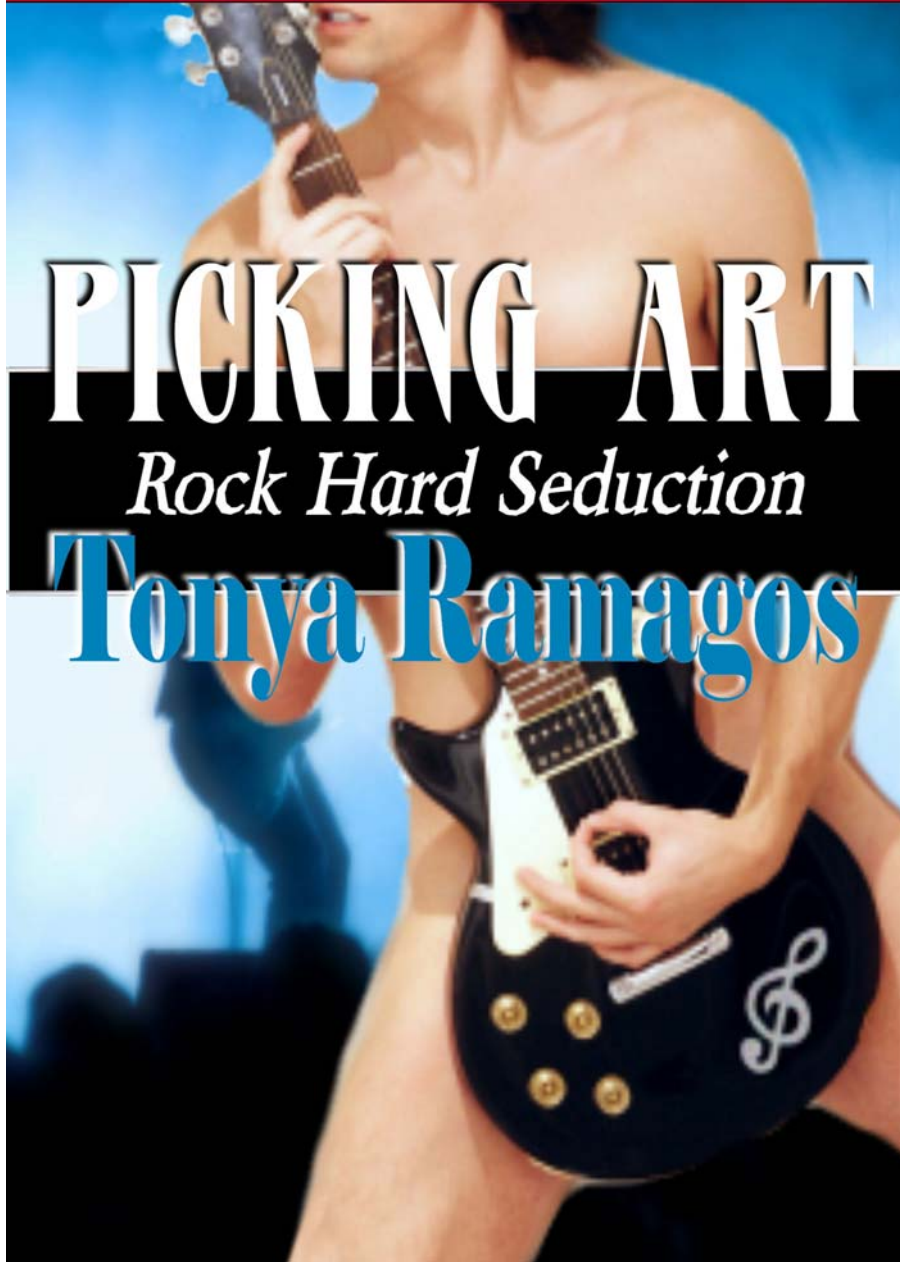


SIREN PUBLISHING

PICKING ART

Rock Hard Seduction

Tonya Ramagos



PICKING ART

Rock Hard Seduction 2

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EROTIC ROMANCE



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PICKING ART

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DEDICATION

To the band and board members of the DMB. Thank you for your support and help in getting my facts straight.

PICKING ART

Rock Hard Seduction 2

TONYA RAMAGOS

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Chapter One

Suzanne Cassidy hated crowds. More, she hated being alone in a crowd. Yet, here she sat in a darkened booth, a lone body in a swarm of unfamiliar faces and blaring music. She'd been in Philadelphia for all of an hour—forty-five minutes of which she'd spent in this same middle-class bar observing people from all walks of life, none of which being the one she'd come all this way to meet. And for the last forty-three minutes of those forty-five she'd found herself longing for home.

Sighing hopelessly, she checked her wristwatch and frowned when she saw only another five minutes had passed. She was torturing herself, keeping such a close eye on the time. Worse, wishing for home was only depressing her. This trip was supposed to be good for her, a jumpstart to extend her career out of the moderately small Florida city of St. Petersburg, a chance for her to grow as both a person and an artist. At least, that was what her parents had said.

