he gave up since the last thing he wanted to do was make her uncomfortable.

Dinner was as fabulous as the tantalizing aroma promised. She'd made Chicken Marsala served with tiny crisp roasted potatoes, and lightly grilled asparagus. As they ate in the formal dining room, complete with an ornate antique chandelier she explained came from France, the conversation turned very naturally to the university and biology in general. He was fascinated by how her face lit with undisguised zeal over what was apparently the center of her life, and since it currently was also his main focus, it was very easy to discuss cells and gene patterns as if it were ordinary dinner fare.

A fabulous cook, who was beautiful, passionate, and loved the same subject he did with perhaps even greater enthusiasm? He'd died and gone to heaven, he thought as he sipped his coffee after dessert.

Or paradise maybe, if he could get her naked and back into bed.

He couldn't help it. As he helped her clear the dishes, his gaze strayed once again toward the swell of her full breasts against the material of her blouse. His cock had been half stiff most of the evening, even through dinner, and it was damned uncomfortable.

Behave yourself, Quinn. Don't fuck this up by acting like a horny teenager.

The faint flush in her cheeks told him she noticed finally as she tucked the last plate in the dishwasher.

With mild defensiveness, he said, "Sorry, but did you not wear a bra just to torture me? If this is a test, I think I did fairly well so far."

“I hate to break it to you, but a bra isn’t all that comfortable.” She gave him one of her coolest Professor Johnson looks. “In my own home, I like to be comfortable.”

“Hey, never wear one again. That’s my vote.” Since he was caught out anyway, he hungrily stared at the rounded outline beneath the thin material for a moment before looking back up into her eyes. “Maybe I’d better go. Dinner was perfect, Jana. I don’t want to screw things up now.”

There was a pause, not awkward precisely, but certainly charged.

“We both know I want you to stay.” She said the words quietly when she finally spoke. “But the sentiment is appreciated anyway.”

“I want to, of course, that goes without saying.” With effort, he restrained himself from reaching for her immediately, hauling her to the closest flat surface, pulling down those sexy jeans, and burying himself in her warm, tight pussy. “But only if that’s what you want. No pressure. I’ve had a great time just being with you already.” He smiled wryly. “I can always go home and jack off.”

She laughed, a small hiccup of sound. “That would be a terrible waste, in my opinion.”

Elation soared through him, along with a fierce anticipation. Jake said thickly, “In that case, come here.”

* * * *

The man was as good at kissing as he was good-looking, and that was saying something. Fighting a moan, Jana rubbed her breasts against his chest and clung to him, parting her lips to the pressure of his mouth. She pressed her pelvis seductively against his groin in a signal of just what she wanted.

She had never thought she was anything but a very strong, very independent woman, capable of making intelligent choices.

However, when Jana had opened her front door—after rushing all afternoon preparing for dinner, including changing her clothes three times like some teenager—and had seen Jake Quinn standing there, all good sense seemed to go south.

Literally.

Straight between her legs, to the point that just the sight of him made her wet. It was his fault, for he had looked his usual gorgeous self in a leather jacket, jeans, and a denim shirt open at the neck, his dark hair as always attractively a little tousled, his eyes exuding that mesmerizing male heat.

Actually, she needed to face the fact the minute she invited him to dinner, she knew she was going to bed with him again. She wanted it. Hard and fast. Or slow and sweet. Or better yet, both. All night long, and if memory served, he was up for the job.

Now, standing in her kitchen, she shamelessly exhibited her weakness by her almost frantic response to his embrace. Her arms wrapped around his neck, she kissed him back with as much fervor, if not more.

Maybe young was good, she thought, drowning in need. Maybe young was better, for while she had loved Brian, she had never felt this consuming physical passion. Sex had been pleasurable, but not some deep primal hunger.

Jake lifted his mouth from hers and said unevenly, “I want you naked and in a bed. Or here on the floor is fine with me, but not very romantic. Help me out.”

“Upstairs.” Jana managed enough composure to pull it together for a moment.

“Let’s go.” He took her hand.

She led the way, and had only a moment’s pause when she saw in the darkened room the bed she’d shared with Brian. Just the one moment, and then she switched on the bedside lamp and turned around. Her fingers went to the buttons of her blouse.

Jake undressed at the same time, watching her as he divested himself of shirt, jeans, socks and shoes in record time. The soft lighting played over hard muscles and taut tanned skin, and certainly showed off the impressive bold length of his erection. His cock jutted up, sleek and stiff against his flat stomach, and with the same interest he showed as he avidly examined her bared breasts, she stared at it.

“I was halfway there the minute you answered the door,” he explained with a rueful gesture at his blatant arousal. “I’ve already mentioned you have this effect on me.”

“At this moment, I’m glad.” She was being honest, and totally so, hooking her panties and shimmying out of them so her breasts jiggled provocatively.

“I want to touch you everywhere,” he said in that suggestive husky voice that instantly made her body begin to ready for sex. “God, I’ve been thinking about this all day. I got absolutely nothing done I was so distracted. I finally went and played basketball for a couple of hours, just to work off steam. And *that* is after being up half the night making love to you.”

She’d been the same way, but admitting it made her sound like one of the adolescent freshmen that drooled after him constantly. The low throb between her legs intensified at the sight of him nude and ready, and though she had never thought of herself as being sexually aggressive, at that moment she knew exactly what he could do with his hard cock.

Jana pulled back the comforter and sheets and slid into bed. Teasingly—and graphically—she spread her legs. She was so wet already she could feel the moisture on her inner thighs. “If you need to work off steam, may I make a suggestion how?”

“Hell yes,” he growled and climbed on the bed to settle top of her. His mouth hovered over hers and the crest of his cock lightly nudged her pussy, rubbing her clit. “If it involves this...”

No foreplay, she thought in a haze of need, reaching down and stroking the erection poised between her open thighs, feeling with wonder the size and hardness, the satin tightness of the drawn skin. Semen seeped from the engorged tip and she smeared the warm fluid with her fingers, guiding him to her vaginal entrance.

She moaned openly as he entered her, the sound involuntary. Maybe size did matter, for as her pussy stretched deliciously to accommodate his penetration, she felt a shimmer of pure acute pleasure at how big he felt, how long. Once he was fully sheathed, Jake kissed her once, a brief hard pressure of his mouth on hers. It was perfunctory at best, since both their attention was strictly on their joined bodies.

“Oh man,” he whispered as he began to move in long hard strokes, not quite rough, but not gentle either, as if he could read her mind. “Jesus, that’s good.”

Jana clutched his shoulders, feeling the tension in his bunched muscles. She arched back and opened her legs wider. “Yes...oh, harder.”

Arms braced on either side, he moved faster at the edge of urgency in her voice. Jana lifted her hips to make sure every bit of him slid as deep as possible inside her burning pussy, the wet soft sound of intercourse overlaid by their ragged breathing.

The friction was incredible, their bodies moving in a fluid rhythm of give and take, in tune and straining toward a common goal. Jana watched his face change as his climax became imminent. His lashes lowered and his skin took on a faint flush, his mouth slightly parted. Her own pleasure rose with each insistent plunge of his cock inside her. His dark eyes were half-closed, but he also watched her, and somehow holding his gaze as her orgasm began was incredibly erotic.

Beyond control, her inner muscles began to tighten. In response he groaned her name and stiffened.

They came that way, staring into each other's eyes. Though she couldn't help but cry out, her gaze never wavered, even as wave upon wave of sensation washed over her body. Jake ejaculated with such force she felt the hot rush of his release even through the haze of her pleasure, his cock flexing against her walls.

Afterwards, her sated body throbbed and her muscles felt like melted wax.

Now *that* was sex.

The trouble was, she worried it might be a little bit more.

Chapter 5

It was getting late, the damned car still sat boldly in her driveway, and it was pretty obvious that the dark-haired fucker was staying the night.

Oh yeah, he'd seen them through the kitchen window all over each other. His hands on her ass, his tongue in her mouth, and she was all about too, there wasn't much question of it.

The Watcher felt that quiver of rage that both frightened and exhilarated him. It was her fault. He'd idolized her. She was perfect; beautiful, smart, rich, unattainable. And now she went and proved him wrong by being just another eager bitch wanting it.

Women were all the same. Why had he ever thought anything different? Each time he was disappointed. So disappointed.

First, he'd kill her lover, the young guy with the movie star looks. She was a whore, but he'd made her one, and he needed to be eliminated.

* * * *

Braced on one elbow, Jake lazily moved his tongue in a slow circle around the nipple in his mouth and heard the woman lying next to him make a small telling sound of enjoyment.

Damn. She was not just beautiful in every single way possible, but she was also the most responsive lover he had ever known. Under that composed, distant exterior, Jana Johnson was a real woman in every sense of the word.

He suckled gently, massaging the other breast, testing the firm, pliant weight of it in his palm. Her slender fingers slid through his hair as she audibly sighed in pleasure. In his mouth, her nipple was tight and erect in arousal.

There was still a part of his brain that didn't quite believe he was in bed with the aloof Dr. Johnson, playing with her gorgeous tits. He lifted his head and grinned, cradling her flesh in his palm. "I'm guessing a C."

Her face was still flushed from her recent orgasm, her nude body relaxed. Glossy dark hair looked like black silk against the white pillowcase. Her brow furrowed. "What?"

"These." He lifted her breast and squeezed lightly. "C cup? That's always been my guess."

"Oh." She laughed and slightly shook her head in evident exasperation. "Why you spend any amount of time speculating escapes me, but yes, as a matter of fact."

"Hey, I'm a guy. We all spend a great deal of time speculating on woman's bodies. You're so naturally slender I'm surprised they are real. General opinion seems split on that."

She gifted him with her best professor glare, but it wasn't nearly as effective when she was naked and he was holding her delectable breast in his hand. "Don't tell me my bra size or anything else about my body is routinely discussed in any way around the department. For God's sakes, I thought we were all professionals. That's juvenile."

He shrugged and slid his hand lower, across her ribcage and along the dip of her waist to stroke her hip. Her skin was satin smooth, and just slightly damp from their exertions. "Men are pretty focused when it comes to sex. Yes, you are a topic of conversation. Sorry, but let's face it, you're gorgeous."

One dark brow lifted and she said tartly, "Thank you, but I'm not the one they call incredible. How do you feel about all those female students whispering about you whenever you walk by?"

"I'm flattered, I suppose." Jake gazed at her, still marveling over his current situation. "But nicknames aside, as long as *you* find me attractive, that's all I really give a damn about."

An expression of slight vulnerability touched her delicate features. "Apparently I do. Even though I know it's probably a bad idea, here you are. And even though I was thoroughly ashamed of myself after last night, I'm doing it again."

"Hey, there's absolutely nothing wrong with a normal, healthy woman who likes sex." Jake leaned closer and kissed her very lightly, just a small caress of his lips on hers. "It is so hot, Jana. I mean it. A man is never as turned on as when he knows his partner likes it as much as he does."

She lifted a hand and cupped his cheek, bringing her mouth softly to his again. She whispered against his lips, "Since you are here against my better judgment, remind me how much I like it."

