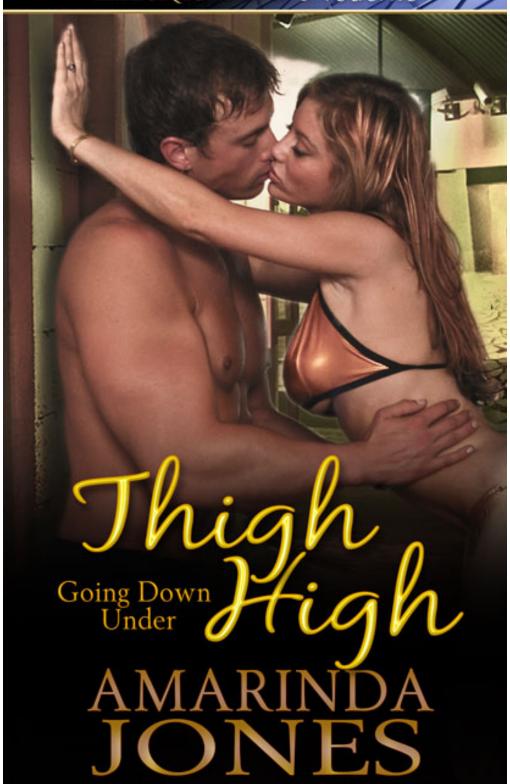
ELLORA'S CAVE Moderne



Thigh High Amarinda Jones

Fourteen years ago, Joe Patterson left the small outback town of Amberwarra Falls and broke Maz Adler's heart. Now he's back. Hotter and sexier than Maz remembered. It's hard holding a grudge when you want to hold a luscious man tight against you and lick every hard, hot curve. But the man needs to be taught a lesson and Maz is the girl to do it.

Joe came back home for one reason. Maz. Problem is, Maz isn't about to open her arms and allow him back into her life and her body. But Joe has a plan to seduce his lover and break down Maz's resistance. His aim? Her total surrender. And he's going to enjoy every hot, sweaty moment loving her under the Aussie sun.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



Thigh High

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THIGH HIGH

Amarinda Jones

Dedication

Dedicated to Cyclops, who taught me a very painful lesson in trust. While he is a

complete toerag, I thank him for the reminder that not all is as it seems in life. Always

look below the surface, ladies.

And as always, where would I be without the dedicated Amarinda readers. Your

loyalty means everything to me.

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Akubra: Akubra Hats Pty Ltd.

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Red Door: UNOPCO Sub, Inc.

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Glossary

Akubra: wide brimmed hat made of leather

Beaut: excellent

Big smoke: the city. It refers to pollution or smog commonly found in the city

Blind Freddy: something so obvious even a blind person could see it

Blue: nickname for people with red hair

Bonza: great

Buggered off: gone, left

Buggers: used affectionately, like pests

Bum: butt

Bung: put in place

Dodgy: suspicious

Dunny: toilet

Dusty: nickname used for people with the surname "Baker" – flour is dusty

Drop-kicked: kicked a football

Fair suck of the sav: to give someone a break

Footy: football

Fringe: bangs

Frozen chook raffle: a chook is a chicken. Often in Australian pubs a raffle will be held to raise money for charity. A common one is raffling off a meat tray that can include a frozen chicken as part of the prize

Lamingtons: vanilla butter cake rolled in chocolate then shredded coconut

Mates: friends

Nong: silly person

On heat: lusting for someone

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Pissed as a newt: drunk

Poofter: slang word for gay

Pull your head in: get real

Readies: available money

Struth: God's truth—used as an exclamation

Scrag: trollop, slut

Sprog: child

Stoked: happy, pleased

Stone the flaming crows: exclamation—"are you kidding me?"

Strides: trousers

Stuff it: to hell with it

Toerag: someone who treats people badly

You old bag: affectionate term for a woman

Chapter One

"Aren't you going to strip?" Joe Patterson was naked and ready for anything.

Marilyn "Maz" Adler smiled down at the naked man before her. The green eyes she knew so well caught and held hers and she had the overriding urge to push back the blond cowlick that made his hair always look rumpled and sexy. *Oh he looks good*. There was a manly rawness in his face that made her stomach contract and her heart race. *Did I ever get over him? And was he always so tall and lean and lickable?*

Maz liked that Joe was so eager and needy, and that he dropped his clothes at her simplest command. He was spread out on the bed waiting for whatever Maz chose to do next and that gave her an amazing sense of power. There was also the thrill that despite the fact that they had been lovers a long time ago, there was a strange sense of the excitement of the unknown that held them. Maz also liked that Joe was basically ready and willing for anything Maz chose to do. She liked that a lot.

"You don't like this?" Maz fingered the black lace of her slip, knowing that the pale flesh of her full breasts pushed out enticingly. Joe had always liked her breasts. He had often enthused lyrically about her pale, buxom curves and her titian-red hair. *You were born in the wrong century, Maz, and yet I am glad for it.* "I wore it just for you." She could see Joe's cock jerk in excitement. The wet warmth between her legs made her thighs slippery with need. *But I can wait. Lessons need to be learned here*.

They had met at the "no-tell-motel" outside town. It was relatively private and if enough money was exchanged no one would know either of them had been there. That was important in a small town. What they did was no one else's business. Joe was there thinking it was to relive old memories of being together but Maz was there for revenge.

"I would rather you wore less."

Maz raised her eyebrows in mock surprise. "This isn't about you though, is it?" She had made that clear in her note. *Joe, I need you to come and do whatever I choose to ask of you.* It was the sort of note that said a lot but could mean just about anything.

"I was hoping we could share the moment."

"Just a moment? Is that all you've got? I was hoping to have that fat, hard cock inside me for longer than that." She liked how he swallowed hard to keep control. It made her feel better knowing he was not as in control as he pretended to be.

Joe reached out his hand to her. "Come here and I'll show you what I can do."

Part of Maz wanted to do just that. She wanted to slide down on his cock and be filled up with the hard heat of it once more. But that was not the plan. She had things she had to do first.

"Again, this is about me. You seem to be forgetting that." Maz knew the easy smile he gave her was one of a confident man who believed whatever game she was playing would eventually give him pleasure. There was no way Maz was going to make this easy on Joe.

"Please, Maz..."

It would have been so easy to take his hand and fall into his arms as she once had so long ago. "Please what?"

"You're a difficult woman."

You have no idea how much, yet. "But I can be fair." She lifted the fabric from her thighs, just enough to reach under and hook the sides of her panties with her fingers. Maz knew Joe wanted to see more but that was not happening until she was ready, if ever. She tugged at her panties until the lace fell to the ground. Maz reached down. Picked them up and tossed them over her shoulder. "Mmmm, I feel so much more comfortable now."

She walked to the bed, wondering at Joe's self-control. He had changed from the eager, explosive young man she had once known. Maz looked at the fat head of his

cock. She was itching to touch and taste. But that was not the plan yet. "You look awfully hard. Are you all tense with need, Joseph?" Maz had always called him by his first name when she wanted to prove a point. "And yet the skin looks so soft on the outside. Would you flinch if my tongue followed the long vein down your shaft?"

Joe swallowed hard and his hands reached out for her. "Anything you do to me I will love."

Maz crawled onto the bed and slapped away his hands.

He sighed. "I know, whatever this is, it's all about you."

She smiled at his words. "Smart boy." Maz lifted one leg over Joe's lap and straddled his thighs. She could tell by the swift intake of his breath that he could feel the wet curls of her pussy against his skin. Maz moved against the muscled warmth of his skin, her clit pushing back and forward against his flesh, the contact making her shiver with need. Maz leaned forward over Joe's body. She liked the way his cock jumped to meet her flesh in response. She pushed the bobbing shaft away. *Hard but soft*. *Yum*.

For the next ten minutes, Maz placed wet, sucking kisses all over Joe's body, gently pushing his cock away every time it tried to get her attention. She squeezed it once just to get his reaction.

"Oh god."

Good reaction. "Too hard?" Maz squeezed again. "Too soft?" She rubbed the pad of her thumb over the tip. She heard his breath catch. "Oh, was that bad? You look like you're in pain." Although it had been many years since they had been lovers, Maz never forgot how exquisite it was to touch Joe. He was hot, hard and responsive and he struck an unforgettable chord inside her.

"More."

"Not yet." Maz let go of his cock and leaned forward and licked his skin from his jaw, down his neck and sternum almost to the base of his cock before following the path back up and down again several times. She had always loved doing that. Maz saw how his hands gripped the bedsheet, knuckles white with tension. She pushed back until she

was on her haunches, her legs spread just enough for him to see the mound of her pussy. Maz dropped her head and nibbled on Joe's inner thighs, making sure to brush his balls with her hair, her hands, her cheek. She looked up at him. "Having fun?" Maz fisted his cock in one quick move. She smiled when he caught his breath, "I've always wondered what it would be like to suck one but I can't do that, can I?"

"What? Why not?"

"You always thought it was tacky for me to do that to you. That I wasn't 'that kind of girl'." Sex back then had been simple. Nothing too over the top. They had started out with the thigh-high rule. Heavy petting but no penetration. That rule had lasted one night. Rules were stupid. After that they had just experimented on each other. They were young and dumb and Joe had this honorable streak in him which Maz later discovered was flawed. It was kind of funny now, after all these years, that her first lover was back in her arms and his views on what kind of girl she was had changed.

"You can do whatever you want to me, Maz." Joe's voice was hoarse with need.

"Gee, I don't know..." Her thumb once more teased the head of his cock as the other hand pushed up and down his shaft in a slow milking action.

"Do you remember everything I've said?"

"Oh yeah, and everything you've done," Maz replied. That's why she was there. The minute she heard Joe was coming back to town she made sure to contact him. She leaned down once more and did what she'd always wanted to. Maz slid her tongue down his cock, following the long vein along and then back up again. She liked the drawn-out, low growl of appreciation. She had never done that to any man ever before. And she knew she probably never would again. Despite everything else, Maz had never loved any man but Joe. She was just about to take another taste when there was a knock on the hotel door.

"Excellent." She sat up and took her hands from his body. Time for her revenge. Leave me as you once did? I'll leave you behind this time.

"What? Why? Don't stop. Just ignore whoever it is and stay with me."

Maz made sure as she moved from his body he could feel how wet her pussy was. She wanted to leave him with the knowledge of the tight heat he could have been sliding up into. "That's room service. I ordered cheesecake." She had rung ahead to make sure there would be a distraction in the proceedings. Joe look stunned. He was meant to. Maz slipped off the bed making sure to flash just enough of her bare ass to make him feel hotter and needier.

"But what about me?"

Maz stopped and considered him for a moment. He really was a lovely man and if circumstances had been different she would have jumped back into bed with him.

"Hmmm, cheesecake or cock? Which one would satisfy this overwhelming hunger I have?" The knock sounded on the door again. "Actually neither. As for your little problem there, it's a damn shame Cheryl is still not in town as I'm sure she'd help you out."

Joe's eyes narrowed in acknowledgement of her words. "So you found out about Cheryl." It was not a question.

"That you screwed her after making me feel guilty? Oh yeah. I never forgot." Maz snatched up her car keys and opened the door and took the plate of cheesecake from the startled room service attendant. She was dressed in only a black slip and no shoes but Maz didn't care and she wasn't about to stop and deal with Joe any longer than she had to. She had done what she'd planned. He had made her feel stupid all those years ago and now it was her turn.

"Welcome home, Joe." Maz walked out the door.

* * * * *

Fourteen years ago.

Maz Adler felt like her body had turned to stone. She couldn't move. Her feet were fixed to the spot. She couldn't speak as she watched the man she loved, his hard, lean

body highlighted in the moonlight as he moved with a masculine grace that made her hold her breath. The woman beneath him moaned and clutched his shoulders, her legs wrapped around his waist, meeting him thrust for thrust.

This was sex at a raw, basic level and for one moment Maz wondered if this was how she looked with Joe. It was abandoned and wanton and the smell of sex overpowered the frangipani tree the two lovers lay under.

Joe's taut butt, rising and falling as his cock plunged in and out of the woman, had Maz mesmerized. It was the last thing Maz expected to see. Two naked people in a special place where she and Joe had made love. It was just so wrong yet Maz couldn't move. Her Joe was fucking another woman and she wanted to scream at him to stop but the power of speech had also left her.

But then, was he "her Joe"? Her mind spun back to three days ago when she had been the woman in his arms and everything had been right in her world.

"We will be together forever," he had whispered against her lips as his cock had sunk deep into the wet core of her body.

"I love you, Joe." To love another man as she did this one would have been impossible. Some things a woman just knew. This man was always meant to be hers.

"There is no other woman for me but you, Maz."

Clearly bloody not. Of course Maz knew the other woman he held in his arms. She had wanted Joe for a long time and now she had him—on her, in her. That he had taken what she offered so quickly after their argument stung Maz to the core. Maybe she had needed to see this to realize it was really over. Did he ever really love me? But then, that argument had answered that question and Maz knew she was pretty stupid to have come searching for Joe after that.

"Come with me to Sydney." Joe's eyes had been bright with dreams and the promise of adventure. He had been twenty-one and everything had seemed doable to him.

Amarinda Jones

Maz, at twenty, had been content with her life. "My home is here in Amberwarra Falls." It was the town she grew up in, the town she loved. Maz had never planned to leave. That Joe would, had never occurred to her.

He had taken her hands in his. "I need more."

"Aren't I enough?" Maz had meant it to sound like a joke but the serious look in his eyes had made the words come out in a panic.

"I could ask you the same thing."

Joe had wanted her to leave with him. Maz had loved her life and her man and she was being forced to choose between the two. "I don't want to leave." Maybe it was naïve and parochial of her, but Maz had no need to conquer other worlds. She had been content with the world she was in.

"I can't stay." Joe's hand had tightened on hers. "If you loved me you would come with me."

Maz had pulled on his hand until hers was free. "That sounds like an ultimatum." At twenty she hadn't known a lot about life, but Maz had been aware that nothing good came from forcing another's hand.