They meant well. Truly they did. She propped her temple on one balled fist and frowned into her glass of white wine as she reminded herself of her parents' good intentions. They only wanted the best for her. Too bad for all involved, the best for her was so obviously not sending her away from her comfort zone, from the familiar, from her

home. Last summer spent in Paris as part of her studies at the University of South Florida should have been proof enough of that. Hadn't she spent nearly every waking hour unable to enjoy the sheer beauty of France due to her almost sickening desire to be home?

No doubt about it, she had chosen the wrong profession. Artists were supposed to enjoy traveling the world, taking in new sights, meeting new people. Maybe she'd been born with the talent to paint, to sketch and create. Still, she felt lacking in other attributes. What happened to the traits of a fun-loving people person? Where was her lust for adventure and taste for travel?

When no answer came to the questions she'd asked herself most of her life, she stole yet another glance at her watch. Only two more minutes down. Eeek! Did time really have to creep to a stop when you least wanted it to?

She should've stayed at the hotel, locked herself in the silence and solitude of her suite of rooms until mere minutes before she was slated to meet Georgiana. She might have if she'd known how long it would take her to make it across the city to the bar and café where the gallery owner had wanted to meet. Obviously, it hadn't taken long enough.

Determined to stick it out, Suzanne pulled a sketchpad and pencil from her bag, and then scanned the barroom for something to occupy her mind. The place wasn't packed, but a nice size crowd gathered around the scatter of tables while others took advantage of the spacious dance floor. It was a motley group, she mused, some dressed in business suits, others in conservative blue jeans and T-shirts, and even a few decked in black leather and silver jewelry. No wonder she felt so out of place! Everyone seemed to have someone. Was she really the only one here alone?

She fought the urge to cringe at that and opened the sketchpad, took a tentative sip of her wine, and continued to scan the room. No matter where she was, if she gave art her complete attention, she

would feel more at ease. What she needed was a focal point, a visual, something to sketch.

Her gaze landed on a table of two men several feet away, both with long dark hair. The one with his back to her had hair longer than hers! The other man's was a bit shorter, just reaching his shoulders with the sides cut to form to his jaw line.

A strong jaw line, she noted, tilting her head for a better look as she studied him. She rarely found long-haired men attractive but this one, well, even in the dim light of the bar his masculine beauty was apparent. He didn't need to stand for her to get a good sense of his height. Tall. Yes, given the length of leg she could see there was likely beneath that table, she'd guess he had to be at least six foot tall. He would surely tower over her five-foot-four frame. While she may not find long hair to her typical taste, long legs definitely did it for her. There was just something truly romantic about having to look up at a man. And his body...Sweet baby Jesus, move over Stephen Segal!

Suzanne actually felt a bit faint as her gaze slid over the wide expanse of his shoulders, the well-defined ripples of muscle beneath his green and tan camouflage shirt. Short sleeves stretched over strong-looking biceps. Wow! He could probably bench-press her weight—barely breaking one hundred pounds—with the ease of a feather. She wondered fleetingly how those impressive arms would feel wrapped around her tiny waist and the faintness in her head intensified even as a warmth spread through her.

His face was long, not too slim and not too fat. Given the distance and lack of lighting, she couldn't tell the color of his eyes under his dark eyebrows, but she guessed they were dark as well. Brown or green, maybe. He had a well-groomed mustache and thin beard and when he turned his head, she caught a sparkle under his bottom lip. A piercing?

No, this was definitely not the sort of man she usually found attractive. Still, she felt drawn to him. It was the oddest feeling! Never

before had she experienced such a reaction to a man. Her stomach tingled, a spur of sensations that darted out in all directions like sparks of electricity until every pulse point beneath her skin sizzled.

Art. She'd intended to give her attention to art, to find a focal point, a visual. Oh yeah, she'd found one all right. Ignoring the rush of heat to her cheeks—geez, it infuriated her to blush so easily—she positioned her charcoal pencil above the paper and with quick, fluid strokes, began to sketch him. Scenery was more her thing, landscapes, buildings and beautiful skies though she'd been told her talent lay in human life sketching as well.

She started with his face, glancing up often to be sure she captured its exact shape. The long, slightly rounded outline of his cheeks, the wide jaw, the narrow bridge of his nose that expanded somewhat as it reached a rounded point, the lines that formed around his mouth when he spoke. As he began to take form on her paper, she looked up again and her gaze collided with his. He was looking straight at her!

Her cheeks burned, the heat rushing from her face in a direct flaming line to her center. Thank God for the lack of light in the room! He smiled, a lazy curve of his lips that instantly transformed his features from merely beautiful to nearly godlike, and her mental camera quickly took a snapshot. She returned his smile, and then hurriedly added the curve to the full lips she had sketched. It was a warm smile, a friendly smile, with a touch of a seductive nature, she noted as she sketched from memory. It was a smile she knew for certain would stay in her mind long after tonight.