He hadn't ever really lost his erection—even after his explosive release—so that was no problem. Just the suggestive timbre of her voice sent blood rushing to his groin. His cock stiffened as they kissed, and though the time before had been rushed, heated, and without any finesse, this time the frantic urgency was no longer a factor. If he had his way, they would take their time.

Jake held her close, gently cradling her against his chest as their mouths melded together. He tasted every corner, rubbed the tip of his tongue against hers, and learned the smooth contours of her teeth and lips. Lightly, reverently, his hands moved across her skin, exploring her body, and he followed with his mouth, touching every hollow, every warm curve.

The small dark patch of pubic hair between her slender thighs was neatly trimmed into a perfect triangle shape. He ran his fingers through the damp curls, and urged her legs apart. With both thumbs he parted her labia, exposing the tender pink flesh beneath, and the slightly swollen bud of her clitoris. Jana watched him

through heavy-lidded eyes, and since he knew how much she'd liked it the night before, he smiled as he began to delicately stimulate it with just the teasing tip of his tongue.

She climaxed easily, swiftly, and with a very satisfying scream. Jake brought her off twice more—because he loved the way she absolutely lost control—before he moved up her quivering body and sank his hard cock in her wet pussy.

He lasted maybe three thrusts before he went over the edge, so aroused from touching and tasting her that he couldn't help it. Tangled together erotically, breathless, they lay quietly and he felt both exhilarated and content.

Jana lightly ran her hands down his back and gave his ass a small squeeze. "That was a very effective reminder," she whispered, lightly licking his shoulder in a slow languid movement of her tongue.

"I aim to please, Professor," he said, his face still buried in the outspread silk of her hair, the faint fragrance of flowers tickling his nose.

How the hell could that small flick of her tongue be arousing? He'd just come as forcefully as he ever remembered.

"On Monday it is going to be very hard to act as if nothing has happened, isn't it?"

The last thing he wanted was her thinking too much about the situation at this very moment, in the aftermath of a hot, wickedly wild orgasm, giving it the cool analytical approach that characterized everything she did.

Except sex. There was nothing cool about her approach to that.

Jake lifted his head and looked into her eyes, noting the almost wistful smile on her lips. "Don't worry about it. No one will know, if that's what you want. When I'm at work, I work. As far as I can tell, you seem to have the same attitude. Nothing there has changed."

“I suppose so.” She sighed, her hands still cupping his ass. “There’s this little refrain in my head that keeps repeating your age, over and over.”

“Don’t listen to it.” He grazed her smooth temple with his mouth. “Think of it this way, there is one advantage to being with a twenty-five year old guy. I’ll be able to *remind* you again in a little while. Just give me a few minutes.”

A small smile curved her soft mouth and her incredible sapphire eyes held a glint of amusement. “I suppose that is one way of looking at it.”

* * * *

The bedside clock said it was after eight. A little startled, because she rarely slept past six, Jana stirred and came fully awake.

Next to her, Jake was still sound asleep, his bare chest lifting easily in an even rhythm, one arm curved over the top of his dark head. The sheet was only drawn up to his waist, and she couldn’t help but admire his entirely male beauty. Ridiculously long dark lashes rested on his sculpted cheekbones, and his mouth—that very talented mouth—was just slightly open as he lightly exhaled.

It was nice to wake up next to someone, and that realization scared her a little. To feel the warmth of his tall body in her bed, to hear him breathe, to know she wasn’t entirely alone.

Actually, it scared the hell out of her that she felt that way. No doubt she was vulnerable because of having had a long-term happy marriage she missed with an inner ache that never seemed to completely ease. However, it seemed unlikely that a twenty-five year old student, no matter how intelligent, charming, and fantastic in bed, was the answer to her current state of being both single and a little lonely.

She was fairly sure she was too practical to fall in love with Jake Quinn. On the other hand, she would have been absolutely certain just two days ago that she would never sleep with him either.

Good grief. She and Brian always had season tickets to the symphony. Jake probably went to rock concerts.

She saved diligently for retirement, invested her money, and had a mortgage. He still didn't have his first real job.

She was a widow who had been married for thirteen years, and for all she knew, he had never had a steady girlfriend. Obviously, he had sufficient sexual experience with women or he wouldn't be so good in bed, but had he ever been in a committed, adult relationship?

That was the other thing. Even after two nights of unbridled, uninhibited intercourse, she didn't really know him well. Yes, she enjoyed talking to him, and he seemed to be on the surface a nice, smart young man who spoke with open fondness of his family, was polite and hard-working, and ambitious enough he was going to make his way in the world without any problem, but...

It takes a lot more than having sex with someone to know them, Jana.

If she had an affair with him and everyone at the university found out, it would be embarrassing because of the age difference, and would make her fair game for every male student and faculty member who wanted to make a pass in the future. She got hit on enough as it was, but most of her colleagues respected the fact she kept work and her personal life entirely separate. Sleeping with a student, no matter how gorgeous and persuasive, was really pretty stupid.

Unfortunately, the Incredible Quinn had that effect on her. Brain activity suspended, body strictly in charge.

With a small sigh, she slid out of bed and padded toward the bathroom. Quietly she closed the door and turned on the shower,

contemplating how many times she had gotten out of bed early and tried not to wake Brian. Sunday mornings were the only ones he slept in, and she had done her best not to disturb him.

Gazing in the mirror, she gave her body a critical look as the water heated up. Thanks to exercise—and she did work out three times a week without fail—and good genes, she had stayed slim and decently firm in the right places. Not the body of a twenty year old, but at thirty-six, who would expect it?

Her nipples were tender and a little red, which wasn't a surprise. Her young lover was obviously a breast man, and he had touched, licked, and sucked until she had almost come just from that. Her pussy, too felt slightly sore from all the sexual excess, but she doubted there was a woman on the planet who would feel sorry for her for the minor discomfort.

Jana stepped into the tiled shower and felt the gush of the hot water over her sensitive skin.

He was still asleep when she emerged a half an hour later from the bathroom. Sprawled so carelessly across the bed, he looked more delicious than ever. She had to wonder with wry inner amusement if any of the girls who already panted over him saw Jake now, gloriously naked, beautifully asleep, what they would think.

That she was one lucky woman, probably.

It remained an open issue.

* * * *

Second day in a row, morning coffee with the delectable Dr. Johnson.

Oh yeah.

Jake leaned back and sipped from his cup, wondering what price he was going to have to pay for this good fortune. Nothing was free. At least he'd never found life to be that way. That was

fine, he was willing to make good if it meant he sat in the breakfast nook off Jana's kitchen, sipping really good coffee and smiling at her across the table.

In the morning light, she looked fresh and desirable as always, her hair shining, her skin clear and fresh. She wore the same jeans, a simple cotton tee-shirt with the university logo on it, and could have passed for being about half her age.

No bra, just like his recommendation.

He had to wonder if her husband had felt this same way, a constant level of sexual awareness that she seemed to inspire. Even before this lucky-as-hell weekend, he'd felt it, even when she did little more than say hello as they passed in the hall or maybe exchanged a few pleasant words after a faculty meeting.

For breakfast she'd set out bagels and fresh fruit, and as they ate, he wondered if she had regrets again. As always, she was outwardly reserved, even when dressed like a gorgeous teenager and after a night of uninhibited sex.

Not certain about his next move at all, Jake took a final sip of coffee. "I'd better go, I suppose. I still have a bunch of papers to grade."

She nodded, her blue eyes unreadable. "I have a genetics midterm to get ready. That exam always sneaks up on me."

He hesitated for a moment, toying with his empty cup. "It goes without saying I want to see you again."

She glanced away. The informal eating area was rounded and had tall beautiful windows. She seemed to find the scarlet leaves of a tree just beginning to turn outside fascinating. Finally, she said slowly, "I am not sure how I feel about all this."

"We seem to have some pretty powerful chemistry, Jana."

"Physically, yes, we do." She looked away from the tree and at him with what seemed like reluctance. "But there is a lot more to a relationship. I think we are in very different places in our lives. Job, house, marriage, children? I've crossed all those milestones

except the last one, and I'm...settled. I'm middle-aged, and you have five years before you'll even be thirty."

"All right," he acquiesced. "That's all true. But your point is invalid, Professor. Lots of men my age are married, have a mortgage, and kids. Getting my doctorate—as you well know—is the only reason I don't have a full-time job, and I'm glad you're settled in a life that suits you. Wouldn't it be even better if you could have a little more fun in your personal life?"

"I—"

"I've already promised, no pressure, and no one at the university has to even know we're seeing each other. It isn't their business anyway, so I have no trouble with that. We like each other and have a terrific time in bed. It's pretty simple from my point of view."

Jana brushed back her hair and gave him a wry smile. "Jake, when is it ever simple between a man and a woman?"

He grinned back, hoping he'd made his point, feeling possible victory from the softened expression on her face. "Okay, well, you've got me there, I suppose. But we're both intelligent, mature people, and I am definitely not into drama in any relationship. To be honest, I don't have much of a social life either, because I'm stuck between two worlds right now. I have no desire to go to the bars—I'm way past that—which is how most of the students define a good time, and neither do I have a family. Pretty much, I work, teach, and go home each night. I'm fairly settled myself, but something is missing. In my opinion, last night was the stellar date of all time. Great food, great conversation, and great sex. I'm not an idiot. Why wouldn't I want to see you again? I didn't come to get laid, Jana. I came over to be with you."

It might be a crude way of saying it, but it was the absolute truth.

After a moment, Jana reached for her coffee cup and quirked her brows slightly. “Has anyone ever mentioned that you can be damned persuasive, Incredible Quinn?”

“Hell, I hope so. Is that a yes?”

“It’s a ‘maybe we’ll give it a try,’ how’s that?”

“The best news I’ve ever had.” Not wanting to push his luck, Jake stood up. “I’ll call you then, okay?”

“I’ll give you my cell number.”

Yes.

He kissed her good-bye, a memorable melding of their mouths that he hoped was a reminder of what had happened the night before in her big bed. He couldn’t help but whistle as he walked to his car, and he probably had a really stupid grin on his face as he unlocked it and slid in.

Pulling out of her driveway, he was thinking about the next possible time he could see her. This coming week was a bitch, and he hadn’t lied, he should have graded exams yesterday.

The light blue truck sat in front of the house three doors down, and he normally would not have paid the least attention to it. However, it caught his eye with a jolt of recognition, and though this time there was no one in it reading a newspaper, he recognized the spot of rust above the bumper and the out of state license plate.

Well, that was odd as shit, he thought as he slowly drove away.

He was pretty sure it was the same truck that had been sitting in the faculty lot when he’d dropped Jana off at her car the morning before. At the time he’d wondered if it belonged to a maintenance worker, and it certainly didn’t belong in this particular ritzy neighborhood.

Coincidence?

Jake shrugged off the uneasy feeling. Well, maybe.

Chapter 6

She got out of her car and walked toward the building, just like she did every day. So normal, so beautiful with her shining dark hair and that perfect face.