"It's what I feel."

What Joe was telling her was he felt she didn't love him unless she packed up and followed him like some lovesick simpleton who could not conceive of her life with anyone but him.

"Maybe you're right. Maybe I don't love you enough." Even as she had said the words she had known they weren't true.

Joe had sighed. "What are you scared of in the outside world, Maz?"

"I'm not scared of anything." *Am I scared to leave home?* She hadn't believed so. It was more a feeling that she knew where she belonged.

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"I can't say here in this town."
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"Joe, I can't—"

Thigh High

"You have to grow up sometime, Maz."

The impatience in his voice had cut into her. "Oh right and you're so mature."

"I know what I want."

"As do I." And she wasn't about to choose differently because Joe decreed it.

He had raked an agitated hand through his hair. "Marilyn—"

"Joseph," Maz retaliated with his full name as they did when they were angry with the other. They had known each other since they were kids but it was only in the last eighteen months that knowledge had deepened into love. "Why do I have to change for you? Why can't you adapt for me?" He could come and go to Sydney and she would see him off and welcome him back.

"I'm planning to go in a week and I'm not coming back."

Right. I know where I stand. "I'm staying here."

Joe shook his head. "So much for love."

Idiot. "You have no idea what love is if I am the only one to make sacrifices." Maz wasn't against changes but they had to be reciprocal moves and not just one doing everything for the other.

"Is it a 'sacrifice'?"

"It is if I give up what I want." Couldn't he see that? Maz wasn't going to hold him back but neither would she beg him to stay. "It's as important to me to be here as it is for you to go to Sydney." The sudden silence that had followed her words had been deafening.

"Maybe it was only great sex between us."

Bastard. "Maybe." It was more and they had both known it but she hadn't been about to fight his words. Joe's need to go had been stronger than his need for her.

"So this is it?"

"Yes."

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And then he'd gone to her. Of all the women in the town, Joe chose Cheryl to fuck. That he was angry and tense, Maz could understand. That it was the town slut he took and made her scream with passion made Maz ill.

She wanted to scream in pain as she ripped every hair out of Cheryl's peroxide blonde head. Maz was so angry she wanted to pull Joe off the slut and beat him with her bare hands. She knew she should have left the minute she found them together but it was like watching a train wreck. Ghastly and impossible to conceive of but unable to walk away from without wobbly legs. Why was she watching them? The only answer that came to Maz was maybe it was to understand that what she had with Joe was dead and that, like him, she needed to move on.

Chapter Two

Present day

"Only poofters use gyms," Blue Green announced to all at the bar of The Naked Shearer Pub. His best friend Dusty Baker nodded in agreement.

Merlene Thomas, the barkeeper, rolled her eyes at the redheaded man's statement. "Women have signed up already."

"Exercise! What those women need is a bloody good—"

"Say it, Blue, and that will be another fiver for the swear tin." Merlene picked up the tin and rattled it.

"Struth you're a hard woman, Merlene." Dusty shook his head.

"Well, you need to have a bit of decorum or you'll be out on your bum. Besides it's a matter of whether you keep your money for beer or shoot your mouth off and it goes in the charity tin. We're looking after injured wombats this week."

"Stone the flaming crows, Merlene, you and your bloody ratty wild animals. To think that's where my hard-earned readies go."

Merlene slammed the tin down before Blue. "Got a problem with that, sunshine?"

"Nah, just pull us a pint, ya old bag."

Maz Adler smiled at the clients of The Naked Shearer Pub. She loved her job. There was never a dull moment. Least of all now. Amberwarra Falls, population of three hundred permanent residents and an unknown number of transient workers depending on the shearing and fruit-picking seasons, was getting a gym. It was the only thing everyone was talking about. Local boy made good Joe "Patto" Patterson had come back home to start up a fitness centre.

Maz's mind flashed back to the hotel and Joe lying naked and erect on the bed. He was probably still a little annoyed with her. *Okay, probably a lot.* She was in two minds

about that. While it was true she was fourteen years older and wiser, she had enjoyed her small moment of payback. It was dumb and childish but the cheesecake was delicious.

Seeing Joe again was something she had thought a lot about. In theory, he should mean nothing to her. Fourteen years was a long time and much water had passed under the bridge and her anger at him should have burnt out but it hadn't. Maz was still pissed that he'd had sex with the town scrag, Cheryl. The vivid picture of them together still burned in her mind. The excited talk of Joe leaving town to seek his fortune had broken her heart and Maz had been more than happy when he'd left. *Yeah*, *stuff it*, *he deserved what he got in the motel room*.

"I don't know why we need a gym." Blue accepted the beer and slurped the thin head of foam off the top.

"To get fit, you mad bugger." Merlene reached over the solid wooden bar and poked him in his beer gut.

Dusty was instantly on the defense. "Hey, that's winter weight I need to live on."

"Well, you'll be living a long bloody time then." Merlene turned her attention to Maz. "Patto's been in the big smoke for a while. It makes you wonder why he's coming home."

Maz wasn't about to answer that. Her boss knew only too well what had happened between them and speculating about Joe was not something she did anymore. It had to be at least a year since she had.

And then the word had shot around town. Joe Patterson was coming home. That in itself was big news. But a gym? While everyone knew Joe was a qualified fitness instructor and had traveled the world doing it, not one expected him to want to settle back in Amberwarra Falls. But that appeared to be what he was doing. He had bought a house and had come back to town.

"Big smoke? Upper Kumbucca West?" Dusty looked impressed.

Maz shook her head in amusement. Upper Kumbucca West had probably a hundred head more population and its only claim to fame over Amberwarra Falls was it had a two-hundred-year-old apple, shrunken with age, under a glass dome in the local library. It was from the first apple harvest and the townsfolk took it very seriously. "No, he's been in Sydney." That was all she wanted to know. Ignorance was easy to deal with.

Dusty nodded his head. "I went there once. More people than flies. I turned tail and came home. It wasn't natural."

"Nah, besides they all talk funny in big cities." Blue gulped his beer down and slid the glass across the bar for another.

To the patrons in The Naked Shearer Pub, home was Amberwarra Falls. It was a six-hour drive from the city of Brisbane and surrounded by the vast nothingness of the Australian outback. The town had been founded in the early eighteen hundreds. The streets had been built wide enough for horses and carriages or the long road trains that passed through on the way to places like Alice Springs and Darwin.

The Naked Shearer Pub, with its painted fresco of a nude, grinning shearer with his Akubra hat placed strategically over his genitals, had been standing longer than the town hall, which had been built in 1850. Back then the local watering hole provided beer, news and companionship and no one cared much for politics. Maz's family had served on the town council since its inception. There was always an Adler on the board or as mayor. Her Auntie Beryl, the last of her family, was on the council and few challenged Beryl when she wanted to do something.

As for Amberwarra Falls—well, there were no "falls" to speak of. Years ago, before the crippling drought, there had been a trickling stream of water that ran over a rocky outcrop down into Possum Gully. It had never been spectacular but it had drawn the odd tourist to stop and take a photo before moving on. But not now. There was nothing to see but red, rough rock and dust. Even the possums had left. There had been talk about changing the name of the town but that had been vetoed. As Beryl Adler, cultural

guardian of all things local had said, "If we change the name we'd have to change the postcards and we got them as a job lot." That was true. They had six hundred and thirty-two left out of six hundred and fifty purchased. No one was about to throw those out due to lack of water.

"I still don't know why he's coming back to bung in a gym where Davo's book emporium burnt down. Not like we need newfangled stuff like that."

It hadn't been so much an emporium as a dusty old shop that sold tattered old books, comics, newspapers and once a week the local poker game had been held in the back storeroom. It was on poker night that the store went up in flames. Many said it was the cigars the men liked to smoke. Others blamed a mosquito coil used to keep the insects at bay.

The real reason? The fire brigade found evidence a scented candle had been burning during the game. It was thought someone had knocked it over. Of course no man admitted to it mainly because being caught anywhere near anything scented and girlie was not something any of them wanted to claim.

"Yeah, we don't need new stuff in the Falls." Dusty always agreed with anything Blue said. They were mates since kindergarten. "Besides we're already on the map."

Maz rolled her eyes. She knew which map they were referring to. "That map is hardly prestigious."

"Yeah, but if you look us up on gaggle -"

"Google," Maz corrected Dusty.

"Same bloody difference."

Merlene picked up and rattled the swear tin at him.

"Fair suck of the sav, Merle. Bloody's not a swear word."

"Cough up, sunshine." Merlene waited for Dusty to pay up for his swearing.

"Jeez, you're a mad cow. You and your bloody wombats." Dusty threw a collection of coins into the tin.

"You used two 'bloody's."

Dusty rolled his eyes and added a ten dollar note. "Happy now? Anyway, as I was saying, anyone can see the toilet block in Captain Cook Park got Amberwarra Falls fourth prize in the cleanest toilets in Queensland."

Maz smiled and wondered how Captain Cook would feel about being a namesake of a park that held a toilet block that was the second biggest attraction to the now nonexistent falls. There was even a shiny brass plaque proclaiming they were fourth best.

"Yeah, dunnies are important if you pass through Amberwarra as there's nothing for miles until Krogan's Crossing." Blue slapped some more money on the counter for a refill.

Merlene pulled the beer, flicking the tap with an expert hand. "And your Auntie Beryl does a roaring trade with her crocheted doll toilet roll cover stand that she's set up just outside those toilets."

"That's right." Blue thanked Merlene for the beer. "Beryl does big business for the Pioneer Women's nag-fest group and no one gets past her without buying one."

That was true. Auntie Beryl could sell toilet roll covers to aliens from Mars. It wasn't so much she was a great salesperson or that the dolls were attractive. They weren't. It came down to the fact that Beryl, at fifty-three, with her fake raven-black locks and large breasts and forceful voice, often stopped people in their tracks. She was like an aging kewpie doll, complete with Doris Day bow in her hair. Once stopped, they often walked away with at least one crocheted doll and a few less dollars in their pockets. No one said no to Beryl.

"G'day all." Three generations of the Petersen family walked into the pub. They were a large clan who liked to do things together. Maz found that sweet. As much as she loved Beryl, she wished she had more family. Her mother, Mae, had passed away when Maz was a teenager and her father had been a shearer passing through town that her mother had taken a shine to. "She never could keep her legs together long if there

was a charming man around," Beryl had often told Maz as she was growing up in her care. "But she wasn't a slut. She was passionate and wild and carefree. I think Mae got more out of her short life than most people dream of. Not that I would condone that for you, Maz. Your mother was just different."

Maz just smiled and accepted Beryl's words without querying her contradictory words. That was Beryl. She was a law unto herself.

"It's a bit late for you lot to be out and about, isn't it?" The Petersens were rarely seen at the pub after dark. They were sociable folk but only during the day.

"We had a bit of trouble at home," Esther Peterson, matriarch of the family, reported as she came to a standstill at the bar. "Big Bill Baxter got drunk and invaded our house. Snakebite please, Maz love. And told everyone to piss off out of his home."

Big Bill was a force to be reckoned with drunk or sober. He was six foot seven and built like a brick shithouse. "But it's not his house." Maz smiled as she poured three quarters of a schooner of beer, added a quarter of cider and a splash of black currant juice for the black snakebite.

Esther nodded, her faded cornflower-blue eyes alight with cynical amusement. "Yeah, but you know what Big Bill is like when he's pissed as a newt. Besides we went to a screening of *Gone with the Wind* at the Coronet theatre. He'll have buggered off by the time we get back home." None of the Petersens seemed particularly worried about it.

"I love that movie." Maz made a mental note to find time to go to the Coronet to watch it.

"Bloody hell. It's him."

Maz didn't flinch. She knew in a heartbeat who "him" was. She had been waiting for the day when he walked into The Naked Shearer. Joe Patterson was now officially back in town and as much as Maz wanted to deny that and avoid him she knew that was going to be impossible. She grabbed a glass and began filling it with beer. It would

work best if she acted as normal and made no more fuss than she had to. He was just like any other man.

Cries of "G'day, Patto" resounded around the room. He was still the local hero who almost made it to the Olympics in athletics. Maz only remembered him as the twenty-one-year-old boyfriend who screwed around on her.

"Are you okay, Maz?" Merlene gave her a worried look.

"Yes. Why?" She was so all right she was rigid with it.

"You've overfilled the glass and it's running down onto the floor." Merlene pulled the tap handle from her.

Maz looked down at her jeans leg. It was soaked with beer. She had been so tense she hadn't even noticed. "Sorry."

"No worries." Merlene grabbed a cloth and was mopping up liquid on the countertop. "Do you want to go home?"

Oh yes. Running and hiding would be an excellent idea. The only problem was Amberwarra Falls was a small town and she would meet him sooner or later. "I have to face him sometime." As Maz said the last word, the him in question appeared. Oh lordy. He's still gorgeous.

"Put your tongue back in, darl." Merlene nudged Maz's arm.

Maz shook herself accordingly. They were over a long time ago and while lust was natural it was not to be acted on. Not with Joe.

"Maz."

No one said her name like he did. She had never forgotten the low, husky timbre of his voice. And those lips...what they used to do to her. He had the ability to kiss for hours. Maz had always thought that more intimate than actual sex. It would make her feel all boneless and completely his. When Joe kissed her, she was his to do whatever he wanted. Maz gulped as she remembered how powerless she had been under those lips.

Amarinda Jones

Oh boy, focus. You were twenty, for god's sake. You thought everything was exciting back then. Remember Cheryl.

"Joe." She acknowledged him with a nod as if he was any other customer. *I have to keep this together*. Her plan had been to treat him like anyone else. Of course he wasn't. This was Joe—her first and only lover. He had marked her for life. Other gorgeous men had come and gone in her life and Maz had thought "what if?" But unlike some of her peers she wanted more. Maybe that was old-fashioned. Maybe she was just picky. Until Joe came back to town Maz had been scared to name it. *I've always wanted Joe*. A sudden vision of her on his cock slammed into her mind. *Whoa*.