* * * *

Garrett Henry chuckled to himself, his smile widening as the blonde across the bar quickly averted her gaze. She'd been watching him off and on for a while now. He'd felt her gaze on him and instinctively ignored it. It was nothing new. People often darted glares in his direction, sometimes even staring at him, recognizing him as

the guitarist for the heavy metal band Façade. He just happened to glance up at the same moment she'd been shooting him one of those looks, met her gaze, and smiled.

She had a hell of a smile. Timid and soft, yet radiant and innocently seductive enough to have him feeling the effects of that quick curve of her lips all the way to his cock. She was absolutely stunning! And blushing, he mused with another soft chuckle. Her angelic face had turned so pink it nearly lit the darkened barroom.

It was that blush, the purity of it that sparked his interest. Who was she? She didn't look like a fan. Not that all fans of heavy metal music fell into the stereotypical leather and studs category. Derek's girlfriend Alicia Addison was a prime example of that. And wasn't she a stark contrast to the band's vocalist? She came from money, and lots of it. An up and coming author, she frequently dressed to the nines in outfits worthy of many people's weekly paycheck when making public appearances. This woman—the spectacular little blonde currently sporting a red face—looked to be from the same class as Alicia.

Garrett found himself only half listening to Trey Langston as the bassist talked of remodeling a bedroom for his unborn child. He glanced at Trey, nodded at what must have been the right moment, then looked back at the blonde and wondered. What was she doing in this bar alone? Was she waiting for someone? Instinctively, his gaze dropped to the small fingers curled around the notebook she held. No wedding ring. Not that the absence of a ring meant she wasn't waiting for a man.

What did he care, anyway? Apparent interest and bashfulness aside, the woman was *way* out of his league. She was all ritzy and elegant, diamonds and gold. As if to add further proof to that observation, a sparkle of gold and diamonds at her wrist caught his eye. A watch, he noted, and no doubt a very expensive one. And the gold and diamonds didn't stop there. Her silky looking hair was pulled back on the sides, fastened in the back by an elegant gold clip

while glistening diamond studs decorated her ears. She wore red, stoplight red that was both arresting as hell and stylish in its simplicity. The bodice formed to her chest, exhibiting a pair of medium-sized, shapely breasts. Yeah, though he'd never cared for the song, this woman defined Chris De Burgh's *Lady in Red* clearly enough for the Webster's dictionary.

Minutes passed, long and excruciating seconds spent trying to drag his gaze away and being completely unable to do so, before she glanced up again, but when she did, it was directly at him. She looked startled, embarrassed, her face again turning as red as the dress she wore. She smiled sheepishly, once again returning her attention to the table, to the notebook she held.

Garrett watched as the paper captured her complete focus, the redness of her cheeks slowly fading as concentration took hold. Her expression became so intense, so serious and, *oh man*, so beautiful. His cock stiffened behind the zipper of his slacks and he shifted in his seat in an attempt to relieve a bit of the pressure. It didn't help. All he could think was *please don't let her be waiting for someone*. Out of his league or not, he wasn't sure he could stand to see another man with her right now.

"Not bad." Trey clicked his tongue, the sound splintering through Garrett's thoughts. "She seems a bit young and too classy, but certainly not hard on the eyes."

"What are you talking about?" Garrett focused on his friend as he picked up his glass of Jack Daniels and soda and took a long swig.

"Not what, my friend, but who." Trey's expression was all-knowing. "And I was referring to the blonde in that booth over there you can't seem to keep your eyes off of."

"I was trying to figure out what she's doing. She keeps looking this way and then writing something in that notebook."

"So go ask her."

Garrett shrugged. "Maybe I will." But what would be the point? He'd already deemed her out of his league. No way was a woman like

her attracted to him. Yet, if it wasn't attraction then what brought on the constant looks, the dick-teasing blushes? And what the hell was she writing in that notebook?

She could be a reporter. If that was the case, he should keep his seat, let her come to him. He didn't mind impromptu interviews but he wasn't about to go looking for one. Maybe she was a fan, he mused and then almost immediately dismissed the thought. He just couldn't see it. Ms. Exquisite Diamond and Gold a fan? No way. Women like that went for the preppy, clean-cut boy bands like the Backstreet Boys or the soft rock icons like Michael Bolton or Bryan Adams.

Once again, he was reminded of Alicia Addison and he silently reconsidered his assessment. Derek was far from the preppy suit type, and yet she was head over stiletto heels in love with the vocalist. She was what he and his other band mates had jokingly come to term as a metal head in disguise. Though he doubted the same would hold true for the blonde across the bar, it was that thought in combination with his growing curiosity and arousal that compelled him to rise from the table.

Trey stood, too. "I have to get home. Let me know what happens with the blonde." He tossed a few bills on the tabletop, slapped Garrett's shoulder, and walked away.

Garrett kept his gaze on the blonde as he made his way through the small crowd across the bar. He was only a step away from the booth she occupied when she finally looked up.

* * * *

Suzanne's heart stopped, her breath catching in her throat as she met the eyes of the man she had so easily captured on paper in her sketchbook. Her stomach flip-flopped as a slow, lazy grin unfolded across his full lips. The smile was super-sexy, and she felt her body react to it in ways so exotic and foreign to her it blew her mind.