It empowered him to realize she didn't even know she'd made a fatal mistake.

He was in charge of everything about her now, her destiny, her fate.

The young lover was just a prop, a pretty part of the scenery with a hard dick. The Watcher knew killing him would only bring a small measure of satisfaction.

She was what he wanted.

He'd been up most of the night, trying to decide how he would do it.

Looking into her eyes. Yes, of course.

They were very blue.

It was time to let her know he was out there.

* * * *

Jake obligingly reached for a beaker on one of the shelves just above his head and absently handed it to the young woman next to him. Gillian Wesley, one of the other grad students, accepted it with murmured thanks. At the moment, they were the only two in the lab, which at this time on Monday afternoon wasn't unusual.

Short and just slightly overweight, with curly brown hair and a good natured smile, she shot him another curious glance as she

began to distill liquid from a pipette. “You are in a very good mood today, Jake. What’s up?”

“I had a...” he groped for the correct word, couldn’t find one descriptive enough, and finally supplied, “...a nice weekend.”

“Nice, huh?” She twisted the pipette closed and gave him a level stare.

He grinned. “Okay, *very* nice.”

“In short, you got laid. You have that self-satisfied look.”

“I didn’t say that.” Half-irritated, half-amused she could guess so accurately, he shook his head. They had worked together for several years now and were good friends. She had an oddball sense of humor, a very forthright way of speaking her mind, and because her sexual preference was for women, there wasn’t any male/female tension between them either.

“You don’t have to say it. I can sense these things and guys are so transparent anyway.” Gillian gave a small snort. “Who is she?”

“No way.”

She propped one hip on the edge of the long table and folded her arms across her ample chest. “Let me guess, you caved and it was one of those leggy blonds in your cell bio class who are probably really English lit majors or something. I saw one in the hall the other day and her skirt was so short that the cheeks of her cute little sophomore ass were practically hanging out. Nice view, but way too obvious.”

He shook his head decisively. “I’m not in the habit of nailing students, Gilly. Give me some credit, please.”

“From the way that one was dressed, you sure could if you wanted to, my friend. If it wasn’t one of the blonds, who then? Come on, give over. My sex life is so pathetic. I’ll settle for hearing about yours.”

Jake knew her last girlfriend had moved out a few months ago, but she seemed to be finally getting over it, because for a while she wouldn’t have been able to joke about it.

“Yeah, well, sorry, I’m not talking.” He glanced at his watch, noting that the real subject of their discussion would probably be back in her office. Jana’s last class had ended a half an hour ago and he still had her key to the supply room.

It was ridiculous, because he wasn’t in junior high anymore, but he still felt an almost adolescent itchy desire just to see her.

As if on cue, the door opened and Jana came into the lab. Today she wore a dark blue knit dress that was conservative in length and style, but there was nothing wrong with the way it clung to the curves of the body he now knew so intimately. Low heeled pumps in a matching color emphasized her fabulous legs, and as always, she carried off looking very attractive and feminine, yet entirely business-like.

Doing his very best to seem nonchalant, he said with as little inflection as possible, “Hello, Professor. I was just going to bring you your key.”

“No problem. I have a meeting in a few minutes and thought about it as I was passing by.” Jana looked and sounded absolutely normal and gave him one of her cool, distant smiles.

The problem was, she blushed at the same time.

A wave of color washed her cheeks and considering her normal poise it was unusual enough there was no way in hell Gillian wouldn’t notice it.

Quickly he dug in the pocket of his lab coat and produced the item in question, handing it over. “Thanks for letting me use it.”

“Certainly.” There was a slight disconcerted note in her voice that indicated her physical reaction and lack of control over it embarrassed her. “Have a good afternoon. You too, Gillian.”

A little too quickly, she turned left the room.

He turned back to the slide he was preparing with studious attention, but he could feel Gillian’s avid stare. After a moment, she said, “Jesus Christ. Quinn, are you kidding me?”

He glanced up, hopefully looking blank. “What?”

“What the hell was that all about?”

“What was what all about?”

“How about the way she just looked at you and the way you looked at her...oh my God, is that why your weekend was so *nice*? You and *Professor Johnson*?” Gillian’s expression was almost comically incredulous.

“That’s an interesting conclusion to come to so quickly for someone who is supposed to be a scientist,” he said disparagingly. “The woman was in here for two seconds because I borrowed her key to the supply closet. There was no look.”

“Bullshit, I was standing right here, remember? Don’t get me wrong, you pretty much always look at her that way—that unmistakable I-want-to-fuck-you-bad look—but this time she looked right back. She *blushed* like she was remembering something, and considering you admitted already that you spent your weekend in the sack with someone—”

“I didn’t admit it at all,” Jake interrupted in exasperation, feeling uncertain whether to just tell the truth and swear Gillian to secrecy or keep denying it. The last thing he wanted was for any speculation to start circling through the department. Jana was leery enough of a relationship, and this might kill it before he even really got a chance.

Gillian tugged out a stool theatrically. “I’ve gotta sit down. No wonder you were being so damned evasive.” She looked at him in her direct way. “You lucky son of a bitch, you’re my hero now. How was it? No, don’t answer, I don’t need it. You’ve been walking around like you just won the lottery or something.”

With a long resigned sigh, Jake rubbed his jaw. “Would you mind keeping quiet about this?”

“Oh man, this is huge. Unapproachable Dr. Johnson and Incredible Jake Quinn doing the wild thing. I’m supposed to keep that to myself?”

“I’d appreciate it.”

“Okay, I suppose I can somehow manage, but only because we’re friends.” Gillian gave him a mischievous look. “But there’s a price. Keeping in mind I completely agree with you one hundred percent when it comes to hot Jana J., give me a couple of details. Hey, you owe me that much.”

Relieved and a little amused, Jake asked warily, “Like what?”

“How many times, was there oral genital contact, are those her real tits, you know, things like that.”

He laughed and shook his head. “Quite a few, yes, and yes. Is that enough?”

“Quite a few?”

“I don’t keep a scorecard, for God’s sake.”

“You really *are* my hero.” Gillian grinned at him, looking a little wistful. “Dammit, I kept hoping Dr. Johnson was so standoffish toward the panting males around here because she was secretly gay.”

With complete confidence, Jake said, “Believe me, she isn’t.”

* * * *

What was she, sixteen?

Normally, Jana prided herself on being able to stay detached from her emotions. It had gotten her through Brian’s illness and limped her through the past two years.

Taking her keys from her purse, she inwardly uttered some inventive profanity as she went down the stairs. Jake had appeared composed and neutral, and certainly done nothing to suggest anything had changed.

On the other hand, she’d gotten all warm and flustered just being close to him. Unfortunately, from the look on Gillian Wesley’s face, Professor Lawrence’s other graduate student, she had noticed it.

See, this just wasn’t going to work out.

But damn, he'd looked good as always. Those same worn jeans hugged his lean hips, he had on some sort of fraternity tee-shirt under his lab coat, and his dark hair, so soft and thick, had curled against his neck. He'd looked at her with as little expression as possible, but she didn't think he could control the intensity in his beautiful dark eyes.

"Crap," she muttered out loud as she walked down the sidewalk.

Her car sat oddly at a tilt.

Jana approached and saw that both tires were flat on the passenger side. Not just low or slightly deflated, but completely flat.

That seemed unlikely.

The meeting had run over and she glanced around, all at once aware it was pretty dark already. The lot wasn't empty, but nearly so, and it seemed prudent to retreat back toward the building. She did, going inside, and she punched in her sister's number first, because Crystal would be a logical choice. Unfortunately, she got the answering machine at her house, and then voice mail on her cell phone.

Well, hell.

There was a phone book in her office and she headed back up that way so she could call a tow truck. Not sure if she should be glad or not, she saw that the light in the molecular lab was still on.

Jake?

She pushed open the door and peered in. Sure enough he was there, seated at one of the tables, his brow knitted in a frown as he looked at a piece of paper.

Jana cleared her throat. "Hello."

He glanced up and came at once to his feet, his dark brows arching. "Hello."

"I have a flat tire," she said. "Well, two. I'm going to call a tow truck, and was going to call a cab, but since you're still here, would you mind giving me a lift?"

"Two? Are you serious?" His frown deepened significantly.

His uneasy tone echoed her own doubts. "Yes, it seems weird."

"Yes, it does," he agreed grimly. Of course, I'll take you home, you know that. Call the towing company, and I'll wrap this up in two seconds."

"Thanks."

While she could manage well enough on her own, it wasn't a bad thing to have a capable male around Jana decided a little while later. For one thing, the two flat tires made her leery of standing out by herself and waiting for the tow truck, so to have a young, very healthy, broad-shouldered young man with her made it much better. He also talked to the tow driver, and they both ascertained her tires had been slashed, and if Jake hadn't been there she thought she would have felt pretty rattled.

She was a little rattled anyway.

"I suppose you walked," she murmured as they watched the truck—her BMW on board—roll away from the faculty lot.

"Yes, sorry. As you know, it's only a couple of blocks."

They began to walk, and he gave her a sidelong glance. "Any idea who would do it?"

Jana shook her head. "No."

"Disgruntled student?"

"It's never happened before."

"All kinds of nuts in this world."

"I suppose so." She had a feeling her smile was a little wan.

This time, when they reached his apartment, he didn't try and persuade her to stay but instead retrieved his keys and escorted her to his car.

It was quiet on the drive to her house, and Jana bit her lip as they pulled into the driveway, completely out of her depth. The

weekend—plus this—was a little much, and to say she felt uncharacteristically uncertain was a severe underestimate.

Her life had been very calm. *Had been.* Before the Incredible Quinn.

“Thanks,” she murmured, reaching for the door handle.

“Want me to come in?” His voice was soft and low.

Well, her thoughts exactly.

She had a shivery feeling of foreboding she didn’t like at all. Yes, she wanted him to stay.

“I can sleep on the couch if you want,” he said evenly. “In the morning, I can drive us back to the university.”

“Why would I ever want you to sleep on the couch?” Jana asked with a touch of asperity and amusement. “I assume you remember Friday and Saturday night.”

“Hell yes, I do.” His mouth quirked attractively. “Well, I was hoping you wouldn’t go for the couch offer, but I’m trying not to push.”

Jana smiled. “I think I have some lamb chops in the freezer. Is that okay for dinner?”

“You mean in place of cold pizza? Yeah, that’s pretty okay.”

“All right then. Stay.”

She walked up the brick walk to the house and let them in, switching off the alarm before opening the door, but quickly reactivating it once they were inside. Jana headed straight for the refrigerator, took out the bottle of white wine he’d brought over, and opened it. “Believe it or not, I don’t drink much but I could use this,” she said conversationally as possible. “Tell me, did Gillian Wesley have anything to say when I left the lab today?”

He didn’t even have to answer.

Jana muttered, “That was my fault.”

Jake watched as she poured wine into two glasses. “Relax. She isn’t going to say anything.”

“That would be nice of her.” She handed him a glass and took a convulsive gulp of chardonnay.