"W-what can I get you?" Hopefully she was the only one who noticed that stammer. On automatic, she picked up a glass. She remembered what Joe drank. Maz had forgotten nothing about this man.

"Beer's fine." He leaned in and lowered his voice. "You set me up, Marilyn."

Uh-oh. Joe only ever called her that when he wanted to prove a point. Maz could see why he was but surely he could see why she did it? "Yes, I did."

"Did it feel good?"

"Yeah, it did."

Joe sized her up. "You must have loved me a lot to have done that. Do you still?"

"Nope."

"Really?"

"Yep." She placed the beer before him.

"So you go around sucking a lot of men's cocks?"

Maz knew what he was trying to do and she wasn't about to feel silly for what she did. "Technically I didn't suck. I licked."

Merlene came over to them. "Everything okay here?"

"I was just telling Maz how good she looked."

"Thank you." She could feel his eyes on her as she went about her tasks.

"Have you signed up for the gym?"

Maz snorted. She was no gym bunny. Her idea of working out was the mega crossword puzzle in the *Amberwarra Sentinel* and even then she rarely finished it due to lack of patience. "Nope." Maz pulled another beer, for no one in particular, just to keep her hands busy. The head had too much creamy foam on it but too bad. That was the best she could do under the circumstances.

Joe smiled. "Why not?"

"I don't like to sweat." The minute Maz said it her mind went back all those years ago to when she had done some pretty hot, sweaty and naked things with Joe. Maz clamped her legs together tightly as the memory of hard, hot cock shot into her mind. "Besides I'm happy with how I look." She wasn't slim but then she wasn't overweight. Maz had heard Dusty and Blue describe her as plump. She had rolled her eyes when she heard but Merlene had assured her that was the equivalent of "hot" in their language. That in itself freaked Maz out. While she liked the two older farmhands, she didn't want them considering her at all.

Joe's eyes did a slow perusal of her body. "You don't want to tone up?"

Maz knew he was trying to bait her. She wasn't about to fall for it. "I'm plenty toned."

"Yeah, I always like soft women."

"Soft?" Maz considered herself as hard as nails. His betrayal had made her that way. Maybe it was foolish to feel like that but seeing Joe with another woman had hit her hard and even now it was not something she could forget.

"Yeah." Joe leaned in once more and lowered his voice so only Maz could hear.

"Remember how good it was when I had you on your knees and I fucked you from behind? The feel of your soft ass still haunts me, Maz."

She swallowed hard and felt the heat rush to her face. *Oh yes, I remember.* "Well I have buns of steel now and the thigh-high rule is back in force."

Amarinda Jones

"Oh yeah?" Joe pulled a card from his pocket and flipped it on the bar. "I'd like to see your buns and we both know how long that rule lasted."

Maz had meant the thigh-high rule when they first started dating to allow them to get to know each other rather than just rush into a wild sexual relationship. *I was so young and naïve then*. But now she was older and wiser and more able to enforce a rule. All Maz had to do was think back to the night when she had caught Joe out.

"Anything else you want?" There was a moment of silence between them that seemed to stretch out for hours.

"Come and check me and the gym out, Maz. If you're game." He winked and moved away from the bar.

Damn man. He knew she could never resist a dare.

Chapter Three

"Wait, wait," Maz pushed her hands against Joe's chest. "What are we doing?" She was hot, trembling, hair all over the place and her naked butt was sticking to the vinyl of a pink exercise mat at the gym. She had gone there to answer a challenge, not to have sex with Joe. Yet there she was all naked and hot with the man in question. It was like the gap of fourteen years had never happened.

"You don't know what's going on here?" Joe held her close, pushing up from the mat and sitting on his haunches. He kissed her hard and passionately.

The man was barely giving her time to breathe. One minute she had been all cranky and full of attitude and the next she was flat on her mat, naked and under Joe before she knew what was happening. It had amazed her how fast Joe had emptied the gym of people and locked the doors. As for her clothes? He had always been fast with his hands and the man could pull off a sports bra quicker than she could. Maz usually ended up with it wrapped around her neck. But not Joe. The fabric covering her breasts was replaced by his hands and a million memories flooded back.

"This is so wrong." Well, wrong-ish. The whole naked thing was pretty good and exciting but that would lead to sex and Maz had already made too many promises to herself not to have her head turned once more by Joe.

Joe's hands slid down to her bum to pull her closer to his erection. "You're not going to quote the thigh-high rule to me are you?"

The thighs in question were parted by the hard cock at the entrance of her body. All rules had been thrown out the window. "We shouldn't be doing this." Even as she said the words, Maz rubbed her body against his reveling in the feel of his chest hair against her breasts.

"Why? It's not wrong. You're not involved with another man."

"How do you know?" Was it that obvious?

"I asked around." Joe's eyes locked with hers. "In fact word is there has been no man in your life ever—except me of course."

She pushed back from him, annoyed that he looked pleased with the knowledge. "Well 'word' is wrong." *Damn word*. How was she supposed to come across all modern and sophisticated when everyone in town gossiped about her solitary state? "Anyway, regardless of whether I am or not, the thing is I don't want you.

Joe's hand circled around and slid between her legs. He smiled as she jumped in response. "You're wet."

She closed her eyes for a moment, giving in to the sweet sensation of his fingers on her clit. "Joseph..." His name was supposed to come out stern but it was bordering more on a moan.

"Marilyn..." His mouth found hers.

It would have been against the laws of nature not to kiss him back. Maz's arms wound around his neck and once more her body was tight against his. His cock was sandwiched in between them in promise of more and better if she allowed it. And Maz wanted to but how rational was that? He'd cheated on her. And while Joe didn't know she knew about Cheryl, Maz still considered his actions cheating. What to do? What to do? Technically it was a long time ago. They were older and wiser. Could anyone be expected to hold a grudge that long? *Good point*. And, he did owe her something for his betrayal. *And I need a damn good fuck*. That moment with him in the motel had left her empty and needy. Besides, who would they be hurting if she just lifted up and slid down on him?

"Condom?"

"Oh yeah." He leaned back and picked up his discarded track pants.

Maz looked at him in surprise as he withdrew one from a pocket.

"I was hopeful." He grinned at her as he worked the ring of rubber from its covering. "What?"

There were so many reasons why this was completely the wrong move for Maz to make. She didn't sleep around. She was picky. *But this was Joe...* "This can only be a one-off quick fuck." The words were out of her mouth before she could think.

Joe smiled, his eyes on hers. "For old time's sake." He worked the rubber down his shaft.

"Yes." When he said it like that it made a lot of sense.

"To burn up calories," he added with a chuckle as his hands went under her thighs to lift Maz up.

Well, in that case it would be insane not to have sex with Joe. She was doing it for her health. "Yes." She kneeled above him, his cock poised at the lips of her vagina.

"Liar," Joe murmured against her mouth.

"Whatever. Who cares. Just shut up and kiss me." Maz pushed down over his cock. The sudden rush of hard heat made her dizzy. It had been so long since she had felt anything as amazing as this. Maz had never wanted another man since Joe. She had always known in her heart no other man could compete.

"I always loved kissing you."

* * * * *

Fifteen minutes earlier

"Oh yeah, I remember this well." Joe's eyes were on Maz's ass. She was on her hands and knees, bum in the air as she struggled to do the plank maneuver that was designed to strengthen her core and abs. Joe wasn't sure what it was doing for her, but it was sure strengthening a certain part on him.

His cock had been hard since that moment at the motel. Joe had gone there thinking about fucking the stuffing out of a woman he had never forgotten nor stopped loving.

He had almost been gleeful when he had found her note slipped into his mailbox asking for them to meet "for old time's sake". He smiled as he remembered how she turned the tables on him and she was justified. Joe knew he never should have taken Cheryl as he had that night but he was angry and filled with need and although she was not and never could be Maz, he wanted to prove to himself that Maz was like any woman and no more special than anyone else.

Of course that was madness and he knew now, more than ever, that Maz was the only woman he would ever love. *How did I ever leave her behind?* But then all those years ago he had been young and restless and Joe would even admit to having been stupid. Now he was back home, where he'd finally realized he belonged, and he wasn't about to waste a second chance with Maz.

That she had not married or become involved with anyone all these years amazed him. When he first heard the news through the ever-reliable Amberwarra Falls grapevine he had felt a strange spurt of excitement shoot through him. There was nothing like first love. "You filled out nicely."

Maz lifted up and turned to face him. It was not a graceful thing to do under the circumstances but she carried it off with the minimum of awkwardness. "Are you saying I'm fat?

Only a woman would say that in defense. While Joe couldn't speak for all men, he knew the perception of weight may worry a woman but never did it occur to him to find flaws in someone due to a particular body shape. He smiled at the nervous look in her eyes. Could she feel it as he did? Had her heart started to pound as madly as his had the minute their eyes met? He had travelled the word and yes, had sex with other women, but no one had ever compared to his first love, Maz.

"So does the thigh-high rule still apply?" Gossip around town was there had been no men in her life. That no man had gotten past her knees since he had. What did Maz want from a lover? Joe wondered about that. As a lover Maz had been giving and

hungry with need for fulfillment. How did anyone switch that off and avoid contact with others?

"Yes." Maz stood up.

Joe held his hand out. That she avoided it was not unexpected. That was Maz. She had always been a law unto herself even way back when they were dating. It had deterred a lot of men but not him. Joe had seen the need and the great abundance of love within her and he had wooed her accordingly. Now he could see by the set of her mouth Maz wanted to fight him. That gave him encouragement. She was not immune to him.

"So what do you think of the place?" He was proud of the gym. It was something he had wanted to try for the longest time. Joe had been sick of working for other people. Sure, it had taken him all over the world but there was nothing like being your own boss. There was nothing like being back at home. There was no place in the world like Amberwarra Falls.

"The name, Patto's Place, must have taken you hours to come up with." Maz rolled her eyes cynically. "And it's pink."

"As is your face." Not many women still blushed anymore. And yeah, Maz was right it was pink, but pink was a vibrant positive color and marketing and experience proved that worked when it came to fitness.

"And it's flashy."

Joe could almost hear the "like you" in her voice. "And?" His lip curled in amusement.

"And you must be very rich."

"I do okay. How about you?" That she was the same Maz he fell in love with was all that mattered. Joe was prepared to do whatever had had to in order to have her back in his life.

"Me too."

Stubborn as. "Never wanted to leave?"

"I've always known where I belong."

It was funny, years ago he had not been able to understand why Maz had stayed, but now Joe knew. Some people understood where home was straightaway. It was the place that spoke to you like no other. Maz was smart. She had not needed to search for something she already had in her life. It had taken Joe years to work that out. Maybe the gym was a crazy thing to do, but he wanted to come home and start a business. Working in and running a gym was the one of the things he knew how to do well. He had worked hard for his qualifications in both personal training and business.

Joe did a long, slow perusal of the woman before him. That she still blushed was adorable in his eyes but then she had always been that way. I was just too stupid to see that. Looking at her now he felt his cock twitch in anticipation of what was to come. Maybe it was arrogant but Joe had a feeling that he was not the only one feeling the intense sexual heat between them. Nothing had ever burned as brightly as it had with Maz. It amused Joe that despite her words to the contrary, Maz had not being able to resist his dare and come to the gym. "So what do you want here Maz?" Pick me.

"Not you."

"I wasn't offering." But Joe was glad she said that as it gave him a clear idea that he wasn't alone in what he was feeling. "Looking for a personal trainer?" He was longing to get very personal with her.

Maz narrowed her eyes at his words. "You know I happen to think I look pretty good and every woman has cellulite."

"You also have a pudgy ass." It was one Joe planned on grabbing onto as his cock slid into the tight heat of her body.

"I do not!" Maz seethed. "Anyway it's none of your business."

Joe was about to make her ass very much his business. "I offer personal training." Though if this older version of Maz was anything like the younger one then he doubted

Thigh High

she would allow herself to be trained to do anything. She had been stubborn back then and Joe doubted that had changed.

"I'm very happy for you."

She didn't look it and Joe knew any time Maz put her hands on her hips she was anything but approachable. But he was older and wiser and more daring and moving Maz was going to be a lot of fun. "I would love to train you." There was so much Joe wanted to do with her body. *Lick, suck, fuck.*

"I'm pretty trained up." What the hell was wrong with him? Couldn't he take no for an answer? And more importantly why was she suddenly unable to move away from him? If it had been any other man proposing what she knew he was, Maz would have blown him off long ago. But then, this was Joe and first love—her only love—ran deep.

"Scared?"

Yes, of doing something stupid. She had a desperate urge to finish what she started at the motel. "No, I told you before I don't like to sweat."

"I remember a time..."

"Shut up." Maz needed no reminding of their mutual sweat-soaked bodies slick and tight against each other.

"Make me," he teased as he moved in close to her.

Uh-oh. If Joe touched her knew she knew she would literally be screwed.

And that's how they ended up with their clothes torn off. Kissing Joe was like imbibing the finest wine. One sip was not enough and too much made her drunk with possibilities and lust for more. Her lips broke off from his. "We shouldn't be doing this." Yet there she was riding on his cock.

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"So climb off me."
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"Okay."

As Maz lifted off on the upstroke, Joe held firmly onto her hips. "You're not going anywhere, lady."

She sank back down and let the heat from his cock invade her body once more. It had been so long since she felt so good. "We can't go any further than this." Maz held onto his shoulders and rode Joe's thighs at a slow leisurely pace.

Joe's hands rose up to cup her breasts. "Of course not."

"I mean it."

"Sure you do."

And then he leaned in sucked one nipple into his mouth and Maz had no idea what she meant or who she was anymore. The wet suction of his lips pulling at her breast sent off a wild chain reaction around her body. Maz moved faster, her clit hitting his pelvic bone with every thrust. "Oh Joe," she whimpered as her fingers threaded through his hair. Her eyes closed as and she held Joe close. She felt like she was on fire.