“Can I buy you another drink?” The mere sound of his voice was so shockingly intimate that it swept over her like a physical caress.

A part of her deep inside melted. Unable to speak, she nodded.

“Do you mind if I join you?”

She gulped and shook her head. He slid into the booth across from her and held up a hand to signal the cocktail waitress. He had beautiful hands, large and confident with long, wide fingers. Artist’s hands, she decided, and wondered fleetingly how they would feel against her bare flesh.

The thought startled her, making her blush...again. Ugg! What in God’s name was wrong with her? In the span of twenty or so minutes she had wondered what it would feel like to be in this man’s arms, to have his hands on her body, and she didn’t even know his name!

The cocktail waitress arrived and he ordered their drinks before returning his attention to her. “I’m Garrett Henry.”

He didn’t reach for her, didn’t extend his hand for her to shake. Instead, he laced those long fingers together and laid them on the table before him.

Okay, so now she knew his name. Still, that didn’t make her body’s reaction to this man any less shocking. She wasn’t a woman who was easily turned on by a man. More often than not, she found men to be intimidating, sex-hungry, overpowering individuals. She never had the hot, heavy fantasies that many women did. Oh, she dreamed, but it was of romance and everlasting love, of marriage and of children, rather than the intimacies between a man and a woman. Yet, as she stared at this man, all she could think about was being with him in the most unspeakable ways. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, she felt like a woman possessed. Who was this seemingly sex-starved being that had taken over her thoughts?

“And you are?” He tilted his head and lifted one brow.

Snap out of it! “Suzanne,” she answered quickly.

“Suzanne Cassidy?” the cocktail waitress asked as she set their drinks on the table.

“Yes.” Startled and confused, Suzanne looked up at the bushy redhead.

“You had a phone call.” The waitress smacked a wad of gum with each word. “Some woman named Georgiana. She said to tell you something came up and she won’t be able to meet you tonight. She said she was sorry and she would get in touch with you tomorrow.”

“Thank you.”

Garrett waited until the waitress walked away before he spoke. “A friend of yours?”

“Georgiana? Actually, I’ve never met her.” But she owed her big. Suzanne hoped whatever was keeping the gallery owner away was nothing serious. Still, as she met the mesmerizing gaze of Garrett Henry, she knew she’d have to thank Georgiana for this forced opportunity to meet this man. “We’ve talked, of course, but tonight would have been our first face-to-face meeting.”

“So you came here on some sort of business, then?”

“Yes.”

“Mind if I ask what kind? I don’t mean to pry, just making conversation.” His broad shoulders rose and fell in a slight shrug.

Suzanne smiled, warming to him in a way she had only been able to do with few men. Handsome, polite, easy to talk to, it was a pleasant surprise that comforted her even as the alien stirrings of what she could only define as arousal set her hormones on end.

“Georgiana works at the Philadelphia Gallery of Modern Art. She wants to display my work in the gallery.”

“You’re an artist.” It was more of a surprised statement than a question. “What kind of work do you do?”

“Paintings, sketches.” She paused and sipped her wine. The chilled sweet taste did little to quench the fire that merely looking at this man ignited inside her. “Landscapes and nature scenes, mostly, but I do some people as well.”

“Is that what you were doing?” His gaze pointedly darted to the sketchbook that now lay closed on the table in front of her.

Darn if she didn't feel her cheeks reddening again! She had long passed the nervous, embarrassed stage of allowing people to see her work, but this sketch... "I was just doodling." *Don't ask to see it. Please don't ask.* No such luck.

"Can I look?" Even as he spoke, his hand was slowly inching toward the sketchbook. When she didn't stop him, he pulled the sketchbook to him and flipped open the cover. It was a new sketchbook, one she'd purchased especially for her trip before leaving Florida, and his was the first sketch. "Wow!" He gasped, tilting the notebook up slightly to get a better view in the dim light. "You're good."

"Thank you. It's just a rough sketch. The lighting in here is terrible."

"It's amazing. The sketch, it's like..." He paused, his gaze moving over the paper, as if searching for the right words. "It's like looking into a mirror and seeing my reflection in black and white."

"The eyes aren't quite right," she said, more to herself than him. "It was hard to capture the true essence of your eyes from the distance and darkness."

He looked at her. No, she'd definitely hadn't gotten the eyes right. The shape was slightly off and the color, not even her best pastels could fully imitate the green of his eyes. They were the color of grass in an open field on a hot summer day and she felt her temperature rise to her very core.

"You have great eyes." Ohmigod! Had she really said that aloud?

His smile heated to the intensity of molten lava. He closed the sketchbook and slid it back across the table to her. "Would you like to dance?"

"I...um..." It's okay, a small angelic voice said in her mind. Live a little, came another voice, this one more devious and mischievous. At least they both agreed. That didn't happen often. "I would love to," she finally answered and heard the echo of applause in her head.

They slid out of the booth together and she placed her hand in his. An electric jolt shot through her fingers, traveling up her arm. She looked up at him, surprised by the warmth and softness of his skin and the sensual effect it had on her. He gently squeezed her hand before leading her to the dance floor.