He grinned, a boyish curve of his mouth. “She’s a little jealous, but it’s understandable.”

He was usually pretty self-deprecating, and that seemed an arrogant thing for him to say. “Aren’t you a little full of yourself, Quinn?” Jana asked, an involuntary smile touching her mouth.

“Well, not jealous of you, but of me,” he explained, lifting his brows. “In case you haven’t noticed, she likes girls way more than she likes boys. If one of us were going to spend the weekend in bed with you, she’d much rather it be her than me.”

She wasn’t exactly shocked—she lived in a modern world and nothing was more liberal than a college campus—but still Jana wasn’t at all used to being the subject of female fantasies. “No, I didn’t know.”

“Oh yeah,” he said softly, sipping his wine as he leaned against the bar in her kitchen, all delectable six-foot plus of him. “Are you that unobservant, Jana?”

“Apparently so,” she admitted.

His face changed then, from teasing to serious. His long fingers smoothed the sides of his wine glass. “Speaking of observing things, do you have a neighbor that has a blue truck? Light blue, seen better days, some rust spots and a Florida plate?”

“I don’t think so.” She shook her head.

“I saw that truck Saturday morning when I dropped you off at the faculty lot, Sunday morning when I left here about three houses down parked on the street, and it drove by twice tonight as we waited for the tow truck.”

She took a sip of the chilled wine, and then said slowly, “I’ve seen it, now that you mention it. The same truck is in the parking lot almost every night. I assume it belongs to someone who works in the building.”

“Maybe it would be worth it to write down the license plate number.”

Suddenly it looked very dark outside. Jake seemed quite frighteningly sincere, and after all, someone had deliberately vandalized her car.

“I suppose it wouldn’t hurt,” she agreed faintly.

Chapter 7

In a half an hour, he knew it all. Name, social security number, checking account balance...hell, he knew what kind of underwear Jake Quinn wore. It had been a breeze breaking into the apartment, and the pretty professor's lover boy didn't do much to hide his secrets.

Well, he'd get a bit of a surprise when he returned home, that was for sure. The Watcher booted up the computer that sat on the table in the living room, typed in the message with gloved fingers, and then quietly let himself out.

He walked the block to where he had parked his truck and tried to not picture them together. It made him too angry and he knew from past experience it inspired carelessness.

That woman in Atlanta...he couldn't remember her name now, had blocked it all out. She had been the first, and he'd almost gotten caught.

He smiled grimly as he got into his vehicle.

He was much, much better at it now.

* * * *

She slid into his arms like silk and Jake felt the rapid acceleration of his heart rate in tune with his arousal. Jana felt soft everywhere, soft breasts against his bare chest, soft lips touching his, soft hair brushing against his fingers as he cupped her nape and kissed her. Their first two nights together she'd been really hot for it the first time, and he'd been the same way, taking the edge

off with an initial fast and furious sexual joining before enjoying each other more leisurely.

Maybe she was a little nervous tonight, maybe she was adjusting to the idea of a relationship, but this evening he sensed she wanted something different. It had even been there over dinner, a slightly different way they looked at each other, a more companionable connection, something that was emotional and not just the physical electricity that seemed to ignite so easily.

Slow, tender, gentle. Hell yes, he could do that. He'd give her whatever she wanted, whenever she wanted it. There wasn't much question he had never been so infatuated with any woman in his life, not even that first pulse-racing high school crush.

Not even close.

Jesus, he thought as he held her and they simply kissed slowly and thoroughly, bodies together in the softness of her bed. *I could really fall in love with this woman.* Maybe he was already there. Maybe he had been in love before he ever touched her.

The idea should scare the shit out of him, but somehow it didn't. Instead he felt the warm curves of her body next to his with a heightened awareness. The glide of her fingers down his arms raised small tingles of sensation. The taste of her mouth made his cock throb, and even the fragrance of her hair evoked a hunger that wasn't entirely physical.

He whispered in her ear, "I want to make love to you."

"I thought that was what we were doing," Jana responded softly, kissing the side of his neck.

"This feels different." Maybe he shouldn't say it out loud and spook her more than she was already, but he just had anyway.

For a moment she went very still against him. The she said softly, "Does it? Show me."

At least she hadn't denied it, and her challenge was one he would gladly meet. "Like this," he gently urged her onto her back. Her thighs parted naturally, and he balanced his body between

them, his hard cock first nudging her pussy before sliding fully inside.

It felt so good for a moment he closed his eyes and just absorbed the moment. The wetness that eased his entry and meant she wanted him, the heat of her silky vagina as it perfectly hugged his erection, the strong thud of his heart. Like any healthy adult male, he'd always enjoyed sex, but this was a level above, and he simply lay with her, joined in the ultimate intimacy.

His lashes lifted and Jake murmured, "Right now we are as close as two people can ever be."

Jana's smile was tremulous, her eyes darkened in the muted light. "Women are the romantics. I believe that is supposed to be what I'm thinking."

He still didn't move, just rested inside her, though the need for release infiltrated his entire body. "What *are* you thinking?"

"You want to have a discussion right now? Like this?" She lightly lifted her hips, pushing him deeper.

"Tell me."

"I'm thinking it's all too fast, too soon, too much. But in spite of that, I'm glad you're here tonight. There, that's exactly what I'm thinking, Jake."

"Me, too." He smiled at the impatience he could sense in her beautiful body, and the imploring pressure of her fingers at the small of his back. "Or something pretty close to it."

"I'm also wondering why our age difference doesn't bother me as much as it did, or should, and that's probably due to the fact you are pretty good at doing what we are *almost* doing right now. Do you mind?"

"That's it? Being good at sex?"

"No," she admitted with obvious reluctance. "And you know it, I have a feeling. Now, once again, do you mind?"

He didn't mind at all. Elated at the last admission, he began to finally thrust in and out of her pussy in long, strong strokes.

Passionate as always, Jana matched his rhythm, her full breasts quivering as she arched into each forward movement, her nails lightly scoring his shoulders.

It was simple lovemaking, missionary position, nothing but his cock sliding in and out between her open legs, and the sound of their breathing as they both climbed toward orgasm.

Simple maybe, but so good he could hardly believe it.

“Oh God, I’m coming,” she gasped after an astonishingly short time. “Jake...oh.”

He gave her what she wanted at the crucial moment, a deep thrust against the clench of her inner muscles, and she gave a small, very sexy scream as she climaxed.

The way his testicles tightened, he knew he wasn’t far behind, and as she started to relax, he moved twice more and groaned as his orgasm took over with almost violent energy, his muscles shaking in reaction.

Afterward, he stroked her back, and held her close until she drifted off to sleep. He should be, but wasn’t in the least tired, and he stared into the darkened bedroom and wondered what came next.

You can’t plan life, he thought as he lay there and listened to the even pattern of her breathing. For the past year he’d been waiting for his chance, hoping it would come, and now he was sleeping in Jana’s bed for the second time. It seemed entirely natural, and still somehow like an illusion.

Logically, even though it was disturbing, he owed a small thanks to whoever had slashed her tires. Otherwise he wouldn’t have gotten to spend another night with her so soon, and he had a feeling that part of their closeness this evening had come from the fact he’d been right there when she needed him.

Dr. Johnson was not used to leaning on someone else. On the other hand, he knew she felt safer tonight because he was around.

If he had his way, he’d be around all the time.

The guy in the blue truck really bothered him, fretted at the edge of his mind. When the vehicle had cruised past the second time, he'd gotten a little better look, but still was only left with a baseball cap in a light color and the fact he was pretty sure he was Caucasian.

Not much to go on.

It could have nothing to do with what happened to her tires, he told himself, staring at the ceiling. Jana fit perfectly next to him, every exhale of her breath moving softly against his chest.

It was hardly scientific, but he just had this gut feeling it did, though.

He finally slipped into a restless sleep.

* * * *

She wasn't exactly getting the secrecy I.Q. promised her.

For one, he had dropped her off at the biology building at seven-thirty in the morning and probably half a dozen people who knew her saw her get out of his car and go up the steps. It wasn't at all his fault, but still not exactly the quiet, unobtrusive relationship she'd hoped for.

Great, and if that isn't bad enough, now this.

Jana leaned back slightly in her chair and looked at the police officers in her office. One was fairly young, but still older than Jake, and though he was polite in every single way, she still felt both self-conscious and a little mortified. The other was older, a little more gruff, and he seemed slightly amused by her discomfort as they explained exactly what had been typed into Jake's computer by the intruder.

I know you're fucking her.

"It isn't a very usual message," the younger detective explained apologetically. "When Mr. Quinn called it in, we had to ask him what he thought it meant, and though he wasn't excited about

telling us, he finally did.” He cleared his throat. “Apparently, you are the only who qualifies as the subject. He said he’s now worried about your safety, and after what happened to your car and in his apartment, I don’t think it’s unreasonable.”

“Anyone we need to know about, Dr. Johnson?” The older one asked bluntly. “Ex-boyfriend or lover that might have an issue with the fact you’re involved with another man? It would be helpful if you’d tell us the truth.”

Jana shook her head decisively. “No, no one. Believe me.”

“Except Jake Quinn.”

“That’s sort of a recent development,” she replied, hoping she looked cool and detached. “My husband died a few years ago and I have seen absolutely no one in the way you mean since until Jake.”

“What about the blue truck?”

“I hadn’t noticed until Jake mentioned it, but when he did, I remembered seeing it now and again. I thought the owner worked here.”

The young guy looked bland. “Not according to the permits issued for the faculty lot where you park your car, Ma’am. The campus police officer we spoke with said he must be careful, because they check the lot now and then, just to make sure all the vehicles are authorized to park there.”

“Also keep in mind that we know exactly when he typed the message because he saved it, so that means he knew that Mr. Quinn was not at home. Usually at two in the morning he would be. I’d guess he really is watching you.”

Well, this just got better and better.

She looked from one to the other of them. “All right, I admit this is all very disturbing, but I really don’t have any idea who would want to break into Jake’s apartment, or damage my car. What now?”

The older officer said, “Be careful. Be alert. Lock your doors, don’t go out at night alone, avoid parking garages, the usual sort of

thing any woman should do anyway. In your case, right now, I'd be extremely cautious. If you don't carry pepper spray, buy some."

"That all sounds logical, I suppose." Jana felt more than just slightly dismayed.

After they left, she made a cup of coffee and saw ruefully that her hands were unsteady when she lifted the cup to her mouth.

The phone on her desk rang, and she automatically reached for it. "Dr. Johnson."

"I'm watching."

For a moment she didn't register the words, because the sibilant hiss of the voice startled her so much. "What?"

"I'm watching," he repeated. "The police just left, didn't they?"

Jana felt a sick twist in the pit of her stomach. "Who is this?"

"You'll know soon enough, Professor. I have another message for Quinn. Tell him you're going to be the most expensive lay he's ever had."

The line went dead and she sat there for a moment, both shocked and now truly frightened. The idea there could be a threat was upsetting, but hearing that eerie voice made it all very real suddenly. Her hand trembled visibly now as she replaced the receiver.