"Open your eyes." Joe lifted his head and looked at Maz. "I want to watch you as you come."

Her eyes met his. "I may not come." She was going to come screaming.

"Liar." Joe chuckled at her words and slapped her butt playfully. "What?"

I want this back in my life. I want Joe. "Nothing." This was just pure lust. This was not reality. It was insane to think it was anything more than one needy moment in life.

"Maz, you can't hide from this."

The look he gave her was so intense that she wanted to believe she was not the only one feeling more than just lust. But that was madness. Fourteen years was a long time to carry memories, let alone love. "I'm impaled on your cock, Joe. Trust me I'm hiding nothing." Maz lifted her hand and stroked his face, the rough, manly stubble making her skin tingle. "Don't talk. I just want to feel." *If I never see him again I want to remember this moment*. Maz knew she was pathetic but first loves, only loves, were always important to a woman.

"I'd do anything for you."

"Then make me come."

Joe caught Maz against his chest and rolled them over so he was covering her body.

When he pulled his cock from inside her, Maz whimpered. This was not what she wanted. She needed heat and skin-to-skin contact. "Joe?"

"It's okay." He lifted her legs above his shoulders. "Do you want me, Maz?" His cock was poised at the wet entrance of her pussy.

"Does a chicken have lips?" It was an insane question. She was open and ready to receive.

Joe chuckled at her words. "No one has ever compared to you."

The head of his cock teased her from clit to anus. Maz squirmed against Joe trying to entice him inside. "No one? How many are we talking about?" Not that it really mattered but she wanted to know. She'd only had one lover. Maz knew no other. Would she even satisfy him?

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"Jealous?"

"No?"

Joe's gaze turned tender. "Worried?"

"Possibly."
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"You are beautiful." He pushed the head of his shaft inside her wet core. "You never have and never will disappoint me."

Never will? That suggested a future. "Um, Joe," Maz murmured, the hard solid length of his cock sliding inside making her suddenly silent as she arched up, seeking more, her stomach tightening. As she pressed against him, Maz suddenly giggled.

"That's not the response a man wants to hear at a time like this."

"I was just thinking this is good for my abs." Maz sighed as Joe started thrusting deep and hard into her body, every move designed to bond and thrill.

Joe pulled back out and slammed back in hard. "I'm going to work on you a lot, Marilyn."

"Just fuck me now and we'll worry about tomorrow later." His mouth found hers and any concerns Maz had, melted under his lips and tongue as his cock pounded into her. It was the most amazing feeling and even better than she remembered. And an orgasm? For one so used to using her own fingers to come, the plunging heat of his shaft beat her digits hands down. "O-o-hhh..." There it was. The familiar rush of sensation starting in her loins and shooting up her spine.

"Look at me." Joe's voice was a hoarse whisper.

"I may faint." Maz wasn't kidding. She felt almost boneless as the wild surge of super hot energy overcame her. Her hands clutched at his shoulders as Maz held on for more, her eyes on his.

"Never pictured you as a swooner."

"You've been gone a long time, Joseph." Too damn long. *How did I exist without this*? Sex with Joe was raw and real. *And I want more*. As if he heard her, Joe increased his pace, his sweat-soaked body slapping against hers.

"But I'm back home now."

As am I. Maz screamed as the orgasm tore up her spine and radiated throughout her body. She felt weak yet exalted and hung on wanting that same feeling for her lover. When Joe growled out loud and jerked and twitched against her, Maz smiled.

"What?" Joe's voice was breathless in her ear as he collapsed upon her.

He was heavy yet he wasn't. It was the sort of close, intimacy Maz craved. "That has to have burned up some calories."

Chapter Four

"Uh-oh, you had sex." Merlene's eyes were instantly locked on Maz as she came around the bar to star her shift.

"I did not—okay, how can you tell?" There was no point lying to Merlene. The woman had eyes like an eagle and could sense the slightest disturbance on a still pond.

"I just can. Besides you're running late for your shift and you never do that." Merlene flicked the edge of Maz's collar. "And your shirt is on inside out."

Maz looked down at the black shirt. The Naked Shearer logo was back to front and barely discernable. "Damn." She ducked under the wide bar. Maz yanked the shirt off over her head and turned it the right way around.

"And you have drenched yourself in perfume."

"I didn't have time to shower." Maz figured her favorite Red Door would overpower the smell of sex that clung to her. The bar patrons were not sophisticated enough to notice the difference between smells unless they were flavored with hops. She pulled the shirt back over her head and then stood up.

"Was it good?"

Maz fell forward onto the bar at the languid memory of it. "Oh god, yes." She felt so relaxed that she wanted to slither to a heap on the ground and fall into a blissful sleep.

"Now correct me if I'm wrong but isn't Joe the guy who quote 'ruined you for life'?"

"Okay, so I may have said that one night after too many white wines but I got over him." *Sort of.* Well, Maz was pretty sure she had until that moment in the gym. But then, that was just sex. Sex didn't count in the "getting over someone" stakes.

"You know I always thought you two would get married."

Maz had thought the same but that had been a long time ago when she was foolish enough to believe in happily ever after. "You thought wrong." Maz believed in fidelity. Joe had broken her heart. *Hmmm, and yet I just had sex with him. I'll worry about that tomorrow.* "Not everyone has to get married."

"Who's getting married?" Blue sauntered in at that moment and dumped his hat on a nearby barstool.

Merlene grabbed a glass. "You and your mate Dusty."

"Oh bugger off, I like women." Blue was appalled at her words.

"Pity they don't like you," the barkeeper replied with a snort.

"I could tell you some stories." Blue nodded to Dusty as he wandered in.

"And they would be just that, stories."

Dusty looked concerned as he approached them. "Do you think Patto's turned—you know...?"

Maz smiled. She had an inkling what Dusty was thinking but she decided to play along. "No. What are you on about?" The thought that Joe, the local hero to all these men could be considered gay was amusing. If they only knew the truth about some of their most manly male acquaintances.

"Well, Johnno said the inside of that fancy gym is painted pink." Dusty's tone was uncomfortable. "Well, pink's not a man's color is it?"

Blue almost choked on his beer. "Pull your head in, you nong, as if Patto would be one of those fancy boys. He played cricket and footy. I bet he shagged half the ladies in Sydney."

Merlene and Maz rolled their eyes. That was what the measure of a man was to some of the locals in Amberwarra Falls. If you played sport you were unquestionably a man and any other inference was wrong.

At that moment, Joe walked into the pub. His eyes locked with Maz's and she felt her heart beat a crazy tattoo. How she ever thought she could forget him was beyond her.

"What are we talking about?" Joe asked as he stood in front of Maz, only the width of the bar separating them.

Maz had the crazy urge to reach out and touch him. It was madness of course. She had lived without Joe for this long and one moment of passion was not likely to have changed that. "There is the assumption that because the gym is painted pink it means you're gay."

Joe's eyes never left hers. "Well, we know that's not right, don't we?"

Maz blushed. She had a horrible feeling Joe was going to tell everyone they had just had sex in the pink gym. And while what people thought of her was irrelevant, it was more that it would get back to her Auntie Beryl who would start planning a wedding. To Beryl, sleeping with a man was a decree of engagement. While her mother may have been different, Maz had grown up with Beryl and she knew how her aunt thought.

"I can't be gay, as I play footy."

Blue slapped Joe's back. "'Told ya."

"I need to speak to you about your personal training schedule." Joe's attention returned to Maz, his voice full of meaning.

Merlene didn't miss it. "Personal, huh?" She winked at them.

"I am not doing any training, personal or otherwise."

"Chicken." Joe's looked at her in challenge.

"Whatever." Maz wasn't about to get into a fight with Joe with so many spectators.

 $\mbox{\rm ``I'd}$ like to train with you, Joe." Dusty seemed keen on the idea.

Merlene smiled at that. "He's busy with Maz at the moment."

"Yeah, but she's a girl. It's not like she wants to increase muscle." Dusty rolled his eyes at the thought. "Only blokes do that."

Joe ignored everyone but Maz. "I am actually looking out for you. I want to make sure you don't overdo it at the gym."

"I'm very sure I'm never again going to do what I did in the gym today."

Dusty snorted. "Did you pull a muscle? Gyms aren't for girls."

Would it stop the bar dead if she announced she fucked Joe and she liked it?

"You'll do it all again." Joe looked overconfident on that point. "Unless you're chicken."

"As if," Maz retaliated, suddenly aware how alive she felt sparring with Joe. "Not everyone in this town thinks you're all that fantastic you know, Joseph."

The man in question leaned forward on the bar. "Did I say I was, Marilyn?"

"Uh-oh, use of full names," Merlene murmured in amusement.

Maz stepped back and placed her hands on her hips. No, he hadn't damn it and suddenly she was taking this all too seriously as if he was the only thing on her mind. Maz had a horrible feeling that made her look pathetic and needy, like Joe was her main concern. He was of course but he didn't need to know that her body still tingled with the thrust of his cock.

"Come on, training with me will be fun."

"It will be painful and tiring." And lead to more sex which in itself wasn't bad, but Maz knew looking at Joe she wanted more. It was highly unlikely, despite his words, that someone as adventurous as Joe would stay in Amberwarra Falls. *Do I risk my heart over him again?*

"I'll look after you." Joe grinned at her. "After all who knows your body better than me?"

"Oh bugger off." Damn, he was sexy. It was hard to fight that.

Merlene grasped her arm and shook Maz. "It's quiet now, do you want to take this round back? You know, small town, crowded bar and alcohol having a way of loosening tongues."

That was a good point. Whatever was being played out between them now was no one's business but their own. "Fine." Maz walked turned and walked to through the doorway that led to the stockroom. She knew Joe was following her. She could feel it. "We have to get something straight." She faced him and swallowed hard. Damn, it was hard to concentrate when he looked at her with those soft, sexy eyes.

"You smell great." His body was pressing against hers before Maz had a chance to move. "Perfume and sex. Excellent."

"Joe." Her hands pushed against his chest. Maz could feel his heartbeat and the firm curve of his pecs and she knew she had to pull herself together before she did something stupid like lift up his shirt and lick his shoulders. "We have to set some rules here."

Rule number one, licking is bad for good resolutions.

"Absolutely." Joe's hands cupped her bum and pulled her against his groin.

Nice. Head slap. *Rule number two, cock is bad for my equilibrium.*

"I mean it." Her words did not come out as forcefully as she would have liked due to the steady massage on her butt.

"I know you do." Joe didn't look the slightest bit concerned.

"Joseph-"

"Marilyn-"

"We can't do this." Actually they could. It was infinitely doable. If she was going to do it that was. *And I'm not*.

Joe's mouth hovered barely an inch from hers. "Yeah, we can."

Maz licked her lips dying for a taste. "We're not dumb twenty-year-olds." What she really wanted to say was, "I cannot get hooked up in you again only for you to disappoint me."

"I'm not leaving Maz."

Amarinda Jones

The solemn look in his eyes made her want to believe Joe but how rational was that? Besides Maz was not the type of woman to have sex without reason and did she want to make Joe the cause? "We can't stay in here all day." Maz tried to pull from his arms.

"I meant I'm not leaving town."

"So you say."

"Is that what this is about? You're scared?"

Hell yes. She had loved and lost him once. Maz didn't want to go through that again. "I just don't see any point in having random sex with a drifter."

Joe laughed at her words. "You've never had random sex in your life, Marilyn, and I'm no drifter and you know it."

He held her so close her body shook with his laughter. "That's not the point."

"What is?"

"What do you want?" Was it just sex or her? And did she want to the same things? Fourteen years of nothing was a hard habit to break. There was something comforting in being closed down. Opening up led to all sorts of issues like need and longing.

"I want you."

Maz could not hide the shiver that coursed through her body. It was everything she wanted to hear but it also made her fearful. "Why now?"

Joe's hands moved in a slow, sensual massaging action up her back to her shoulders. "I have always wanted you."

"We haven't seen each other in fourteen years." Maz fought not to close her eyes under his gentle assault on her body and emotions.

His hand reached up to cup her face. "But neither of us has forgotten the other."

"Yeah, well some things are hard to forget." Maz had the ridiculous urge to cry. Joe was so gentle that she wanted to sink into his arms and take from him whatever he gave.

Thigh High

"I'm sorry I hurt you."

"I got over it." Not.

Joe shook his head in disbelief. "Did you? Fourteen years later and you're still thinking about it."

"Well, time goes slowly in Amberwarra and things tend to stick in my mind."

"Maz, let's start again."

Yes. "No." She hated being needy.

He leaned in and whispered in her ear. "We're good together."

His hot breath on her skin made her tremble. "So we have sex." That was doable. But do I want more? And can I just lose myself in lust and not call it love?

"If that's all there is between us." Joe didn't sound convinced. "Do you believe that's all it is, Maz?"

"Literally?" She would have had to be dead not to feel his cock pushing madly against his trousers in an effort to get to her.

Joe grinned. "You know what I mean. Would it hurt to feel good?"

"No." It would be wonderful. That moment in the gym still had her body lit up like a Christmas tree.

"So?"

"Why me?"

"You know why."

And then Joe kissed Maz and any words she was going to use to deflect him from his purpose seemed pointless. She wanted him. It was fact. Her body craved his touch as much as her heart beat its crazy tattoo for him. This was Joe. The only man she had ever loved. Why fight what was on offer? She grabbed at his shirtfront to steady herself. "We need some rules here."

"And I need to see you naked."

"Joe – "

He smiled at her. "Oh come on the thigh-high rule was thrown at the window long ago."

Yeah, it had been and she wanted her thighs wrapped around him as she came but she needed to set some ground rules first. "No promises of anything. Let's just enjoy this." If Joe promised her the moon Maz would want to believe in it. If it was just pure, hot and raw sex then she could deal with that.

"Okay, for now." Joe's hands slid down to the snap fastener of her pants. "But I'm not going to play this all your way." His hands pushed the fabric off down her hips.