The song that played was a slow one, a bit harder than Suzanne's usual choice of music, and she knew she wouldn't recognize the artist. She preferred the soft easy sounds of classic bands like Chicago or Journey to the hard-hitting drums and heavy guitar of most of the music she had heard played on the bar's jukebox this night. Still, she attempted to focus on it rather than the man who was pulling her into his arms. Her endeavor failed miserably. She had wondered what those thick forearms would feel like wrapped around her. Now she knew and, oh God, what a feeling!

* * * *

Garrett drew her closer as they began to move in time with the music. Even in heels, she was a good three inches shorter than he. She felt like a Barbie Doll against his large frame. He was afraid to hold her too tightly for fear she might break.

She looked up at him, drawing her bottom lip between her teeth. It was a nervous gesture. He could feel the slight tremor of her body in his arms. But, nervous or not, the gesture was so unconsciously sexual he felt its effect in his groin. He fought not to push his lower body against hers, knowing she would feel his erection if he did, and fearing it would scare her away. The urge to capture that oh-so-kissable bottom lip between his teeth and steal a nibble only managed to aid in the fierceness of his arousal.

A smile played at the corners of her mouth, and he wondered if she could read his thoughts. She was an artist and that meant she had a trained eye for detail and observation. If his eyes did betray his thoughts, she didn't seem to mind. By her own accord, she stepped

even closer into him, laying her cheek on his chest. He rested his chin on the top of her head, closing his eyes as her unmistakably enticing Chanel scent drifted to his nostrils, fueling his desire. He was doing his damndest to get a handle on his control, to somehow soften the erection that was becoming increasingly painful, but the scent of her combined with the feel of her small, fragile body pressed to his made it nearly impossible.

They moved in silence, and when the song faded into another slow ballad, they continued to dance. As the hour grew late, the barroom began to fill, the dance floor becoming more cramped, fusing the dancing couples to one another, and he knew he could dance like this forever.

* * * *

"I don't think I've danced this much since my senior prom," Suzanne said later in the evening as they walked back to the booth.

"That couldn't have been too long ago." Garrett flashed a smile and her world seemed to shift.

She felt as though she had been riding a Tilt-A-Whirl all night. Each time he smiled at her, each time he pulled her into his firm muscular arms, each time he caressed her hair with his palm, the ground moved beneath her feet. When he gazed at her with those green eyes so full of intensity and desire, the world spun out of control. Never before had she sensed such heat radiating from a man, such a searing longing to be with her.

"It's been almost ten years. Well, eight, actually." She picked up her wine glass and sipped. It had grown warm while they were on the dance floor and she winced from the tartness.

"Do you want another one?"

"I better not. It's getting late. I should probably be heading for the hotel." She didn't want her night with this man to end, but she had a growing sensation in her most secret places that was telling her if she

didn't get away soon, she might end up doing things she had no business doing.

Like going to bed with a man she had just met.

The devious, mischievous voice in her head booed and chided her while the angel applauded. Her heart tripped at the thought, then stilled at the realization that she wanted to tie the little angel's hands behind her back, blindfold and gag her, and give the little devil the entertainment he wanted.

It was the wine, she decided, the alcohol impairing her judgment. Never mind the fact that she only had three glasses all night. She felt the desire within her to do things she never would have considered before. She wanted to say to hell with etiquette, with responsibility, with morals, with twenty-five years of waiting and ask this man to make love to her. But even if she were able to completely let go, she would never have the courage to make such a request. She couldn't believe the thought even crossed her mind!

It was the little devil's fault. Throwing away twenty-five years of celibacy for one night between the sheets! Did the little red freak with the devious grin and spiky horns think she had lost her ever-lovin' mind?

Garrett placed a wad of bills on the table and stood. He walked her outside. "Do you have a car?"

"No, I took a cab."

"Need a taxi, Miss?" a man leaning against a yellow car parked at the curb asked at the same time Garrett asked, "Can I give you a ride?"

Suzanne hesitated, her gaze darting between the two men. Her imaginary companions appeared on her shoulders. The angel on her right told her to take the cab, while the devil on her left whispered wickedly for her to allow Garrett to take her back to the hotel. She yearned to listen to the devil. He was so cute, and his beady little eyes were offering so much fun. She felt his power, felt the longing pull at

her resolve. But she couldn't. She shouldn't. She knew she should listen to the angel instead.

"I better take the cab," she finally said, albeit reluctantly.

Garrett nodded, understanding evident in his eyes. "How long will you be in town?" He walked with her to the taxi. The driver got behind the wheel and waited.

"I'm not really sure, a few weeks, probably."

"Can I see you again?" His arms moved around her waist as he spoke. He pulled her to him and she went willingly.

"I—I have a suite at Loews until Friday." The excitement of the possibility of seeing him again surged through her veins. "After that, I'll be staying with a friend."

"I'll call you." His voice lowered, growing so husky it took her breath away.

Unable to speak, she looked up at him and nodded. When he brought a hand to her face in a tender caress, she leaned her cheek into his slightly callused palm.