Jake.

Hastily, she got to her feet and went out in the hall, heading for the lab. In mid-morning, it was busy, and there were at least six students working on various experiments. To her relief, Jake was there, but then again, he usually was.

When he looked up and saw her, there wasn't much doubt he registered something was wrong.

To hell with discretion, Jana thought fearfully. This was serious, and if there was one thing she realized right now, she wanted nothing to happen to the young man now staring at her

with dark concerned eyes. The very thought of it was horrifying and scared her in a way she would have to analyze later.

"I need to talk to you," she said urgently, and really didn't care who heard her.

"Jana, you're pale as a ghost. What's happened?"

"My office?" she suggested shakily and actually grabbed his hand. His fingers felt warm and strong, and she was cold as ice.

"All right." He nodded grimly, and followed her out the door. She was only vaguely aware that all of the students were staring, no doubt wondering what was happening. It wasn't every day she dashed in and dragged away a grad student, but their speculation was currently the least of her problems.

As soon as they were inside, she shut the door and sank into her chair. "He just called me."

"He?" For one moment Jake looked puzzled, and then said forcefully, "Holy shit, are you kidding me? What did he say?"

She told him, word for word, and watched as comprehension of what was actually happening crossed his face. When she finished, he said nothing for a moment. Then he murmured, "It sounds to me like this asshole has some serious problems. We should call the police again. I'd guess they could do something about tapping your phone."

Jana looked at him and took a deep breath. "That last part was a direct threat against you."

"Yes, it sure sounded like that all right."

"He got into your apartment pretty easily. Maybe you should stay with me. At least my house has an alarm system."

Jake grinned in his signature boyish way. "You think I'm going to turn down that invitation? I concur one hundred percent, Professor. Considering last night, I think this guy needs to realize he's doing me a serious favor."

She made a futile helpless gesture with her hand. "I am not sure how you can joke right now, Jake."

“I am not sure what else to do.” He bent over her chair and kissed her, a warm, slow pressure of his mouth. When he straightened, he smiled again. “Look, I’m glad you asked me, because I was going to suggest it anyway. Not for me, but for you.”

Jana shook her head. “I’m petrified right now, and I don’t like it one bit. It isn’t...me. I’m angry, too, that someone can interfere in our life like this.”

“I like the sound of that.”

She glanced up and met his dark eyes, his gaze steady. “What?”

“Our life.”

Yes, she had said that, hadn’t she? “I didn’t mean it that way,” she whispered.

“When you do, trust me, I’d love to hear it again,” Jake murmured.

Chapter 8

Most of the joy was in the planning, the anticipation. He recognized it when the phase began, and rode with the hunger, the yearning, feeding off what he knew was happening. The pretty professor was scared now. Loverboy was probably a little nervous, too. It was obvious they felt him, sensed his purpose. It had been a week now since his message had been received and they spent every minute as far as he could tell together. Quinn wasn't a small guy, athletically built, tall, with plenty of solid muscle, and he probably thought he was capable of defending her and himself.

He was out of his league, The Watcher thought with a dark smile. Way out. When the time came, it would be easy.

But it was too soon to end this .To stop the pleasure of it.

It was time to send the video. That should kick things up a notch.

* * * *

The package sat on the passenger seat of her car, but Jana knew she'd left the vehicle locked. Instinctively she lifted her head and looked around. There was no blue truck, but this was a college campus and there were people walking around, their collars up against the recent drop in temperatures as the weather turned to a true fall chill.

"What the hell is this?" Jake opened the door and stared at it, the small manila envelope unmarked and looking innocuous

enough, except it hadn't been there when they arrived that morning.

"I have no idea," Jana admitted with a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach.

For a moment they stared at each other across the top of the BMW. In his dark eyes she saw a reflection of her reaction. A mingled fury and frustration, tempered by a healthy dose of trepidation. His good-looking face tightened and the cold wind whipped at his hair. "Your car has an alarm system."

"I know." She shivered and it wasn't just the sting of the autumn breeze. "Should we call the police?"

"We don't even know what it is or where it came from." Jake shook his head and bent over to pick it up and tear open the envelope. Inside was a simple disc in a case, unmarked. "It's too much to hope he left prints on anything. He's too good at this. Get in the car, it's freezing out here. I guess we'll take this home and see what it is."

Home. He said in very naturally, and in truth, if it hadn't been for the proverbial sword hanging over her head, the past two weeks had been pretty close to wonderful. It felt a little like she was coming alive again, as a woman, and as a person. A sort of thawing that came from within, and a glimmer of glimpsed happiness that gave a completion she didn't know she craved.

In short, Jake Quinn was everything he seemed. Good-natured, intelligent, responsible, the list went on. Not to mention hot-blooded in bed, and considerate at all other times, too. Under that fabulous exterior existed a very nice man, and though she still felt the age difference, it now seemed a pretty trivial flaw in their growing relationship.

Yes, she had gotten a few teasing Incredible Quinn comments from her colleagues, but it really didn't bother her in the way she thought it would. The only problem was it was all too comfortable too soon. How could they so smoothly slide into the normally

rough transition of suddenly sharing a living space, especially as it had been hers alone for so long.

Was that actually a problem?

She liked him staying at her house, stalker or no stalker. She liked him in her bed, but also in her life. Actually, she just plain liked him.

Maybe more than liked.

Why the hell does someone have to ruin it, she thought violently as she slid into the driver's seat and started the car.

"He's probably around somewhere, watching our reaction to finding this," Jake stared out the window as she backed up the car and pulled out of the lot. "I have to admit to a certain primitive desire to find him and kick the living shit out of him."

"I have a primitive desire to watch you do it," she agreed, trying to just concentrate on driving and not that ominous disc.

"Yeah, well, we have to figure who he is first, and what he wants."

She felt that inner queasy quiver in her stomach again. "Besides my tires, he hasn't really done anything bad."

"Yet," Jake said briefly, not looking over.

That one terse word was true and hard to argue.

Her house looked quiet and serene, a refuge with the carefully locked doors and expensive alarm Brian had insisted they install for the times he traveled. Jana pulled into the garage and they went inside. Jake lost no time but went to where the entertainment center sat discreetly in a large cherry cabinet against a wall in the living room. He opened the doors, inserted the disc into the DVD player, and pressed a button.

In the act of taking off her coat, Jana froze at the sound of her own voice. She whirled around to stare at the television screen.

The image flickered, and then focused.

Not a word. A moan.

Oh God.

It took a moment to sink in, but when it did, she felt a flush of outrage that made her whole body suddenly warm.

She was on her back, nude, knees bent and wide apart. Jake's dark head was between her open legs, and he was licking her pussy with a skillful enthusiasm that had been wonderful at the time, his hands cupping her bare ass. As she watched in mortified horror, she arched into his mouth and moaned again, saying his name as she climaxed, her body shuddering.

"Jesus," Jake muttered harshly. "Are you kidding me? That's your bedroom."

"Turn that off," she demanded.

Jake turned and looked at her, and his face held that same hint of furious disbelief. "No, wait. Let's see if we can figure out when this was filmed."

"He could be here right now," she pointed out, more than a little panicked. "Inside the house."

"I doubt it. He's fucking playing with us."

The screen went blank, and then came alive again. This time she was on her knees, bare breasts front center camera, nipples tight and pointed. Jake lay propped against the pillows, his bold erection against his stomach, and as they both watched, she leaned forward and took his cock into her mouth. It was big, so she also stroked him with her hand too, cupping his balls as she moved up and down, sucking and licking.

"That was Tuesday," he said almost inaudibly.

Jana glanced at him and asked in a voice that didn't sound remotely like her own, "How do you know?"

"Good grief, you gave me a blow job for the first time. Like I'm going to forget that? Keep watching, pay attention, and let's see if we can figure out if this was that one night, or several."

She did, ill from the thought that whoever was harassing them had seen such intimate moments.

Things only got worse.

The DVD lasted almost a full hour and obviously it had been edited. It was like a bad porn film, or maybe a *really* good porn film, for they weren't acting, but actually enjoying themselves and each other. It had quite a variety, including almost every position they had tried. Her on top, riding him, eyes closed and head thrown back as she panted in enjoyment. Jake behind her, holding her breasts as they moved together in a rhythm of thrust and withdrawal...

All of the snippets showed the sexual intercourse they had shared, and all of it was graphic and personal.

This is a nightmare, Jana thought frantically.

When the screen went blank, Jake pushed the button and turned around. "The camera never moved and those shots were taken over the course of several different nights. It's in your bedroom somewhere. I'd guess it's set to start automatically either at a certain time of day or activated by movement."

"How could he get in?" she asked, cold all over. "Jake, what are we going to do?"

"First of all, call the police. They can find the camera."

"I'm not letting them see that video!"

He shoved his fingers through his thick hair, making the dark strands more unruly than ever. "I'm not anxious for that either, but if you think this is the only copy, think again. For all we know, we're currently stars on the internet sites that publish without the permission of the people involved. Jana, really, we need to report it."

"I'm guessing they'll want to look at it. No. Absolutely not."

"I don't know." His mouth set in a thin line. "Maybe we can just say that we know it exists. After the slashed tires, my apartment break-in, and the phone call, they might believe us without further proof."

"They might just buy a bucket of popcorn and enjoy themselves," Jana said acidly. "I think this is what he wanted. He

knew I wouldn't want that video reported and I bet he's sitting somewhere enjoying the idea we both feel violated, yet he won't answer for it."

Jake slid his hands into the pockets of his jeans. His dark gaze was steady. "Okay, it's up to you. I'll look for the camera myself and we won't say a word. But I have to tell you, if we go that way, it feels to me like he's in control of this situation."

They certainly weren't, and she felt it in the uncharacteristic edge of hysteria that seemed to hold her prisoner. Tears filled her eyes and she swallowed hard. "I'm not ashamed of anything we've done," she said. "But on the other hand, it is only between you and me."

"Hopefully so, and yes, that is how it is supposed to be." Ever the pragmatic scientist when she seemed to have lost that part of herself, he sounded almost infuriatingly calm. "But that's a gamble with this psycho, and when you think about it, it's true. He could send a copy to anyone either of us knows. The son of a bitch took my checkbook, my mail, He knows where my parents live, for God's sakes. Maybe they got a copy just today."

"Jake," she said in weak protest, and then had no choice but to walk to the couch and sink down, her legs felt so useless. "Don't say that. I haven't even met them yet. Oh God, what if you're right? That would be the worst thing on earth."

"No," he disagreed and came over to sit next to her. His arms slid around her shoulders and his mouth comfortingly pressed her temple. "It would be embarrassing, but not the worst thing. The worst thing would be to let him win this...this thing, whatever it is, whatever his sick agenda. Come on, let's call the police."

How could she?

How couldn't she?

Jana said dully, "All right."

* * * *

He hoped he'd done the right thing, hoped they knew what they were doing.

God, he certainly prayed that was true.