Never did Maz think for a second he would. She slipped her shoes off and kicked the fabric free from her ankles. She was so wet for Joe it was almost embarrassing. "I didn't have time to shower from before."

"I love the way you smell." His fingers gripped the sides of her panties and pulled those down as well. "Perfect."

"Hardly." She had spent years collecting the cellulite she had.

"You are delicious." Joe's lips found hers as his hands worked on his belt.

It was no surprise to Maz that Joe went commando, his cock jumping out as soon as it was freed from its confines. "Eager are we?"

"Since the moment I drove to the motel."

"So what happened after I left you?" It had been getting pretty hot and heavy there. Maz herself had needed to stop her car and breathe deeply to calm herself and not turn back and jump Joe and ride him.

"I counted backward from three hundred and fifty-seven to calm myself down."

Maz smiled. She could almost picture that. "I'm sorry."

Joe snorted in amusement "No, you're not." He turned her around.

Maz's hands gripped at a box of imported beer. "Okay, I'm not. It was fun." She pushed her ass back expecting to find Joe close behind her. "Where are you?"

"Eager are we?" he mimicked her earlier words. "I know I have one here somewhere." Joe scrabbled through the pockets of his discarded trousers looking for a condom.

"If it's all too hard for you—"

"Oh yeah, it's very, very hard and just for you." Joe found what he was searching for.

Maz turned her head and watched as his hands made short work of covering his cock in rubber. Five minutes ago she was determined not to have sex with Joe and yet here she was ready and waiting to receive. "You're a bad influence."

"But you like it." He moved in behind and grabbed her hips. "How do you want this?" Joe whispered against her neck. "Hard and fast? Soft and slow?"

The answer was yes to all, however Maz was not insensible enough to forget there was a bar full of people outside. She spread her legs wide. "Just make it quick before someone comes in." Maz jumped as hot, hard inches of cock pushed into her vagina. She closed her eyes and gave in to the feeling of fullness. "O-oh..."

"You like."

I love. "It's okay," It was fantastic. The push and pull of his flesh against her made her bite her bottom lip to stop from panting out loud like she was on heat. Maz never realized how much she craved sex until Joe. No other man affected her so.

Joe laughed at her words. "You never used to lie this much before, Marilyn."

I have more to lose now. Getting all starry-eyed over Joe again was not an option. "Just shut up and fuck me."

Joe pulled out and slammed back into her. "Yes, ma'am."

"Oh god..." Her knees shook when he did that several more times. "I am not going to be able to hang on much longer if you keep doing that."

Once more Joe's cock pulled out and thrust back in. "What?" His voice was overly innocent.

Amarinda Jones

"T-that." To hell with it. Maz panted at the increased friction of his cock.

"What about this?" One of Joe's hands moved round to massage her clit.

If she had not been leaning so hard on the crate of beer she would have fallen down.

"Oh Joe." Maz pushed her ass out for more.

"Come on let me train you. See how much fun we'll have?"

His voice against her ear made her shiver. That and the hot cock buried deep inside her were giving her the most intense rush of feeling. "Training for what?" Her thighs shook as she felt the first surge of an orgasm hit her.

"Whatever is meant to happen."

Maz caught her breath as he rammed harder as if sensing she was close to coming. "You're not going to leave me alone until I agree are you." *Maybe I should*. She was breathless from this fast fuck. "Well, regular exercise might be a good idea."

"I am delighted to provide not only exercise for you but also gym work."

"Yeah, we have German beer." Merlene's voice rang out loud and pointed. "Maz, will you get that for me?"

"Oh crap." She had almost forgotten where they were. The last thing she needed was Blue or Dusty wandering in and seeing Joe buried balls-deep inside her. "Hurry up."

"'Not the most romantic thing to say."

"Maz?" Merlene called out.

"C-coming." It wasn't a lie. Maz came so hard and fast that she would have fallen to the ground if Joe did not have an arm securely around her waist.

"See how much fun we're having already?" He pulled her back in his arms and growled low and huskily as his body jerked against hers.

Maz licked her lips and leaned back into him. "We smell of sex."

"Yeah, but luckily Dusty and Blue haven't had sex in so long they'll think it's sheep dip they're smelling."

Chapter Five

Sweat was dripping from Maz as she jogged on the moving path of the treadmill. "I cannot believe I allowed you to talk me into this." Her clothes were clinging to her, wet with perspiration, as she swiped her sweaty fringe from her eyes. One minute she had been saying no and the next she was moaning *yes*, *oh god yes*, *anything*. Maz squinted at Joe. "Are you looking at my ass?" She could feel it wobbling like jelly in her navy blue track pants.

"Only in a professional way," Joe responded with a grin.

Thankfully she was already red in the face so her blush went unnoticed. "How long do I have to do this? I'm not built for running." Her breasts were bouncing and her thighs were killing her, and all in all, Maz would have preferred to sit on an ants' nest naked than run.

"It's fun to watch," Joe move around and slowed down the pace of the treadmill with the push of a button. "It's good cardio exercise."

"It's frigging torture." Maz was breathless and out of shape and yes, maybe it was good for her, but still she would have preferred to be anywhere else.

"Stop whining and keeping breathing."

"I'm not whining and of course I'm bloody breathing. Why do people always say, 'remember to breathe'? It's not like I'm going to forget or refuse to, is it?"

"You're cute when you're angry and sweaty."

"You're cute when you're in Sydney."

Joe clutched his heart in mock dramatics. "So wounded." He pressed the button to decrease her pace further until Maz was walking. He handed her a water bottle.

Maz look a long, unladylike slurp. "Bloody hell."

"Okay?"

"Do I look okay?" She was a lather of sweat.

"You always look great."

"I thought exercise was supposed to make you feel better." Her legs were starting to wobble and she had a feeling she was going to trip ungracefully from the treadmill.

Joe took her hand and helped her down. "You'll like the next thing I have planned—no not sex, but now you mention it..."

"I didn't." The last thing she felt like was sex. His hand clasping hers made her heart beat a little faster but then Joe had always had the ability to make the simplest touch intimate and exciting.

"Later then."

Maz pulled her hand from his. "No, this has to be strictly business." Even as she said the words Maz knew how crazy they were. It was madness to even allow him one second in her life as she knew when Joe left—and he would, for Amberwarra Falls would not be able to hold an adventurer such as himself—she would once more miss what might have been and be annoyed at herself for letting him in.

"Okay." Joe handed her a towel.

"I mean it." Maz mopped her face. *Crap, I am so out of condition*. Her upper left thigh was throbbing and she knew she had pulled a muscle. But there was no way she was going to admit any weakness to Joe.

"I mean it too." Joe took her hand once more, refusing to let go.

"Oh shut up." Maz found herself following him as he pulled her along. "Where are we going?"

Joe pushed open a door and switched on the lights to a small room. "I am going to give you the chance to hit me."

Maz smiled. "Okay so this hasn't been a complete waste of a day."

"You're so cute." Joe left her for a moment and found some boxing gloves.

She held out her hands as directed and soon both fists were incased in red padded leather. "Kinky," she murmured, her stomach clenching as Joe smiled at her. Oh what that man could to do her with the simplest, sweetest look.

"And it gets even better." Joe picked up two pads that covered his own hands. He explained how he wanted her to punch, jab and uppercut against the protective covering.

Maz found that she enjoyed belting the hell of Joe. Not that she was actually doing any damage to him, nor did she want to. It was just so cathartic letting out the long-held anger she'd had toward him. Even though her thigh was beginning to ache viciously as she pummeled Joe, she didn't want to stop. "I like this a lot."

Joe laughed at her words, delight shining in his eyes as he easily deflected her blows. "I thought you might. So tell me, why there is no man in your life. Maz? Been pining for me?"

Maz slammed her fist hard against the pad. "No. As if." *Sort of.* Anyway, he didn't need to know that. She hit out hard once more. "You know most women are capable of being without a man."

"Ah, got a vibrator then?" Joe ducked as she aimed at his face. "You're going red in the cheeks. Embarrassed?"

Like she could get a vibrator in Amberwarra or one sent through the post without everyone wanting to know what it was. "No, I'm just hot from boxing."

"Yeah, you are."

Maz hit him hard. She knew he was teasing her, making her want to lose control and she knew it was in her power to ignore him. *But damn it I can't*.

In one quick move Joe caught Maz to him and faked a dive, dropping to the ground with her in his arms.

"We can't do this here." Maz could feel his cock already hard and insistent through the fabric of his sweatpants. She had actually been trying to avoid looking at his groin during training as in one quick glance she had seen the noticeable bulge. *Or maybe we could*. They had before.

"Good point." Joe rolled them so she was lying on top of him. "But you do want to do it."

"No, I never said that." Lord, it's hot in here. How can a woman concentrate?

"Here's the thing, Maz. I came back to Amberwarra Falls for you." Joe's hands moved down to her butt, making sure she stayed where she was.

She froze. It was everything Maz wanted to hear but it was not something she could believe in. "No you didn't, Joseph." There was no way that could be possible. If Joe had really wanted her he would have come back years ago. Maz didn't want to be wanted just because she was available.

Maz always made him smile. He loved the way she called him Joseph. It was normally when she was out of her depth and unsure of herself. "Yeah, I did, Marilyn. "I was an idiot to leave." The feel of Maz against his body as she squirmed to free herself from his embrace was making his cock jump with excitement. The thing was he had no hold over her. Maz could easily break away but she didn't. That in itself told Joe that he was not the only one craving this contact. "I have been keeping tabs on you and I know there has never been anyone else for you but me."

At first he could not believe someone as sexy as Maz had no lover but then on reflection he knew. She was the only one for him as he was for her. Yes, he had indulged in liaisons with other women but in the back of his mind there was always the girl back home. The one he would go back to because to do anything else would have been crazy.

"Okay, so there have been no other men." Maz bit her lower lip and looked at him in defiance. "So the town grapevine knows every damn thing about me. But it doesn't mean I want you back in my life." She struggled to free herself.

She was so beautiful that for a moment Joe almost forgot to breathe. Joe took his hands from her body. "What does it mean to you, Maz?"

"What about Cheryl?" She pushed up from him and stood.

Joe knew that question had to come up. He had hurt Maz badly. He had no defense other than youth and stupidity. "I was idiot."

"Yeah, you were."

Before Joe could respond, Maz's legs buckled and she started to fall. Joe sat up quickly and made a grab for her, catching her in his arms and cushioning her body with his. "What's wrong?"

"Thigh cramp," Maz gritted out between clenched teeth.

Joe got up and pulled her with him. "You should have told me you were in pain, you stubborn woman." He wanted to shake her, instead picked her up in his arms and carried her.

"I didn't want to be a wuss."

"You are obstinate." Joe loved that about her. She did things for a reason and once her mind was settled she rarely changed it. However Joe planned on making a lot of changes in this lady's life. He was going to become so indispensible to Maz that being without him would be impossible.

"Hey, don't pick on me, I'm in pain." She wound her arms around his neck.

"Let me kiss it better." Holding Maz at any time was dangerous as he wanted to touch and taste and feel. His cock jerked at any contact with her. The problem was she was injured and sex was not an option—at the moment. Joe carried her over to the massage room and laid her on the table. He turned and kicked the door shut. Relieve the pain first then work on other tensions.

"Only a kiss on the forehead," Maz responded as she winced in pain.

"Yeah, right. I'll hold out for something better." He went to the table and looked down at her. Even hot and flushed and sweaty, Maz was the most beautiful woman he

had ever held in his arms and he wanted more with her. Joe ran his hands up her legs to her waistband. That she shivered under his touch delighted him. It was a true, real reaction that could not be faked or hidden.

"Hey!" Maz clutched at the fabric Joe started to pull down.

"I want to massage your thigh." Then make love to you until all you can say is, "Yes Joe, anything you want." He smiled at that thought.

"So do it." Her hands covered his.

"It's better to massage without your track pants on." He lifted his hands up and hers followed. "Come on, I've seen you naked before. It's burned on my memory." It would be damn hard to massage and not want more but Joe was a professional.

"What are you scared of?"

Was he kidding? Maz was more in love with this man than she ever planned to be and being naked with him, even for medicinal reasons, was a really bad thing to do.

"Everything." Maz blurted the word out without thinking.

"Really? I would never hurt you."

The soft look in his eyes underscored that. The problem was she would hurt herself. Maz winced at the pain in her thigh. It was silly to act so wary over something like this. "Just a massage, okay?" Even as the words tumbled out of her mouth, Maz knew there was never a "just anything" situation with them.

"Whatever makes you feel better." Joe's hands made short worked of stripping off her track pants. "White granny panties." He smiled and ran a lazy finger over her mound.

Maz clutched the sides of the table. "I wasn't expecting you to...well you know."

"I do know." Joe's fingers trailed to her thigh and began a gentle massage on the sore, stiff flesh.

Maz felt the muscle loosening up. His hands felt amazing but then there was no surprised in that. Any time Joe touched her she felt good. She jumped as his hands moved to her other thigh. "The other one is fine."

"I wouldn't want it to tense up as well."

When he leaned down and kissed the skin of her thigh, Maz choked. "J-Joe?" His lips were so soft yet hungry as they covered her flesh in sucking wet kisses. "O-oh boy," she stammered, her hands moving down to thread her fingers through his hair. There were so many reasons to stop Joe and yet none of them were valid enough to give the command. When his tongue slid into the crevice where her skin met white cotton, Maz's legs opened without hesitation.

Joe's head lifted and his eyes met hers. "I'm hungry."

Maz's breath came out short and sharp. She knew what Joe wanted. Her need matched his. "So eat." She lifted her hips and allowed the white cotton to be peeled down her thighs. When his tongue touched her clit, Maz bit her lip to stop herself from crying out loud at the exquisite sensation that gripped her body. She was on fire with need and the tongue that lapped at her pink inner folds was exactly what she needed. Her stomach clenched and her thighs widened to give Joe more access. If anyone walked in right now, Maz would not have given a damn.