"I want to kiss you," he whispered. "I've wanted to kiss you all night."

When she still said nothing, his hand moved to her chin. With a gentle tug of his thumb, her mouth parted for him as his lips neared hers.

Like everything else about the man, his kiss was soft and light, and when his tongue swept into her mouth, she felt it all the way to her toes. She sighed into his mouth as her tongue met his stroke for stroke. Sensations she hadn't known were possible exploded inside her. His arms tightened around her waist as he pulled her closer still, and not for the first time that night, she felt his growing erection against her stomach.

All too soon, he ended the kiss and slowly pulled away. "You better go."

Though it was the last thing she wanted, she knew he was right. She couldn't explain the magnetic attraction between them, but

sensed that if she didn't watch herself, she could easily become welded to this man.

"Thanks for a wonderful evening." She slid into the backseat of the taxi. "I had a great time."

"So did I." He leaned through the door to brush a quick kiss on her forehead. "I'll call you." He pulled back and shut the door.

As the taxi drove away, Suzanne wondered if she really would ever see Garrett Henry again. She wanted to. Every fiber of her being wanted to see him again, to be held by him, to be kissed by him, to do so much more. But in the course of a few short hours, he had awakened things inside her she hadn't known existed, made her feel things she hadn't thought possible. If she never saw him again, she would forever have fond memories of her first night in Philadelphia.

Who would have thought? She rested her head against the back of the seat and closed her eyes, a small smile toying with her lips. The little devil crossed his arms and scowled. The angel beamed, and muttered comforting words of praise.

Chapter Two

Suzanne awoke the next morning disoriented and suffering from a pounding headache. When the phone on the bedside table rang, she nearly leapt out of her skin, and then groaned in agony as the movement jarred her aching brain. It wasn't exactly a hangover that had her head feeling like the little devil had come into possession of a huge sledgehammer and took up residence behind her eyes. She'd only had three glasses of wine last night. But the previous day had been taxing to her nerves, and the fact that she couldn't remember eating anything more than the bagel with low-fat cream cheese and diced grapefruit she'd had at breakfast yesterday morning certainly couldn't have helped.

The phone jingled again, and she knew she had to stop the monstrous noise before her head exploded. Easing up in the bed, she picked up the cordless hotel phone, answering with a groggy, "Hello."

"Suzanne?"

Suzanne winced at the bright, bubbly voice on the other end of the line and tilted the receiver away from her ear. *Too loud. Must find aspirin. Quick!* The thoughts came to her in incomplete form, but their meaning was crystal clear.

"It's Georgiana, darling. I hope I didn't wake you," the way-too-cheery-for-this-time-of-the-morning voice continued.

"No, I've been up for a while," Suzanne lied as she slid off the bed and scurried to her purse which sat on a mahogany table just inside the door in the small living room area of the suite. She dug around in the bottom, pushing her wallet, lipstick and other items

aside until her fingers curled around the small bottle of extra-strength Tylenol she carried for times like these.

“You sound absolutely dreadful, darling.” Georgiana’s purring twang sounded like a cross between a Siamese kitten and Miss Jane Hathaway of the *Beverly Hillbillies*. “You aren’t getting sick, I hope.”

“No, no, just a little headache.” Tylenol in hand, Suzanne straightened her knee-length sleep shirt—pink with a picture of a black and white panda bear—and walked to the small refrigerator in the corner. She was grateful to find it stocked with eight-ounce bottles of water. She quickly popped two of the pills, and then sank down on the queen-size floral print sofa to wait for them to take effect.

“Did you have too much to drink while you were waiting for me? I’m so sorry I had to cancel on you last night. You wouldn’t believe the day I had yesterday.”

“It’s okay, Georgiana. I didn’t mind.”

Though the pain was still there, the fog around her brain began to fade and she remembered why she hadn’t minded getting stood up the night before. At the thought of Garrett Henry, her lips began to tingle and her insides kicked into a funny dance. She remembered every single moment of the night before in pristine detail, but it was the kiss that made her body hum. Garrett Henry had lips designed to lure a woman between the sheets and a mouth that gave new meaning to the art of kissing. In the course of a few hours he had made her feel sexy, desirable and all woman, a feat no other man had ever done.

“Did you stay at the bar for a while? Meet any hot men to make your stay in Philly more enjoyable?”

Suzanne giggled and then wished she hadn’t because even that hurt. “Actually...”

Georgiana squealed and Suzanne moaned. “Darling, you must tell me all about him. Why don’t we meet for lunch at The Garden Deli? It’s a nice little place down the street from your hotel on the right. We’ll have Philly Cheesesteaks and talk about your exhibit.”

Suzanne's stomach revolted at the thought of ingesting a Philly sub, but she *was* in Philadelphia, she reminded herself. She couldn't make a trip to Philly without experiencing the taste of its trademark sandwich at least once.

"What time?"

"One o'clock. That'll give you time to get rid of that headache and we'll miss the majority of the lunch rush."

"Then I'll see you at one."