The detective took a mercifully brief glance at the beginning of the DVD, and with two uniformed officers went upstairs. They didn't find the camera, but did find traces of adhesive on the back of the headboard of the bed itself, as if something had been taped there recently and removed.

Detective Larkin, young, blond, diffident, was the same one who had come to his apartment after the break in, and he seemed both sympathetic and grimly concerned. "I'm not surprised the camera is gone. Why lose a valuable piece of electronics? He must have known you'd search for it the minute you knew you'd been taped."

Jana still sat on the couch in the elegant living room, looking shell-shocked but slightly more composed. "How did he get in? I'm diligent about using the alarm system. If anyone opens a window or door, it's supposed to go off plus directly contact the police department."

"I'd say you need to have someone out to check it and make sure it's all in working order. In my experience, these systems are a deterrent, but a really determined intruder can sometimes get around them. Especially if he knows what he's doing." Larkin paused for a moment and then said unemotionally, "He wants you to know he's out there, that's clear enough. He wants you to know he was in your house, that he knows where you work, and even what you do in the privacy of your bedroom, Dr. Johnson. Stalkers usually are pretty possessive of their victims and it looks like maybe when you started seeing Mr. Quinn, it set him off. What he told you on the phone, plus what he typed on the computer, indicates that his interest in you makes him resentful that you are having a sexual relationship with someone else."

"I kind of got that impression myself," Jake said dryly. "The question is, what's he going to do next?"

Larkin shrugged. "Who knows, that's the problem. Guys like this don't think like we do. The only thing I can come up to do right now is to tell all your neighbors to be aware of any strangers and to have a police officer cruise by now and then. It might scare him off."

"Surely he expects something like that," Jake muttered. "Isn't there a list of registered sex offenders now? Can you check the ones nearby and see if any of them are in some line of work that includes electronics? I mean the camera had to be small for us not to see it, and he has gotten past her house and car alarm."

"I can take a look," Larkin said as he glanced at his watch. There was a weary set to his mouth. "I'll call you tomorrow if I find anything interesting."

After they left, Jana still sat there, and Jake sat back down next to her and tentatively took her hand. Her fingers felt delicate and fragile in his grasp. "Maybe we should go to a motel until the alarm system can be checked tomorrow."

"What if he follows us?"

Being male, he had only an inkling of what she was feeling. He was more pissed off than anything, but he could feel from the tremor in her hand alone she was really frightened. "I'll drive. You watch for anyone that looks remotely like he's following us, how's that? We're both smart people and we're aware now of what's going on. If there's anything suspicious, we'll just call it in."

"Okay, that's probably not a bad idea." She stood and smoothed her skirt, giving him the semblance of a smile. Her incredible long-lashed eyes looked a deeper blue than usual. "I've always thought of myself capable of handling anything. Even when Brian first got his diagnosis, I was devastated, but strong enough to deal with it. This, however..."

"I know," Jake said grimly. "This is pretty out of the realm of my experience, too."

"I'm so glad you're here." There was a poignant huskiness in her voice.

"Of course, I'm here. I love you."

He hadn't really meant to say that way the first time. To just blurt it out in what was really a very unromantic moment, but the words just tumbled from his lips before he could stop them.

Jana stared at him, her soft mouth parted.

Quickly, he added, "You don't have to say anything. Maybe we can talk about this down the road, whenever you're ready. Right now, why don't you go upstairs and pack an overnight bag."

He wasn't sure if he was disappointed or relieved when she nodded and headed for the stairs. A few minutes later she emerged, a small leather case in hand. Jana gave him a wry look as she locked the door, but punched in the security code anyway, and the little red light flashed on.

Jake drove slowly out of the neighborhood, looking for anything that remotely touched off a spark of warning, but the street was deserted, all the houses lit against the cold, blustery October evening, not a blue truck in sight. He headed toward downtown, where it would be nearly impossible for anyone following to be missed, the series of one way streets and stoplights a maze for anyone who didn't know exactly what they were doing. He chose a noisy popular steak place, and as soon as they were seated, ordered a beer.

Jana had ordered a martini and raised her perfect ebony brows when he chuckled as the waitress hurried off. "It seems appropriate."

"By all means," he agreed, his mouth twitching, glad she didn't seem quite as tense with all the lights, noise and people around them. "Have three. Maybe I'll get lucky."

“On the contrary, I.Q., I am coming to the gradual conclusion I’m the lucky one.” Her lashes lowered a fraction as she spoke and she looked away for a moment. “This was a good idea.” She changed the subject abruptly. “Usually I’d rather stay home more than anything. I change into something comfortable, maybe have a glass of wine in front of the fire, and as you know, I really do like to cook. It relaxes me. But tonight, this is better.”

Anything was better than to see the apprehension and tension in her face over what was happening, and Jake was still a little knocked off kilter by her initial sentence. Their drinks arrived, saving him from having to form a reply.

He took a few frothy sips of beer and listened as Jana ordered a rib-eye, medium rare, baked potato with sour cream and butter, and a salad with blue cheese dressing. He nodded at the young waitress and said, “Same thing exactly.”

They ate, carefully not discussing the man who had turned their lives into something that resembled a television police drama, and afterwards drove toward the interstate, where they chose a generic motel and registered. He used his parent’s address in Michigan and paid cash, despite the fact he was sure they were not followed. Once they were in the room, he watched as Jana swiftly bolted the door.

“No one knows where we are,” he assured her gently.

“I know. It isn’t that.” She kicked off her shoes and unfastened her skirt. “I really, really want to make love with you. And by the way, if you want a repeat of Tuesday, I’ll do that too. Get undressed.”

He grinned, his swelling erection automatic. “It isn’t necessary, but if you insist...”

Jana let her skirt fall to the floor and yanked her sweater over her head. Clad only in little black panties and a black lacy bra, she was enough to take his breath away. She snapped open the fastening on the front of her bra and her beautiful breasts spilled

free, full and pale, the nipples already hard and pointed. The panties went next, and Jake couldn't get out of his clothes fast enough.

Sometimes in bed she was playful, sometimes she was simply intense, but always she was more than his wildest, most erotic fantasies ever conjured.

He lay down first, her insistent hand on his chest, and she climbed on top of him, straddling his waist. Her pussy was wet already. He could feel the moist heat as she rocked lightly over his erection, rubbing the tip of his cock against her clit.

"Tell me again," she said a little breathlessly as she rocked, knees spread, her breasts lightly swaying.

"Tell you what?" he asked cautiously, a little wary of her volatile mood.

"What you said earlier."

Was that what she really wanted? He was afraid he'd gone too far, but Jake didn't even pretend to misunderstand the request.

His hands spanned her hips. "I love you," he whispered.

"It's too soon," she argued, erotically moving her body, giving them both exquisite, teasing pleasure.

"No, it isn't, Professor. It's an accelerated reaction due to just the right chemistry." He needed to be inside her, and stifled a small groan.

"You love this." She shifted, her hand going downward to grab his cock and adjust it so she could sink downward, taking his length inside her tight heat.

"Yes," he agreed, lightly thrusting upward. "I love this. But I also love you. Jana Johnson, the person, not just the woman."

"It's the sex."

Jake moved suddenly, in one lithe roll turning their bodies so he was on top and in control. He kissed her and then said firmly, "No, it isn't just that. Come on. I know it, and you know it. That's what scares you."

Her gaze was luminous and her lips trembled as she clutched his upper arms tightly. "I'm afraid you're right."

He could barely hear the admission it was made in such a muted whisper.

"Don't be," he admonished softly and kissed her again as he began to move.

Chapter 9

They were somewhere, hiding.

He loved it. All the power was his, and it was time they recognized it.

It gave him a night off...well, sort of.

The Watcher lay back on the couch. It wasn't comfortable, but nothing in his cheap ass apartment was comfortable. Sacrifices for a cause were always necessary, and he was willing to make them; had the discipline to do it. Right now, however, he was just going to enjoy himself.

With the flick of his finger, the television screen changed.

He set the remote aside, unzipped his jeans, and took out his cock. Slowly, he began to stroke it as he watched the performance with rapt attention.

They were probably doing it now, he thought.

Well, Quinn had better enjoy it while he could. Tomorrow it would be all over.

* * * *

Jake heard the ring and reached in his pocket, flipping the phone open. He didn't immediately recognize the number, and usually didn't answer those calls, but considering what was going on, pushed the button anyway. "Hello?"

"Mr. Quinn? This is Detective Larkin. Okay, we have a small break." There was a slight pause. "It doesn't solve all the problems for you and Dr. Johnson, but it gives us something."

“What is it?” Aware of the students around him in the lab, Jake walked back toward one of the other rooms, near where the freezers were located. “At this point, I think both Jana and I would like to hear any positive information.”

“You noticing that blue truck made the difference. Campus police called me. Two months ago they did ticket a vehicle in the faculty lot where Dr. Johnson parks her car. A blue pickup with Florida plates. Automatically, the ticket is generated and mailed from the university to whoever has the registration. In this case, it has never been paid, because the owner had reported it stolen. Luckily, it popped up in the system.”

“I see. Well, that makes the blue pickup more suspicious, but doesn’t really give us any more insight, now does it?”

“Maybe a little.” Detective Larkin sounded ominously grave. “The owner of the truck is named Lisa Gleason. She claims her brother, John, is the one who stole it, right after the Florida police came to question him about a woman who was raped and murdered in her home, not too far away from Fort Myers. She actually saw him drive off in it.”

All along, he’d felt there was something wrong, something bad out there, but this was not exactly welcome news. “Christ,” he muttered, raking his hand through his hair.

“There’s more. Gleason was a suspect in another stalking type murder, but this one in Atlanta. It was five years ago, but they couldn’t arrest him. They didn’t have enough and he skipped anyway. In that particular case,” Larkin said heavily, “he first killed her boyfriend. It was the same thing, threats first, phone calls, break ins. In the Florida case, the boyfriend went missing, and they’ve never found him. At first he was the lead suspect, but when they honed in on Gleason, they started to think maybe he was just eliminated first.”

He was infinitely more worried about Jana than himself, but it still wasn't very comforting. "Mind telling me how he did it in Atlanta?"

Over the line, he heard Larkin give a small mirthless laugh. "I thought you might ask. I know I'd be wondering."

"Thanks," Jake said dryly.

"He broke into the house and used some kind of knife or machete. Want to hear more?"

"I'm not sure. I'm not exactly all cheered up by all this, but okay, go ahead."

"Gleason is an electrical engineer. Graduated from a big college, good GPA, and we know for a short time he worked with a company that designed, among a lot of other things, security systems."

Oh shit.

When he said nothing, Larkin went on. "He's currently wanted in Florida. All we have to do is find him to be able to arrest him. Yes, he's smart, but he also has an obsession. I've talked to the FBI—been on the phone all morning, actually. At this point, I'm fairly convinced he's the guy after Dr. Johnson. From the descriptions of the other victims, she fits. Professional women, bright, beautiful, and get this, they both worked at big universities where it was easy for him to blend in."

The phone felt heavy in his hand. Jake said slowly, "I think he is the man, too. The question is how do we do that? How do we find him?"