"Delicious," he murmured between placing wet open-mouth kisses on the fleshy lips of her vagina.

When his tongue slid inside, nothing on the planet could have stopped the cry that tore from her mouth. Maz panted weakly and pushed her pussy into his face. "Joe, I need-"

"What?" He looked up eyes bright with lust, his fingers pushing inside her body.

While that felt excellent, Maz needed more. "I need cock."

Joe smiled. "I don't have a condom on me."

"God damn it." The words came out hard and loud.

Thigh High

"Do you really need me?"

"Fuck, yes I do." The pressure of his fingers was nice but not enough.

"How badly?"

"Real bad." Maz ground her pussy against his hand.

"Marry me."

"What?" Maz arched up at his words. "Are you kidding me?" Joe leaned down and kissed her clit, his fingers still pumping away inside. "Oh lord, I am going to explode." As if by magic, both his mouth and his fingers left her body before she did. "What? Why? No!"

"Marry me, Marilyn, and I'll be delighted to help you explode."

"This is blackmail."

"Yep." Joe made no effort to deny it,

"Why?"

"Because I love you and I want you forever and I believe you're too damn stubborn to accept an on the knee proposal so I thought I'd get you in a weak moment."

And he certainly had. Maz was on fire with need. "Bastard." She was trapped by desire.

"But you love me, yeah, you do." Joe trailed his fingers lightly up and down her thigh. "Hot? Needy? 'Want some relief? Just say yes to my proposal and I'm happy to oblige."

Maz sat up and squeezed her legs together. "No. Now leave me alone." She could use her own fingers almost as well as he could use his.

"It's not the same, Maz."

He was right. Touching herself after Joe was most definitely second best. "You cannot be serious."

"Deadly so."

Amarinda Jones

"I would suck at marriage." It was never an option she had ever seriously contemplated after the Cheryl episode.

Joe smiled. "Sucking is good in marriage," he teased her.

Maz closed her legs a little tighter. "Be rational."

"This is the most rational thing I have ever done in my life. Marry me."

"For sex?" Was he that desperate? Was she? Maybe.

"Yes, but also love and companionship."

"Oh jeez." Should she agree to marriage to relieve an ache? In a crazed moment like this it seemed doable. "If I agree, no one can know." Maz figured by then Joe would have moved on and no longer be in town.

"It's a small town. They'll find out."

"Yeah, but let them find out when it suits us." *Or not at all*. She was betting on the latter option.

Joe's grin widened at her words. "So you'll marry me?"

"Well, as it stands I'm not going to get your cock any other way am I?" desperation was a bitch.

"Nope."

"Did I mention you're a bastard?" Maz looked at the obvious bulge between his legs. Need was a two-way street. She had some leverage.

"Yep."

"Okay fine, yes, whatever."

"Excellent decision." Joe reached into his pocket and pulled out a strip of condoms. "Unzip me."

Maz pulled a face of mutiny. She wanted to say no. He'd tricked her. "Manipulation is not attractive."

Joe unzipped his own fly. His cock sprang out. "Do you want me?"

"Do you want me?" Maz returned the question. She watched as the pounds per square inch going into the condom fascinated her.

"Oh hell, yes." He snapped the last piece of rubber in place.

"Damn you." Maz scooted around so her legs were on either side of his hips.

"Yeah, I'm incorrigible." His cock slid into her body in one smooth stroke.

Maz closed her eyes and enjoyed the heady thrill of him filling her up once more. "Joe?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm not marrying you."

"Oh yeah, you are." He started thrusting determinedly inside her.

"In a pig's ear I will and there's nothing you can do about it as you need me just as much as I need you right now." Her eyes locked with his and they shared a smile.

"Correct. You're a smart woman."

Maz tightened her legs around his waist and lifted her mouth to his. "Shut up and kiss me." They remained locked like that and stayed that way long after their mutual release.

Chapter Six

"There's a bet on in town," Merlene said to Maz as they folded napkins that they kept for the simple bar snacks they served.

"Oh yeah? What's Wazza betting on now? The proverbial two flies crawling up the wall?" Maz was amused. William "Wazza" Brown would run a book on anything. "He's as dodgy as a two-bob watch." All his bets were fixed so no one but Wazza really came out ahead. Yet, the locals always took on his odds because betting was an Aussie way of life.

"The bet is on you and Joe and when you're getting married."

Well, of course it was. There were probably half a dozen women knitting baby clothes as they did when any two single people in Amberwarra Falls even glanced sideways at each other. "I am not marrying Joe." That silly moment in the gym had been just that.

"You're having sex with him," Merlene pointed out.

Maz sighed. "Jeez Louise, but that doesn't mean I'm going to marry him. What is wrong with this town?"

"Nothing worth watching on television."

Maz knew there was no point fighting it. "What are the odds?"

"Six to one Joe came back to town for you and not the gym, and four to two that you'll get married." Merlene rattled the figures off. "And sixty to one you're not having sex with him. I took those odds." Merlene tapped her nose in a knowing way. "Insider knowledge and all."

"What will Auntie Beryl think?"

"I believe she's taken odds on that Joe will marry you. She's probably crocheting you a dress like one of the dolls that cover the toilet rolls." Merlene rolled her eyes at the thought. "I'll decline being a bridesmaid thanks."

Maz blew out a sigh and dropped the napkin she had scrunched in her hand. "I don't need this. You know my life was fine and average and I was happy plodding through the days."

"Boring days though."

Oh yeah, they had been. Like most people she had gone through her days on automatic, doing and saying stuff without any thought at all. "Anyway, it's not like Joe's going to stick around regardless of what he says.

Merlene looked interested. "He's told you he will?"

"Yes, but the man has been all over Australia and overseas. Amberwarra Falls is not going to be enough to keep him here."

"But you're here."

"I'm convenient." That was the thing that stuck in her mind. If she had said no to having sex would Joe still be interested? For god's sake, he had shagged Cheryl, so that in itself made her wonder.

"You still love him don't you?" Merlene's smile was soft. "Nah, you don't have to say the words I can see it in your eyes, mate."

There was no point lying to Merlene. "Yeah, stupid of me but I do." It was somewhat of a relief that she could talk to about this without involving the whole town. As the local pub owner, Merlene kept many secrets. "But I don't want to get my hopes up and then he leaves."

"I can understand that."

"What do you understand?" Joe smiled at Maz as he came around the corner of the bar from the back door "Is this about Wazza's bet? And yeah, of course I've heard." That and lot more. Wonder of wonders, Maz still loved him. He wanted to leap over the bar, sweep her into his arms and take her somewhere they could be alone to talk and make love to her until she finally understood that he was never leaving. Joe had every intention of marrying this woman. "How's your thigh?"

"Stiff and sore, but I'll get by."

"So my—er—my massage didn't help?" Joe smiled at the sudden blush that rose to her cheeks. "Come for a swim."

Merlene nodded. "That would help relieve tension—er—in your thigh. You two know what I mean." The smile she exchanged with Joe was conspiratorial.

"There is no water anywhere in town." Maz pointed out the obvious.

"I have a pool at my place," Joe told her. It was the perfect solution and he did so enjoy getting Maz all alone to himself.

"That's right, you bought Rabbit Warren's place. He put a pool and spa in when he had a fling with the ditzy blonde from the city." Like most of the locals Merlene was a fount of useless Amberwarra knowledge. "He thought it would make her stay." She rolled her eyes at that thought.

Maz winced and adjusted her stance. "I'll be fine."

Joe felt momentarily guilty. Having sex with Maz so soon after an injury had not been a smart thing to do but it had been excellent. "I'm not asking you to skinny-dip nor am I going to ravish you."

Merlene sighed and winked at Joe. "Ravishing sounds good." She moved away to serve a customer.

Maz looked at Joe. "Where would you be if I was in the pool?"

I would be inside you enjoying the buoyancy of the water holding us up. That's what he wanted to say but Joe knew if he did Maz would be militant enough to back away and be in pain to prove some crazy point. "Do you want me to be one hundred paces away?"

"Well I just think if I am just going there to relax my muscles then you don't have to be there at all."

Joe loved it when Maz put her hands on her hips. It was a sign to him that she was trying to keep control in a situation rapidly becoming uncontrollable. "What are you scared of?"

"You know I was doing just fine until you turned up with your gym and made me think about—"

"About us?" It was all Joe could think about. He longed to have Maz in his life for good. She was the only piece that had been missing.

Maz lifted one hand and waved it dismissively. "It was a long time ago."

They were more an "us" now than they had ever been but Joe refrained from pointing that out to her. "And I broke your heart." He could never change that.

"Yes."

"I regret it, but I was a stupid kid." Joe sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

"Aren't we allowed mistakes?"

"Yes, but—"

"That you did not give up on me gives me hope."

"Just because I never had sexual relationship with anyone else doesn't mean I was never tempted. I just want more than a quick tumble and a fast goodbye. I deserve more than that." Others may settle for less but Maz wasn't about to. Maz stopped dead and clapped hand over her mouth.

Joe smiled. It was as he thought, as he knew in his heart. "You only confirmed what I suspected." He reached out a hand to her. "I swear I will not touch you unless you ask me to."

Maz looked worried at that. "O-kay."

Amarinda Jones

That she didn't sound at all certain made Joe happy. He knew he wasn't the only one caught up in the madness of their being together. True love and undeniable lust was too heady a combination to ignore. "You'll ask me though."

"I will not, cocky son of a bitch," Maz murmured as she moved away to serve a patron.

"What a woman."

"What are you doing?" Maz watched wide-eyed as Joe broke through the surface of the water after diving naked into the pool.

"I'm hot."

He certainly was. As was she now. "I just want to swim." That's why they had stopped at her place to pick up her swimsuit.

"I'll swim with you."

Maz trod water and looked at him. "What is this?"

"What do you want it to be?"

She sighed. This was like the chicken and the egg talk. It was a never-ending circle. While there was an answer, it was not one Maz wanted to leap at and take. Love was difficult at the best of times. Loving someone who may leave again was impossible. "You just can't come back, Joe, and expect me to fall in your arms any time you look at me." Which was exactly what Maz wanted to do. There were times when it was hard to remember this was the same man who had ripped her heart out of her chest and drop-kicked it into a wall making her wonder what the hell she could have done to keep him in her life. Looking back, it was madness for Maz to have thought that way but love did that to the sanest people.

"Don't you feel anything for me, Maz?"

Thigh High

Oh yeah, she did. Every gooey, sweet, sticky emotion she had inside was for this man alone. "I don't just fool around with anyone." That in itself had to prove something to him.

"Is that what we're doing? Fooling around?" Joe arched his eyebrow in disbelief.

"Having sex then."

"Yes, and something else."

"I don't want to get caught up in you again." There. It was out. It was much better to lay it on the line. All his crazy talk about coming back for her and wanting to marry her was fine for him to say but she needed more. Maz needed reality. Was Joe her reality? Or was he always going to be the boy from home she pined over? Hell. Do I even love him? Maybe I'm just as infatuated as I was when I was twenty.

Joe made no move to touch her. "Still scared of what you feel?"

"Yes." And it was love. Blind Freddy could see that.

"So what do you propose, Maz? I need to be with you, to touch you." Joe's eyes were honest on hers. "I know you feel the same way too."

Oh yes. "But I don't want anything more than that."

"Really." Joe's eyebrows arched with cynicism.

"Yes, let's just enjoy ourselves and make no plans."

Joe reached out to touch her. "I'm not leaving, Maz."

She bobbed away in the water. "I may not be staying." Even as Maz said the words, she knew it would never have occurred to her to leave Amberwarra Falls.

"Where would you go?"

I have no idea. "I need to get out and see stuff. I'm too insulated. I only know the same people. Maybe there are better people out there." Even as she said the words Maz doubted that.

"Men you mean?"

"Maybe." Again, that had never occurred to her either.

Amarinda Jones

"So in the meantime I'll do?"

"Yes."

Joe grinned at her. "Liar."

Maz sighed. "I have no control with you." Joe could do what he wanted with her and she welcomed it no matter how much she said didn't.

"So take some."

Okay. That had never occurred to her. "How?"

"Do whatever you want with me?"

That was a fascinating thought. "Really?" Her mind went back to that moment in the hotel. She had enjoyed that and she had felt in control.

"Yeah, drive me wild, Marilyn."

That could be fun.

Chapter Seven

Maz knelt between his spread thighs. "If you laugh at me I will slap you." She had no idea what she was doing but she kind of liked that. After Joe's offer for her to take control, they had climbed from the pool and gone straight inside the house. Her swimsuit had hit the ground but her hands had kept him at bay.

"This is about me, remember," Maz had told him as she ordered him to sit down and be quiet. She remembered that moment in the gym when she had been totally out of control when his mouth descended on her pussy. Maz wanted to see the same reaction from Joe.

"Oh trust me, I am having the most deadly serious moment of my life here. The thought that you would walk away from me now kills me."

Her hands reached out to encircle Joe's cock. "You don't feel dead." She loved the feel of his penis inside her body, on her breasts, in her hands. It was hard yet velvety soft and the urge to take the length of it into her mouth and suck was overwhelming.

"May I?" There had been times Maz had wanted him so badly that she could barely concentrate on what she was doing. Was Joe aware that every word he uttered made her stomach clench in excitement and her inner thighs sweat? Did he feel the same madness that she did?

"I may cry if you don't."

Maz smiled. He had the ability to make her do that more than anyone else she knew. "You always have the correct answer." Before he could speak, her lips descended on the turgid head of his cock.

"Hmm," she murmured as she swirled her tongue around the tip. It was as she imagined but even better because it was Joe.

"Oh god," was all Joe could growl as his hands threaded through her hair to hold her close.

Maybe there was some sort of protocol involved in a blowjob, maybe not. She didn't care. Maz just wanted to suck that fat cock head into her mouth and drive the man wild.

Joe guessed her thoughts. "I will come if you do."