* * * *

By one o'clock, Suzanne's headache had disappeared and she was feeling much like herself again. If only Tylenol could cure the aches of homesickness, she would be superb. She'd been battling the almost overwhelming bouts of melancholy fairly well until her mother phoned a little before noon. Just hearing her mother's sweet, loving voice and her father's hearty jokes made her long for home more than she had since arriving in Philadelphia.

As she stepped onto the sidewalk that would lead her to The Garden Deli, she buried her yearning for home and tried to enjoy the scenery. This section of Market Street was lined with department stores and restaurants. She spotted a few she thought she might like to visit before returning home.

The temperature was cool but not yet blistering. Thank goodness it was only October. Another month, maybe less, and winter would be in full force, but for now, she was comfortably clad in a pale yellow straight dress with sleeves that gathered at her elbows and matching pumps. She'd pulled the sides of her hair into her usual relaxed style, fastened with a gold barrette in the back, and reveled in the feel of the breeze as it caressed the sides of her neck.

She easily found The Garden Deli on the right of the street, as Georgiana had said she would. It was a small restaurant decorated in

greens and white with only a few tables and booths for its patrons. She guessed it did more take-out business than dine-in.

Hoping she wouldn't be in for another long wait in a strange place, she scanned the handful of people sitting at the tables. Since she had yet to meet Georgiana in person, she had no idea what the woman looked like. She heard someone call her name, and her attention was instantly drawn to a woman in a booth at the back of the deli.

Georgiana was definitely no Miss Jane Hathaway, Suzanne decided as she made her way to the booth, nor was she a Siamese kitten. Retro was the first word to come to mind given her wild dress of vibrant colors—hot pink blouse, lime green sash, deep purple slacks—generous makeup, and bob of red curls. Large gold hoop earrings dangled from her lobes and equally large rings of diamonds and gems garnished her fingers. Suzanne liked her one the spot.

“My, you’re a dainty little thing.” Georgiana bubbled. There was no other word to describe her. She leapt from the booth, threw her arms around Suzanne, and drew her close for a suffocating hug of heavy floral perfume. “Have a seat. I just love the mature schoolgirl look. I could never pull it off like you can, though.” When Suzanne blushed, she quickly added, “I didn’t mean to embarrass you, honey. You simply took me by surprise, though I don’t know why. I should’ve guessed by the sound of your voice on the phone, so innocent and pure.”

Ugg, she really hated being seen as innocent and pure, even if it was the truth. She brushed it off, reasoning she shouldn’t have been so shocked by Georgiana’s appearance either, despite her Siamese-Hathaway voice. Lots of people associated with the arts preferred the gaudy and elaborate, as opposed to the simple and drab that defined her.

“I took the liberty of ordering our sandwiches. They should arrive any minute. I wasn’t sure what you would want to drink, so I just got water.”

“Water is fine.”

A burly man with a balding head appeared with their Philly Cheesesteaks.

“Juicy stuff first, and then we’ll get to business.” Georgiana sprinkled salt between the sub buns without so much as a sampled taste first. “Tell me about this man you met last night. Or was it men?” She waggled eyebrows over greenish-blue eyes that glinted with a wicked twinkle.

“It was just one.” Suzanne flushed and picked up her sandwich. God, she would never be able to eat it all!

“Gorgeous?” Georgiana prodded between bites of her own sandwich.

Suzanne thought of Garrett Henry, of his long, handsome face, his broad, muscular body, his intense green eyes and super-sexy smile and her insides went goofy again. “I sketched him,” she said finally. “The lighting in the bar wasn’t so good but I think I did an adequate job.”

“Tell me you brought it with you!” Georgiana gushed.

Suzanne licked her fingers before wiping them on a napkin. Her mother would have chastised her for doing such an unmannerly thing in public but she couldn’t help it. Like the food at that chicken restaurant, the sandwich was finger-licking good.

She carefully pulled the sketchbook from her bag and handed it across the table to Georgiana. “It’s the first sketch.”

Georgiana gasped, her eyes growing to the size of half-dollars. It was pretty comical really, the way a cartoon character’s eyes popped out of their head when they were surprised. “Holy shit, Suzanne! This is the man you spent last night with?”

“We didn’t spend the night together.” Though to her utter disbelief, spending a night with the man didn’t sound nearly as wrong as it should have. Apparently that little devil’s influence had more of an effect on her than she thought. “We had a couple of drinks, talked, danced, and then I took a taxi back to the hotel.”

"I would have never thought..." Georgiana shook her head and let her words trail off.

"Thought what?"

"That he would..." She paused again, her head continuing its side-to-side gesture. "Well, don't take this the wrong way, sweetie, but I never would've thought you would be his type."

"You know him?" Suzanne asked in surprise. She was even more shocked when she reached down for her sub and discovered she had nearly eaten every bite.

"Darling, almost everyone in this town knows him." Georgiana eyed her for a moment and then added, "But from your reaction, I gather you don't."

"His name is Garrett Henry." She shrugged. "I know he lives here in Philadelphia. He's just completed the construction on his new house at the edge of the city limits. I did learn a good bit about him last night." Boy, she sounded defensive. Why did she feel such a sudden need to defend herself?