"Well, considering he's a serial murder suspect who skipped out of state, my interest is suddenly a little more focused on this." The detective sounded chillingly sincere. "If he's coming after you and Dr. Johnson, well, we'd really like to be there."

"Oh well, hell yeah, consider yourself invited." Jake said it sardonically, wondering how earth he was going to tell Jana about all this. To actually know the guy was some sort of serial killer was

a shock to him, and he was pretty sure she'd be more terrified than ever.

"I'm serious." Larkin's voice intruded on his thoughts. "We want to keep an eye on this from close by."

"You think I'm not serious by saying please do? Some machete-wielding nutcase is not my idea of a good time. I'm a biologist. This isn't exactly my area of expertise. What is it you want to do?"

"I'll put two officers hidden in the house, at least that many in selected positions on the street when you are both at work, but I think he'll hit the house. That's what he's done before and keeping things the same is supposed to be part of the ritual, or so I'm told. I haven't dealt with something exactly like this before, but we'll handle it. You and Dr. Johnson just have to act normally and wait."

"That sounds easy."

"Better than being there alone without us, I'd guess."

"All right, I'll give you that one."

"I'll be in touch and we'll set it up."

After Jake snapped the phone shut, and he thought for a moment before he opened it and pushed a button. His mother answered on the third ring, the familiar voice bringing back a semblance of normality to his morning. "Hi, it's me."

After the obligatory update on what was happening in town, his brother's recent football game victory, and his father's blood pressure, there was a chance to speak. "Hey, Mom, do me a favor and call my cell if anything unusual happens, okay?"

"What do you mean?"

"If you get a package in the mail, or someone calls and leaves a weird message, anything like that." It made him break out in a cold sweat to know Gleason had his parent's address because of the burglary. It was only a four hour drive home, and if anyone really wanted to get to him, his family would be the way.

"Jake, is something wrong?"

“Yes and no,” he admitted. “Just kind of be on the lookout, okay? And call me right away if anything out of the ordinary comes up.”

“I’m not really sure what—”

“I’ve met someone.”

That diverted his mother’s attention quick enough. “Someone? A girl someone?”

Despite everything, he smiled. “A woman. I’m in pretty deep,” he admitted, “I’ve actually known her for a year, but just recently got her to finally go out with me, and it’s going really well. Very well.”

Except, of course, for the serial killer stalking them.

Yeah, that was a definite setback to the relationship, he thought ruefully as he finished the call and hung up.

* * * *

“I understand your phone isn’t working.”

Jana glanced up at the timid knock. The repairman hovered just outside her office door, as if he was apologetic over a simple malfunction that had certainly happened before. “Yes,” she said briskly. “It’s completely dead. I just reported it; that was fast. No offense, but usually it takes days.”

He smiled easily. “We get backed up. There are over three hundred buildings on this campus. If you don’t mind, I’ll see if I can figure out the trouble.”

“Sure, thank you.” She pushed back from the desk and stood. “I have a class in ten minutes anyway. When you’re done, if you would close the door behind you, that would be fine. It will lock automatically.”

“No problem.” He was fairly young, maybe thirty, with brown hair, clean-shaven, and he nodded as she left the room, setting

down his toolbox on the floor. Vaguely she thought she'd seen him before. Well, probably so, if he did repairs around the building.

To say she was distracted during her genetics lecture was an understatement. Thankfully it was the last lecture of the day and she trailed back up to her office with both relief the day was over and dread at the coming evening jangling her nerves.

The police wanted her and Jake to stay at the house like nothing was wrong, even though the alarm company had called to say the entire system was inoperable. Somehow it had been wired so the light still came on to say it was activated, but the actual alarm part was bypassed.

Great.

Jake had also revealed the rest of his conversation with Larkin. She had been telling herself if she could just put a name to the faceless man in the blue truck that seemed to be ruining her life, she would feel more in control. But it didn't help at all. In fact, it made matters worse to know he'd brutally killed two women and at least one man.

She also didn't want him to be smart, or to be a college grad with a hard-earned degree. That meant every time she gave a lecture, or walked into a classroom, she'd wonder if another one was out there.

The door to her office was closed, and though she should be happy her phone was probably back in working order, she hadn't felt much like talking to anyone all day anyway. She unlocked the door and stepped inside.

Almost instantly a hand clamped over her mouth and a voice hissed in her ear. "Hello, Professor."

She jerked in resistance, but an arm came cruelly around her neck, pressing painfully against her windpipe.

"No, don't struggle, don't do it. This isn't the right time. He has to be first." Her assailant shut the door, probably by pushing it

with his foot. She heard the click of the latch above the sudden roaring in her ears as she fought for breath.

Her fingers clawed at his arm, but he wore a jacket of some kind and she did no damage. After a moment, just when she thought she might faint, the pressure eased and she was able to take in a gasping, choked breath. Instantly he increased his hold again.

“You smell good,” he whispered in her ear. “Like I thought you would.”

Jesus, no!

“What time does Quinn think you’ll be done? It’s so convenient. You work late, so does he, nobody will think anything if you’re both still here.”

Jana’s head swam, her lungs burning for air. She wanted to scream at him, to ask what he wanted, but unfortunately, she knew.

Rape...murder...her head swam and she made a small incoherent gurgle that caused her attacker to chuckle.

“You’re going to like it,” he said in a horrifying husky tone bereft of human feeling. “I promise.”

Oh God...

When he abruptly shoved her to the floor, she tried to roll away but couldn’t because of his cruel grip and the pressure of his much heavier body. She had never fainted in her life, and this did not seem an opportune time, but still her head spun. The very first thing that happened was her assailant grabbed her hair and jerked, pulling her head back.

There was nothing she could do as he pressed something sticky and confining over her mouth.

Nothing.

The bare floor felt very cold as she ineffectually struggled against the horrible twining of some sort of wire around her wrists and ankles.

* * * *

Jake locked the door to the lab. He could feel the tension in his neck muscles, and his back ached, probably from being so uptight all day. He was actually not surprised that Jana must also be putting off going home. Even with Larkin's assurances, it felt a bit like being set up as bait. Though he appreciated the idea that police officers—with real guns and real training—would be in the house tonight, he still felt uncomfortable putting her in the path of a homicidal stalker when he could maybe keep her someplace safe.

The protective depth of his emotion was overwhelming.

Most everyone was gone, the upper hallway of the second story deserted. Jake walked to her office and saw the door was closed and the lights out. She wouldn't leave without him. For that matter, she *couldn't*, because he'd driven and car keys were in his pocket. With a frown, he knocked lightly. "Jana?"

No answer.

Then he heard it. A faint sound, a small whimper, that made him go cold and still.

"Jana!" He rattled the knob, and found it turned easily in his hand as he shoved the door open.

The first thing he saw was the spill of her hair on the floor, the dark silky color against the stark linoleum. She was her side, facing him, and her hands were bound behind her back, her ankles lashed together with telephone wire. One shoe had come off and sat next to her, obscenely askew. Sapphire blue eyes were wide, even though there was some sort of tape over her mouth.

She made that sound again, a high pitched protest against the confinement and violently shook her head.

What the hell?

Without thought, he moved to help her, and then even as he started to step into the room, he jerked backwards as he caught the movement out of the corner of his eye.

The first slash caught him across the uplifted arm of his jacket, squarely in the middle of his forearm, and he felt the blade slice through the leather like butter and find flesh and nerves.

Shit!

Jake pivoted and threw the same damaged arm up to protect himself. The attacker was fast, the space small, and even as he staggered back under the force of another blow, he crashed into the desk.

Gleason—it must be—sprang at him then, wielding the big knife like a club.

He ducked, fell to the floor, and almost landed on Jana, which would undoubtedly have hurt her badly since he probably outweighed her by about eighty pounds.

It pissed him off.

Really, really pissed him off. He was bleeding too, but he didn't much care, and as his assailant rushed forward, he lifted a leg and kicked with all his might. The resulting crack as his foot connected with the man's kneecap sounded loud, as did the scream of pain. The man went down almost all the way, catching the side of the desk.

"That's a start," Jake gritted out, aware of the blood soaking his shirt and coat as he scrambled to his feet. "You son of a bitch." He kicked again, this time catching the guy in the act of rising to his feet, clipping him in the chin.

Gleason's head snapped back, but somehow he managed to not fall entirely.

He still had that wicked knife and swung it, narrowly missing Jake's leg. Jake jumped back still trying to not trip over Jana's prone body.

It was way too small a space for a bloody, murderous fight when he was the one without a weapon.

However, that actually worked to his advantage. He was bigger, faster, and even though he was definitely bleeding all over

the room, he had the added impetuous that the terrified woman on the floor was more important to him than almost anything else on the planet.

Slash, feint, retreat.

Blood pouring from his mouth from the last kick, Gleason came at him again, eyes glazed with hatred, his chest heaving as he lifted the machete.

Without thinking, Jake stepped sideways and swung his fist with every ounce of force in his body.

The result was a terrible crack as his knuckles exploded in pain. He aimed for Gleason's face but instead hit him solidly in the neck, and the dull sound was sickening. The other man seemed to fold up, and even as his knees buckled, he still tried a half-hearted sweep of the weapon in his hand.

Luckily, it met air.

A moment later, the room was quiet except for the harsh sound of his own breathing in his ears.

Dazed, it took Jake a moment to realize it was over, his adrenalin running so high he could barely stop from taking another shot at Gleason, even though the man was obviously unconscious.

A shuddering breath later, he was able to drop to his knees next to Jana and tug free the tape over her mouth. "Did he hurt you?" he asked, his voice so unsteady he wasn't sure if she could understand him.

"No." It was a gasp. "He was waiting for that. Oh God, you're really bleeding badly."

He managed a sickly smile. "Yeah, I know. If I can get your hands untied, can you call 911 and ask for an ambulance? I also think Larkin is going to want to hear about this."

Professor Johnson nodded with tears in her eyes. "Yes, absolutely I can."

* * * *

Twenty-nine stitches, a nicked artery, and a broken hand. It could have been worse was the only positive way to look at that news.

There was actually less damage than she had expected from all the blood. Jana sat, rested her head back, and blocked out the bustle around her. She knew a lot about hospitals. She knew a lot about waiting rooms. Though the circumstances were entirely different, the surge of memory was unwanted.

Love made you vulnerable to loss.

Was she ready for that again?

Ready or not, she felt it already had happened.

Jake was out of the emergency room and being admitted because of all the blood loss. It was just as well they were keeping him because she had a feeling he was going to be in considerable pain, not to mention fairly helpless with one arm slashed to pieces and the other hand in a cast.

“Can I buy you a cup of coffee? The real stuff, not the hospital sludge?”

She sat up a little straighter at the sound of the quiet voice, and saw that Detective Larkin stood there, holding a tray with two cups. He smiled. “I sent an officer across the street for this. The least I could do.”

“That sounds wonderful.” It did, and she gratefully accepted a steaming cup and inhaled the fragrance of French roast with appreciation.