"You do what you must, as will I." Maz gave in to need and sucked the tip inside her mouth. Joe's hips bucked and her hands went to his thighs to stroke the firm flesh. There was something so raw and sexy and primal about having this man at her mercy. It gave her an unbelievable feeling of power. She sucked more of his cock inside her mouth. The need to taste him was everything.

"Bloody hell..."

Maz could feel the muscles in his legs tense with excitement. She was so wet she was torn between standing up and impaling herself on his length or sucking him dry. She looked up at him, licking her lips. "Do you like that?"

"I love it and I love you."

"Correct answer." Her head dropped down for another taste. His groan of excitement urged her on. Although caught up in what she was doing, Maz was conscious of the fact she was the one in control. It excited her. Joe would come but only when she was ready with him fully sheathed inside her. Until then she would enjoy the moment. Maz let his cock slip, pink and wet and shiny, from her mouth. "Tell me something."

"Anything you want to know I'll tell you."

"If I asked you to, would you jack off for me?"

Joe's body stiffened. "What?"

"I want to watch." Maz leaned in once more and licked the long vein from the tip of his cock to the base of the shaft, her hands caressing his balls. Thigh High

"Maz," Joe choked out, gently pushing her had away. "I want to come inside you."

Great minds think alike. "And I want to see you lose control." Maz knew she had him when Joe swallowed hard.

"Sit back on your heels and open your legs for me." Joe's voice was husky with emotion.

Maz was about to point out this was her game but she was eager to see how explosive Joe could be. If being so exposed helped that then who was she to argue. "I'm awfully wet. I may drip on the carpet."

Joe's eyes locked with hers. "You're trying to kill me aren't you?"

Maz did as he requested, spreading her legs. "Maybe. Your turn."

When Joe fisted his cock, Maz felt a moment of jealousy. *That's mine*. But she inwardly shook herself. This was about him losing control. Not her. There was something so hot and primal about a man running his hand up and down his own cock. It was controlled yet there was a sense of urgency that was exciting. Although the climax was assured, it was the look on Joe's face that gripped Maz the most. His eyes never left hers in his quest to give them both pleasure. Maz almost slid her own fingers to her clit but refrained. She wanted to come but with him in and on her.

"Go faster."

Joe nodded. "As you wish."

"Does it feel the same as—"

"When I'm inside you? Oh hell, no." He pulled harder on his shaft. "Nothing compares to that. You grip me so tightly that I can barely think straight and the heat from your body makes me shiver."

"Really?" This thought entranced Maz. That she had that effect on Joe never occurred to her. "I never felt that." But then maybe she was trembling too much herself to realize.

"Oh I do."

"Um, you're pulling pretty hard." Did that hurt? Maz knew cocks were amazingly flexible instruments but she didn't want to see Joe do any damage to himself. "I'm kind of partial to your friend there."

Joe grinned. "He's all yours, as am I."

The look he gave her was so loving that Maz blinked rapidly for fear of crying. How embarrassing would that be? "What about when my mouth is on your cock?" She saw his hips buck at that thought.

"While amazing, it's not the same." Joe stilled his hand for a moment. "Do you really want to see me come?"

"Yes." It was not something a good girl would have asked to see but good was vastly overrated and knowing this man would do whatever she asked of him made her feel powerful. And loved. It was at that moment that Maz understood something. Joe loved her. In many ways she had denied this for fear of him leaving as he once had. But now, that fear wasn't there so much. *Maybe I have come to trust the man before me and forget the boy who was.* "Please show me, Joseph."

"Anything for you, Marilyn."

Okay. It was not what she expected. It was one thing to feel him jerk and strain inside her body but another to see the mechanics of hand-induced orgasm. "Huh," she murmured as watched him.

"Huh?" Joe mimicked, looking at her in amusement. "I'm supposed to be inspiring you with the raw power emanating from my cock."

"Oh trust me, while I find your cock fascinating and best-friend-worthy, this is different."

"What did you expect? A volcano?"

"Well it feels that way when you're inside me." Although he always wore a condom, the pulse and jerk of him was explosive.

Joe started laughing. "I adore you. Only you, Maz, would say that."

Thigh High

"I'm sorry." It was not a flattering thing to say.

"Don't be." He patted his thighs. "Come here."

"Normally I would love a ride of that beastie." Maz side stepped him. "But I'm late for my shift at the Shearer." She turned and started to walk away. She knew she wouldn't get far, but like Joe, she was willing to give up some control for what she wanted.

Joe lunged forward and caught her ankle before she could escape. "I don't think so, lady. You have to finish what you started." He dropped her lightly, stomach first, to the ground, his body imprisoning hers. The raw, musky smell of male sexuality captivated her senses and made her heart beat faster.

"But the pub." Though the heat of his body on hers was making the most persuasive argument for staying.

"It can wait."

"What about the gym?"

"I'll give you a workout you'll never forget," Joe whispered against her ear as he lifted her onto her knees.

Yes, please. Maz could feel his already hardening cock against her ass and she knew what she needed. "But, I think—" She choked as one of his hands slid under her body and touched her pussy and she had no idea what she had been about to say.

"O-oh." His fingers found her clit.

"Is that good?"

Maz sucked in her breath. It was beyond good. "It's okay."

"Liar." Joe kissed the side of her neck. "Tell me what you want."

Oh, she could fight it but what was the point? She was his. They both knew it. She bore down against his hand. "I want you everywhere."

Joe blew softly against her neck as he stroked her upper thigh. "Do you want me inside you?"

Amarinda Jones

"Yes." Maz's voice was barely a whimper, as his fingers teased her skin.

"What about here?" One long finger pushed into her anus.

Maz jerked forward. "Um..."

"Um?" His finger penetrated through the ring of muscle.

They had never done this before though she had often wondered what it would feel like to have Joe's cock wedged high up inside her ass. "You're kind of big." Was that even doable? Do I want to try it? Oh hell, yes.

"I would never hurt you."

"I know." She shivered as a second finger joined the first in her anus. Maz was completely held in place by his fingers teasing the sensitive hole.

"May I? Please?"

Maz licked her lips in thought. She knew what he was asking. It was something she wanted. "I've never..." she stopped when she realized how dumb that sounded. Joe knew only too well the extent of her experience.

"We've had a lot of firsts together Maz."

"Yes we have." She closed her eyes and concentrated on the friction inside her body. "Joe?" Maz turned her face so she could see him.

"Hmm?"

"Please..."

"What?"

"Take me."

"Where?"

"Anywhere you want." The words were out and Maz didn't regret them. "I'm yours." She had never stopped being his.

"As I belong only to you." He slipped his fingers from her body. "Don't move."

"Where are you going?"

Joe chuckled and slapped her butt lightly. "I have to get a couple of things. I promise I will be back. Wild horses could not keep me from you, lady."

"Hurry." Maz needed to be filled and now.

Joe leaned over her. "Needy are we?"

His voice was a hot whisper against her ear. It made her body shudder. "Yes, we are needy." Maz knew she wasn't alone in her desires. The stiff cock that brushed her skin was evidence of that. She felt Joe move away. She could have turned around and watched him or even sat down and waited for him but there something so primal and out of control being on her hands and knees and waiting for her lover.

Maz heard sudden swearing and the sound of a body hitting the ground. "Are you okay?" She swiveled her head around to see Joe jumping to his feet.

"Yep, just eager and clumsy." He approached her, a tube of lube in one hand and condoms in the other.

"Well, be careful. Don't damage anything that's useful to me." Maz surveyed his bouncing cock. She wanted all of it inside her. There was only one problem.

"Trust me, it will fit," Joe said as if guessing her thoughts.

"What else am I thinking right now?"

"Why hasn't he got that damn condom on? Is the lube cold? Am I going to giggle or moan when he pushes into my ass?" Joe knelt down behind her and ripped the condom packaging with his teeth. "The condom will be on any second, the lube is cool but it's kind of fun and I bet on you crying out my name in passion in a couple of minutes.

"Well I'm going to make sure I laugh then." She stiffened as she felt Joe's hands position her hips.

"Relax." He placed slow, thorough kisses down the side of her neck making her shiver.

"That's easy for you to say. You're not going to have a pole shoved up your ass."

Not that she was worried about that. Maz was actually looking forward to it.

Amarinda Jones

"Not exactly a flattering description." Joe flipped the lid off the lube. "What about calling my cock something like my 'powerful love muscle'?"

Maz burst out laughing only stopping when he started to work the slippery lube into the tight puckered hole of her ass. One finger followed by another slid easily inside. Maz bit back the moan that came to her lips.

"Okay?" Joe pushed a third finger in and began working them backward and forward.

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"Yes-s-s," Maz moaned under the steady, pumping pressure of his hand.
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"Want to cry out my name yet?"

"Who are you again?"

"Just a man."

"A mighty fine man." He was. And I am lucky to have him as long as I can.

"I do my best."

"Joe?"

"Yes?"

Maz ground her ass back against him. "I need more than fingers."

"This may hurt so I wanted you to get used to the feeling." He pulled his fingers out.

Maz smiled softly. He was such a caring lover. "You've never hurt me yet." *And maybe, just maybe, I acted a little dumb over the whole Cheryl thing.*

"And this is why I love you, Maz." Joe moved in and positioned his cock at her anus. "Hey, you're shivering." He wrapped one arm around her waist and held Maz close.

She was. He loved her. Of course he had said it before but she knew at that moment he really did. "Heat me up, Joe." Maz needed to feel him all the way inside her.

"Anything for you, Maz."

At first the pressure of a large cock head against a tight ring of muscle seemed impossible and too much. Maz almost asked Joe to back off. Almost. The need to be filled overrode any other concern she had. When his cock finally penetrated her bum, Maz stiffened as the strangest feeling took hold of her body. It was uncomfortable but not. It was tight but a perfect fit. The penetrative force was scorching hot yet she melted under the gentle assault of muscle pushing inside her. "Oh Joe…"

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"Told you," he whispered in her ear.
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"That was a sigh and not a cry."

"Same difference."

"Just shut up and fuck me, Joseph."

"Yes, Marilyn."

And then he started moving and Maz's fingers burrowed into the carpet. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply as every thrust pushed deeper and harder inside her until she could feel his balls grinding up against her butt.

Okay?" Joe kissed her shoulders as his fingers moved around to play with her clit.

"Yes." And then he gave her the slowest, most through fucking of her life. The intensity of it made her whole body shake as the friction of his cock pulling out and sinking back in over and over made her whimper. It was so different to have him buried in her ass. It was the same heat yet it was the forbidden aspect of it that made it more exciting. "We have to do this again."

"Oh yeah," Joe readily agreed readily. "Can I move faster?"

"There's more." Dear Lord, who's a lucky girl?

Joe chuckled. "I went slowly because I wanted you to get used to me."

"By all means go faster. Please do."

That's when Maz cried his name. Maz didn't care that he was right. She loved the slap of his thighs on her ass, the grunt and groan as Joe came and the way his arms encircled her body and held her close as she screamed when the orgasm hit her.

Chapter Eight

"Beryl was here." Merlene smiled and shook her head at Maz as she approached.

"Oh yeah?" Maz felt amazing. That was the only way to describe it. Every inch of her body tingled from Joe's touch. *Sore thigh? What sore thigh?*

"Yeah. Word around town is you and Joe were spotted frolicking naked at his place."

Maz rolled her eyes at this. "Whose word."

"I heard it from Blue."

"That's a really reliable source," Maz snorted at the idea. "Anyway, I never frolic. Do I look like a frolicker?"

Merlene held her hands up. "Hey, I'm just repeating what Blue said."

"Well, we—I mean *I* – wasn't naked in the pool and that's the only place someone would have seen us unless they were looking inside." Maz shuddered at that prospect. "Oh I don't even want to think about that." What she did on her hands and knees with Joe was no one's business except her own.

"It doesn't matter about specifics. The thing is it's gone around town and Beryl is pronouncing you engaged."

Oh crap. That sounded like Auntie Beryl. "We are not."

"Well, you are as far as Amberwarra Falls is concerned."

Bloody Beryl. She loved her aunt but there were times when that woman could try the patience of a plaster saint with her interfering. She was probably making a wedding dress right now.

Dusty and Blue came into the pub and headed straight for Maz. They were beaming.

"I was stoked to hear the news. You and Joe make a bonza couple."

Blue nodded his head in agreement. "And it means Joe will stay in town and we'll be able to get him to play in the Mighty Emus football team."

"And the Wandering Wombats cricket squad," Dusty added with pleasure.

"Yes, that would be the reason we would get married, to provide you with a teammate." These two were as predictable as taxes.

"So when's the wedding? Hey, don't look at me like that. You just said you were getting married." Merlene gave Maz a cheeky wink.

"I said 'would get married' in the not-bloody-likely sense of the word." Where the hell had Beryl heard about her and Joe being together, let alone naked?

"Word is you and Joe – well you know." Dusty grinned and nudged Blue.

Maz narrowed her eyes. "What?" What exactly was she going to have to live down or lie about?

"Threw a leg over," Blue announced blithely. "Oh come on now, we're all adults here."

"Oh for god's sake. Even if we had sex—"

"If?" Merlene teased her.

"If. That doesn't mean we're getting married. Jeez, none of you three are married."

"Yes, but with these boys, sex with yourself doesn't count."

Blue looked appalled. "Fair go, Merlene. I told you I was adjusting myself behind the tractor."

"You were moaning a lot."

"My strides were tight."

"Uh-huh."

Sometimes Maz likened Amberwarra Falls to a mob of drunken six-year-olds prodding each other with sticks.

Dusty broke into their argument. "The thing is, he's a good bloke and Joe would to do right by you. And as for bonking you before the ceremony, well who cares? Besides we haven't seen a really beaut wedding in town since Snogger Reilly got Mandy Clarke preggers and they had the sprog at the reception."

"Yeah, that was a good wedding," Blue nodded in agreement. "I still have the pictures."

Merlene snorted in amusement. "You fainted and were out cold when the baby started to come."

"I was drunk, Merlene. There's a difference," Blue corrected her. "And I've seen heaps of calves born."