He wearily sat down next to her. “If it is any consolation, Gleason is in worse shape than Jake Quinn. He has a broken jaw, and some spinal injuries they think will probably cause permanent motor skill problems from that blow to his neck. Your boyfriend has a powerful punch.”

Yes, well, Jake had lived up to his name. He'd been incredible. Brave, fierce, and in the end, a hero. Yes, he'd been fighting for his life, but he had done a wonderful job of saving them both.

Oh hell, what would happen when the worshipful undergrads found out about this, Jana thought with jaded, tired amusement.

"It was a very ugly fight." As long as she lived she would never be able to forget the sight of Gleason jumping at Jake as he came through the door.

"From the state of your office and their condition, I'd say so. I'm just thankful it turned out the way it did." Larkin took a drink from his cup, and then stared at the floor. "I miscalculated. He killed the first victims in their homes, and I assumed he'd do that again. I knew he'd stalked you at work, so I probably should have put more surveillance around the university area immediately."

"It's a big campus, Detective, forty thousand students and hundreds of buildings. If he wanted to blend in, he sure could. The same thing with the biology building. It's large, and thousands of students go in and out in a single day, in all shapes and sizes. My genetics class alone has over two hundred students." Jana shook her head. "I think spotting him there would have been a very long shot. He walked right into my office and talked to me and I didn't know it was him and not one of the real maintenance staff."

Larkin rubbed the back of his neck and sighed. "Maybe you're right, who knows with someone like that. I never understand it when I hear about these guys, and Gleason is a perfect example. He's obviously bright enough to get an engineering degree, not bad looking, comes from an average middle class family, yet somewhere the wiring must be faulty."

Those moments of pure terror, waiting, tied hand and foot, with a murderer who planned to kill not only her, but also Jake, well...it was too immediate and she couldn't stand to think about it.

“You’re telling me,” she murmured. The coffee tasted good, hot and stimulating; a positive in an evening that had been more nightmare than reality.

Larkin gave her a sidelong glance. “He made one serious mistake when he decided to attack Jake first. The FBI has been faxing me stuff all day from their profiling department. These guys need to feel powerful. It is what fuels their existence. That’s why usually their victims are younger, smaller, and vulnerable physically. Pedophiles, rapists, and serial murders tend to operate under that same urge. He must have been very unhappy when you started your relationship with someone physically superior in size, not to mention a good seven years younger than him. Gleason is actually just average height and probably weighs only a hundred and fifty pounds. Yet he still felt he could win a confrontation.”

She really wanted to block his face—and everything else about him—from her mind. “I suppose that is another advantage to dating someone who is twenty-five,” she said dryly, embarrassed but resigned to the fact that the man sitting next to her had seen even a little bit of the graphic video.

The detective raised his brows and then laughed, catching her meaning. “I won’t ask what the first one is, and don’t worry, Dr. Johnson. While the contents of his apartment will be processed, if there are any pictures or videos, I doubt they would have to be used as evidence. I can always testify that video existed. The fact he was stalking you like his first two victims is pretty clear. The attack today certainly supports that.”

“That’s a ray of sunshine on an otherwise pretty dark day. Thank you, Detective.”

The young man sitting next to her gave her a level look. “You have it backwards, Dr. Johnson, this was not a dark day. I’ve seen dark days, and that’s when it turns out all wrong. For you, today, I think the sun just came out and there isn’t a cloud in the sky.”

Epilogue

Now this was an interesting development.

Jana straightened and grabbed her toothbrush, slowly brushing her teeth, staring in the mirror.

She looked exactly the same. Loose dark hair, blue eyes, same face, same everything.

Well, not exactly.

Jake was still asleep when she emerged from the bathroom and she slid into bed beside him, absorbing his warmth. He slept as always with casual abandon, easily, his lean body relaxed and taking up way more than his half of the bed, long legs sprawled. He still had the cast on his right hand, but his left arm looked normal except the vivid scars.

It was a miracle he was with her, and she felt a throat-clogging rush of emotion.

Damn, she was lucky.

Tentatively, she ran her hand over the muscled contours of his chest. He felt beautifully solid and male.

She inched closer and draped one of her thighs over his leg.

Almost immediately he stirred, thick lashes lifting a fraction. “Uhm...good morning.”

“Yes, it is.” She kissed his jaw, lightly licking the dark early morning stubble, and moved a little more on top of him.

That he liked. He said thickly, “I don’t mind waking up like this, don’t get me wrong, but what the hell time is it?”

“Six.” She threaded her fingers into his rumpled hair and nibbled on his lower lip.

“Six?”

“A.M.”

“Isn’t it bad for a person’s health to have sex at six in the morning?” he asked, but he wasn’t serious, she could tell, because already she could feel the beginning of his swelling erection.

“Speaking of sex...” Was this right way to do it? Because she didn’t know. This was her missing milestone.

His dark eyes were still half-closed, and one hand caressed her back in leisurely strokes. “Yeah, speaking of sex? Were we? I think I was dead asleep.”

“Yes, well, I think *I’m* pregnant. I just did a test. It was positive.”

That certainly got his attention. His dark eyes opened fully and he went very still. “What did you just say?”

“I’ve wondered for the past few weeks,” Jana admitted. “I wasn’t really all that concerned, just ...wondered. We don’t use anything, but Brian and I didn’t either. Maybe it was him, not me. We wanted kids, but we were involved in our careers and when it never happened, we didn’t worry about it.”

“We’re having a baby?” Jake had a stunned look on his face.

Now that was exactly the right thing to say, she thought in dreamy contentment as she shifted so she was fully on top of him, bare breasts to bare chest, her open thighs aligned over his hips. “Yes, *we* are having a baby. I’m late, I can tell there are changes in my body, and modern science tells me that it’s all true.”

“That’s amazing.” His good hand went up and he touched her cheek. His sexy signature smile sent a coil of need spiraling through her stomach. “Jana, really?”

“You’re amazing. No, you’re incredible.” She leaned forward and kissed him, just a light, sweet pressure of her lips to his. “Now, if you don’t mind, can we reenact how this happened in the first place?”

“Absolutely,” he promised.

Lucky for her, the Incredible Quinn was as good as his word.

WATCHER

Sexual Studies 1

THE END

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AUTHOR'S BIO



Kate Watterson/Emma Wildes/Katherine Smith is the author of numerous erotic novels and short stories. Reading has always been her passion and she finds that vibrant characters with strong personalities have a tendency to draw her straight into the story. History is her passion, and it reflects in her choice of wickedly dashing heroes and willful heroines. She lives in rural Indiana and is working on her next romance. Please stop by and visit at www.katewatterson.com. She would love to hear from you.

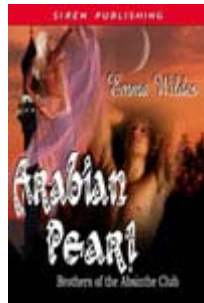
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[THE BLOODSTONE AFFAIR](#) [Brothers of the Absinthe Club 2]

[*Historical Paranormal*] An infamous ghost hunter travels to the most haunted house in England to rescue the woman of his dreams and encounters an evil secret that refuses to die...

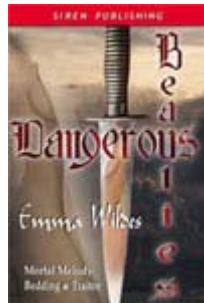
*"Masterfully written, the plot is chillingly delicious with some surprise elements and lots of twists and turns. **5 Hearts**"* —The Romance Studio, *"I was intrigued and fascinated ...eagerly awaiting each new addition to this thrilling series. **5 Blue Ribbons**"* —Romance Junkies.



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"edgy and erotic ...enough heat to warm you on the coldest of nights. 5 Kisses"—Two Lips Reviews, *"very poignant love story that is remarkably breathtaking. 5 Angels"*—Fallen Angel Reviews, *"held me enthralled right to the end. 4.5 Blue Ribbons"*—Romance Junkies, *"sizzling molten lava sex. 4.5 Stars"*—Ecataromance.



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[*Historical*] A war hero and an aristocratic man with a dark gift. Both are jaded, wary, and think they aren't susceptible to the dangerous beauties that captivate them... **"5**

Kisses/Recommended Read" —Two Lips Reviews, **"5 Stars"** —Just Erotic Romance Reviews, **"5 Flags"** —Euro-Reviews, **"5 Angels"** —Fallen Angel Reviews.



BEDDING A TRAITOR [Dangerous Beauties 2]

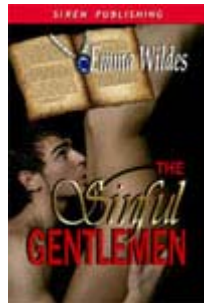
[*Historical / Light BDSM*] A beautiful widow and a war hero with a tarnished reputation find the ultimate passion in a desperate game of deceit... ***"This is not your average historical ...a fresh***

*and exciting read. **5 Stars/ Orgasmic*** —Just Erotic Romance Reviews, *"numerous plot twists that kept me turning the pages as quickly as I could. **5 Kisses**"* —Two Lips Reviews, *"**4.5 Blue Ribbons**"* —Romance Junkies



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[*Historical/ Paranormal*] Can a man who denies his magical destiny find incredible rapture in the arms of a beautiful, but dangerous, young woman? *"**5 Kisses. Recommended Read**"* —Two Lips Reviews, *"**5 Stars**"* —Just Erotic Romance Reviews. *"**5 Angels**"* —Fallen Angel Reviews. *"**5 Flags**"* —Euro-Reviews, *"**4 Stars. Nominee 2006 Reviewers' Choice Award**"* —Ecataromance



THE SINFUL GENTLEMEN [Print Collection]
The Manuscript : Midnight Without a Moon

[*Historical*] A reclusive, wounded scientist. A seasoned rakehell. Both have no faith in love, but that just might change. **"5 Stars"** —Euro Reviews, **"5 Blue Ribbons"** —Romance Junkies, **"5 Stars"** —Just Erotic Romance Reviews, **"5 Angels!"** —Fallen Angel Reviews, **"4 Stars"** —Romantic Times BOOKreviews.



MIDNIGHT WITHOUT A MOON [The Sinful Gentlemen 2]

[*Historical*] An aristocratic rogue and a determined young woman find danger and heated romance in the darkness of midnight without a moon. **"delicious ...carnally passionate and delightfully descriptive. 5 Stars/Hot"** —Just Erotic Romance

Reviews, *"a charming page-turner. 4.5 Kisses"* —Two Lips
Reviews, *"4 Stars"* —Romantic Times BOOKreviews.



THE MANUSCRIPT [The Sinful Gentlemen 1]

[*Historical*] A desperate ingénue and a reclusive scientist find love matters more than scandal and some more than intriguing ideas for everlasting passion in *The Manuscript*. *"5 Stars/ Excellent"* —Euro Reviews, *"5 Blue Ribbons"* —Romance Junkies, *"5 Stars/ Hot"* —Just Erotic Romance Reviews, *"5 Angels!"* —Fallen Angel Reviews, *"4 Stars"* —Romantic Times BOOKreviews.



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