Maz shook her head. *Give me strength*. "Regardless of all that, I am not marrying Joe." It was madness. Sure, he had joked about it but she knew Joe had not been serious. Why would he be? She knew, despite what he said to the contrary, Amberwarra Falls would not hold Joe for long.

"Yeah, you are." The man in question appeared. Joe went straight up to Maz, his eyes on only her.

"Here's the lucky man himself." Blue clapped him on the shoulder. "We have to organize the bucks' party and see you off proper."

"Yeah, and get a stripper." Dusty pondered on that for a moment. "Do we have any in the Falls?"

"Only paint stripper and I doubt that will hold your attention for long," Merlene quipped.

"We are not getting married." Was anyone at all paying attention to her?

Joe reached out his hand to Maz. "We still have things to discuss."

Maz stepped back. "Um, no we don't." As far as she was concerned there was nothing to discuss. Sex was one thing. Even contemplating a life with a drifter was

another. Marriage meant commitment and settling down. Joe was neither of those things.

"Darling—"

"Don't darling me." What the hell was wrong with everyone at the moment? Was she the only sane one? "I'm not your darling."

"Whose are you then?" Joe looked at Maz significantly.

When he looked at her like that, Maz felt a familiar heat surge through her and what she had been about to say completely left her mind. She was in an impossible situation. Admit her feelings for Joe and live with the fact he might leave. Agree to marry him which would thrill the whole town, but of course this was not about them. Or walk away now and think long and hard without any pressure from anyone but herself.

Maz surveyed her friends and lover. While she was no quitter, she certainly didn't want Amberwarra Falls making decisions for her. "I'm not having this conversation with you—any of you—right now." Maz turned and left. It was better to think than react and do the wrong thing.

"I've heard brides can get pretty emotional," Dusty commented as if this explained her behavior.

"Yep, definite wedding jitters." Blue clapped Joe on the shoulder. "You're a lucky man, Joe."

"I know." Joe felt bad about trying to force her hand. He knew he shouldn't have inferred to Blue about marriage between him and Maz but he loved her. That was the pure and simple fact. Joe knew the feeling was mutual. He could see it in her eyes and feel it in her touch. That Maz had not had a relationship with any other man meant she was not one to go into anything uncommitted. Because of that, Joe had acted. He didn't want to go on as just lovers. He wanted more. He also knew that Maz was worried he would leave and that wasn't his plan at all. Joe wanted permanency and he had that

with Maz. He loved her. This was about commitment. He knew he had to show that this was forever. Maybe, employing the earnest good intentions of the locals was cheating but Joe planned to use whatever weapons he could to make Maz understand this was forever and he wasn't going anywhere. He was finally home.

"Bloody man." Maz kicked a box of soda water in anger. "Oww, crap that hurt!" She staggered slightly as she sought a place to sit and check the damage to her toe. Maz swore as took off her shoe to look at her foot. It wasn't the pain from her foot that made her swear. She hated being pushed into a corner and that was what Joe had done bringing the town into their relationship. She stiffened suddenly. "Relationship? Do we have one of those?"

Maz was so worried that he would leave her that she hadn't really thought logically about what they had. The fact was she loved Joe. She had never stopped. Some people mated for life and she was one of them.

"Okay, so we have a relationship. But do I need him?" She was a strong independent woman who had been living her life successfully for fourteen years without him. Did she even know what need was? Was it seeing someone every day? Laughing with them? Leaning on them? Comforting each other? Loving them? Maz wanted all that and more.

"Okay, so I need him but it's just the bloody way he has gone about it," she muttered to herself and massaged her toe. Something like marriage was an enormous commitment. She wanted to make up her mind herself and not because the town wanted a bridal extravaganza. "And damn it I want to be asked." Maz didn't want it be a foregone conclusion. She wanted the whole dropping down on to one knee bit and asking for her hand. "I deserve that." Every woman did.

Maz blew out a sigh. "So what do I want?" She couldn't deny that she felt happy with Joe. Was he really going to stay? But then would he announce the whole marriage thing and create the stir he had if he wasn't? "Oh frig, I don't know."

"He's a cheeky bastard, your Joe."

Maz looked her to see Merlene appear before her. "He did this deliberately."

"Yeah, but he loves you as you do him." Merlene held up her hand. "Oh come on, don't even try denying it with me. I can see it in your eyes."

"I barely know him." Or maybe I do. Maybe I'm trying to find any bloody excuse to push him away. Maybe it's not Joe who wants to leave. Maybe I'm scared. That thought amazed Maz. It was always easier to blame someone else.

Merlene sat down beside her a nearby crate. "Tell me what you know about Joe."

"Why?"

"It may clear your thoughts."

"Well, he's dead sexy and very sweet. He says things to me that make my heart pound and my thighs sweat." Maz smiled at the thought. "He's arrogant and pushy and yet I know if I had any problem at all he's the first person I would turn to."

"That's nice."

"He's nice." Maz had always thought nice an insipid word. But it wasn't. It was a word that caught up a whole lot of deep feelings and packaged them together in a beautifully wrapped present that she could open and take out stuff without worrying about consequences. Nice was safe. Nice allowed her to act without fear, to be what Maz wanted to be without worrying about the cost.

"I believe he could talk me into anything and yes, if Joe was going I would want to go regardless of my need to stay here." That threw Maz. That she would follow Joe. "I want to hold his hand. I want to kiss his cheek and I want to have him wrap his arms around me because he is a safe harbor." *Joes loves me. So what the hell am I fighting this for?*

"Merlene, he makes me feel more than I ever have in my life. I know that Joe loves me." Maz stopped dead on those words. I'm such an idiot. I'm fighting the wrong person. I should be fighting myself.

Amarinda Jones

Merlene had a soft smile on her face. "You know a lot."

"Yes." A surprising amount.

"So what's the problem?"

"He will leave." Or will he? And when did I change my mind about that?

"Joe wants to marry you. He's not leaving."

Maz looked at her friend. "I'm the problem then." Sometimes reality was a nice, firm head slap.

"Yeah." Merlene nodded in agreement. "Life is too short, mate, to stuff around worrying about the ifs and buts." She stood up. "Besides if you take control of your wedding now, you can maybe stop Beryl trying to crochet you a wedding dress."

Maz rolled her eyes in horror. "Well, since you put it that way."

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"Do you have something you want to ask me?" If Joe wasn't going to come to her then Maz would go to him. She didn't want her future being decided by a town. She needed to know exactly where she stood with Joe.

The man in question stood up from the treadmill he had been working on in the gym. "Like what?"

"I dunno. Something on your mind?" This was not the most private place to have a conversation but nowhere was in a small town so why worry about it now?

"I have a few things I'm considering." Joe smiled a slow, lazy smile at Maz.

She felt her stomach clench in response. "If I have to drag it out of you then forget it." He was as sexy as hell but impossible with it and Maz was not about to beg any man to propose to her. She wanted the fairy tale but not under sufferance.

"Drag what out."

Perverse bastard. "The whole marriage deal." Maz tapped her foot in irritation.

Joe looked at her in sudden understanding. "Oh that."

Maz narrowed her eyes at him. "What do you mean, oh that?" He didn't sound like a man with strong commitment on his mind.

"Are you interested now?"

"I'm not sure. It seems everyone else was told about it before me. That can piss a woman off you know."

"You want an old-fashioned proposal?"

"Forget it if it's too much of a hardship." Why the hell am I standing here again? Is this man worth it? The answer was yes, no, I don't know. Maz was not about to drag words out of anyone. If he wanted to say them freely then that was fine. But she wasn't about to play games with her feelings. Maz had discovered she had them and they were important enough to treat with respect. She turned to leave.

"Maz." Joe caught her hand and stopped her.

She tried to pull her hand from his but his fingers locked with hers. "No, piss off. My life was just fine until you turned up." Okay, not perfect but something average was easier to deal with.

"Was it?"

Maz could see in his eyes Joe knew the truth. Her life had been boring. "The thing was I knew what I was doing. I didn't second-guess myself all the time and I didn't need a man."

"I've always needed you." Joe's voice was deep with emotion as he pulled her close to him. "You heard me. I love and need you in my life. I'm not going anywhere, Maz. I've wasted years searching for something that was always in Amberwarra Falls."

Her heart began to beat wildly at his words. "What, a block of land for a pink gym? Season membership to the Mighty Emus football club?"

"Don't forget the Wandering Wombats cricket team."

Amarinda Jones

"Who could?" They were legendary for their inability to win a game and their ability to drink every visiting team under the table at The Naked Shearer Pub. That in itself was considered a feat.

"I want you." Joe's gaze never left hers.

Maz gulped at the intensity of those three simple words. "Me?"

"Yeah." Still holding her hand, he dropped to his knees.

Oh boy, oh boy. "You're not going to do pushups are you?" Her other hand clasped her chest to keep her heart from running amok.

"I was wrong not to ask you first."

"Yes you were."

Joe massaged her hand in his. "I was scared you'd say no."

"I still might." *Though not bloody likely*. Some things were just meant to be even if they took fourteen years to right themselves.

"You've thought about this? About me?"

"From the minute I heard you were coming back to town." The words shot out of her mouth before she could think. "Okay, so I may have had this crush on you for fourteen odd years." What was the point of pretence when reality kicked its ass?

"Oh Marilyn, we have wasted some time."

"Yes we have, Joseph. The question is what are you going to do about it?"

Joe looked at her thoughtfully. "Should I ask Beryl's permission for your hand first?"

Maz snorted in amusement. Even if that was appropriate, it was a bit late for that. "Consider that already given. Beryl's probably already making white satin ring cushions and hiring wedding doves to fly over and crap on everyone as we speak."

Joe laughed. "That might even top Snogger Reilly's wedding."

"Nah, that was a classic. We cannot hope to do that." Her eyes remained on his. "So ask me."

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"Will you say yes?"
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"You'll never know until you ask."

"Marilyn Adler, will you do me the honor and privilege of being with me for the rest of my life?"

Oh yes. "What are the specifics of this arrangement?" The man had, after all, messed her around somewhat so it was only fair she did the same in return.

"You want them in writing?"

"Maybe."

"You're a tough woman." His smile belied his words. "Well let's see. There's love, commitment and cherishing involved in the deal."

"That sounds okay so far."

"Hot, orgasmic sex on tap."

"Excellent." Maz was wet just thinking about it.

"Tender kisses, comforting hugs and slow, seductive massages."

"That end in hot orgasmic sex?"

"Of course," Joe responded as if any other thought was crazy. "The general overall plan is to grow old with you."

"That could be dangerous."

"And fun."

"Oh yeah."

"Marry me, Marilyn."

"I believe I will, Joseph."

"She said yes," a voice yelled from outside and people started cheering.

"Oh crap, are we never alone in this town?" Maz already knew the answer to that.

"Nah, but its home." Joe rose to his feet and pulled her close to his body. "I guess making love now to seal the deal is out of the question?"

Amarinda Jones

There was only one response to that. "Close the gym."

Joe let go of her and sprang to do her bidding. "I could do that."

"Make me sweat some and I'll get you all hot and hard."

Joe turned and smiled her words. "I like the sound of that."

"Then I'll cool you down with my tongue and—"

"Everyone out of the gym," Joe roared.

Epilogue

"Oh for god's sake, strip me." Maz held her arms out and looked at Joe. "I feel like Frosty the Snowman." She was swathed in a sea of pristine white. It was like every bride's hell. But Maz had caved in to what Beryl wanted to make her happy. It was easier that way. Besides, the wedding was never about them. It was a grand event on the Amberwarra Falls' calendar, sandwiched between the pig judging and the lamington-making festival.

Joe started stripping her dress off straightaway. "Yeah, there's a lot of white fluffy stuff. I'm not even sure where you start and it ends." In his haste he ripped part of the wide skirt. "Oops."

"Rip it to shreds. I'm never getting married again."

"Yes, ma'am."

Maz laughed as Joe made short work of her dress until it lay in a tattered heap at her feet. She shivered when his hands came to rest on her bare hips.

"Hello," he murmured against her lips.

"Hello." Maz grabbed hold of his shirtfront and pushed him back on the bed and unzipped his trousers. "Yum, you're so nice and hard and I'm very wet." She proved just how much by straddling his thighs and rubbing her pussy against his cock. "But I have been since you put your hand down the front of my pants at our table at dinner." At first Maz had been horrified but a little later she enjoyed the slow, probing fingers between her legs. "And I never made a sound." Her man was great with his hands.

"No, damn it, and I wanted you to," he grabbed her ass and tried to pull her down over his cock. "You were squirming though. Do you think anyone noticed?"

"No, they were all three sheets to the wind by then." The cellars at The Naked Shearer Pub had taken a workout at their wedding reception.

"I feel terrible about getting you all wet and leaving you so frustrated. What can I do to help?"

"This." Maz grabbed the head of his cock and pushed it into the wet entrance of her body. As she slid down over the hard length of him, she sighed. "Oh yeah, that's better." It seemed like an eternity since she had last had Joe inside her. In reality it had only been half a day.

"Do you hear that?"

Maz smiled and rode her man as the sound of water splattering down on the iron roof started to permeate the room. "Rain." It was almost a forgotten sound in their part of the country.

"Yeah, and I'm going to win Wazza's bet. He said only a miracle would bring rain. I bet on that miracle happening today."

She leaned forward and kissed her lips. "You impulsive romantic you."

"Stick with me darling and we'll win all the frozen chook raffles between here and Krogan's Crossing."

About the Author

Amarinda Jones believes anything is possible and sometimes just asking for the impossible will surprise someone enough that they will give it to you. Writing is like that. Put it out there and wait for a response. There is always the possibility you may fall on your ass, but after all, that's what cellulite is for. Amarinda believes in taking chances, speaking her mind and aging disgracefully. Twenty years from now she plans on being the neighborhood witch who all the kids are scared of. But then, everyone has to have a hobby.

Amarinda welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her <u>author bio page</u> at <u>www.ellorascave.com</u>.

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