"And did he tell you what he does for a living?"

Suzanne opened her mouth, closed it again, and thought back. "I don't remember asking." Oh, God, was he some sort of mobster? A hit man for hire, perhaps? He was certainly built for such a job.

What a person did for a living was such an important fact, she couldn't believe she hadn't asked. Not because she cared about how much money he made, but it would have given her a great deal of insight into the type of man he was. Yet she *did* have a good excuse for not asking last night. It had been difficult to think of anything to say in the man's presence. As the night went on, she'd grown more comfortable with him but her body's reaction to him had kept her mind in a constant blur.

"Garrett Henry is the guitarist for Façade." Georgiana was obviously star-struck.

Suzanne gnawed her bottom lip. Geez, she hated to sound naïve, but... "I'm afraid I have no idea who Façade is."

“No, you wouldn’t.” Georgiana shook her head and laughed. “Are you familiar with heavy metal music?”

“That’s like screeching guitars and lyrics sung so fast you can’t understand a word they’re saying, right?”

“That’s one way to describe it.” Georgiana laughed again. “Though not all heavy metal is that way. Façade’s music isn’t. It’s heavy, yes, but you can understand the words and, while the beat is fast, it isn’t screeching. Their music ventures more into the melodic side of heavy metal. They’ve been one of the biggest bands in the genre for the last few years, and Garrett Henry is their guitar player.”

* * * *

“Do you want something to drink?” Alicia Addison asked as Garrett sat down on the smooth black leather sofa in Derek Kadin’s apartment. The place was sparsely furnished, but each item chosen fit the vocalist’s personality. Everything was black or wrought iron.

Much like the man, Garrett mused. Derek often had bleak views of the world in which they lived and a will that was as strong as the wrought iron with which he surrounded himself. It was that darkness and insatiable appetite that came through in the lyrics Derek wrote, combined with the powerful music he, Reese and Trey pulled from their instruments that had made Façade such a popular band in the metal scene.

“I’ll take a soda, if you have one.”

“With a bowl of Blue Bell’s Golden Vanilla ice cream?” Alicia’s grin was dazzling and proof of why Derek had so quickly fallen for the woman.

“Baby, you do know the way to my heart,” Garrett moaned. He wasn’t a picky eater and didn’t care much about food one way or another, but nothing could catch the attention of his taste buds like a few scoops of Blue Bell’s Golden Vanilla ice cream.

Alicia chuckled and batted her long dark eyelashes. “I have to take care of my Façade men.”

Garrett watched her as she walked into the kitchen for his drink and ice cream. He liked Alicia. From the moment he had picked her up at the airport in Atlantic City a couple of months back—the band had performed a show that night and she had flown in to meet Derek—he had known she was the woman his friend had been looking for. The couple had gotten off to a rocky start, but they had worked things out and, in all the years he had known Derek, Garrett had never seen the man so happy and content with his life.

“Derek has been working out this afternoon,” Alicia called from the kitchen. “He’s in the shower now, but he should be out soon.”

“I’m surprised you aren’t in there with him,” Garrett teased. It wasn’t a lie. Alicia and Derek were two of the most sex-crazed people he’d ever met. Derek had always gotten more action than the rest of the guys in the band, Garrett included, but even settling down with Alicia hadn’t changed that. The vocalist simply got all his action from one woman now instead of many.

“When are you going to get a woman and quit ragging Derek and me about our sex life?” She returned to the living room, soda and bowl of ice cream in hand. She was barefoot, clad in a pair of thigh-hugging shorts and a tank top that fully exposed her midriff. Looking at her, the way she was dressed, no one would guess she came from a family loaded with money, and a substantial bank account of her own.

“I’m working on it.” Garrett popped the top on the soda can, took a long pull.

“Are you now?” Alicia’s brows winged up. She sat on the opposite end of the sectional sofa, curling her legs beneath her. “And how is the search going? Met any prospects?”

Suzanne Cassidy’s angelic face instantly popped to mind. Not that he’d actually been able to get her *out* of his mind since the kiss they shared outside the bar last night. He set the soda can on the table and poked at the ice cream with the spoon. He’d wanted to call her the

minute he awoke that morning, but argued with himself it wasn't a good idea. She was only in town for a few weeks and nothing about her had struck him as the type who would go for a casual affair.

No, Suzanne Cassidy was the commitment type. Sweet, innocent, bashful, possibly even one of the elite few who still believed in no sex until marriage. She was exactly the type of woman that could steal his heart. Which was precisely why he hadn't called her this morning, nor would he call her any other morning. He couldn't. His heart wasn't something he tossed around lightly and the last thing he could afford was to have it broken again.

Offering his heart to a woman was tricky. Because of his career and lifestyle, most women couldn't handle the limitations of what he could offer. He couldn't be the typical husband that awoke in the morning and went to work, only to return eight or ten hours later for dinner and bed. Sure, he could offer that now, but once he and the guys were through with the new CD, they would hit the road again. He'd be gone for months at a stretch on tour before coming back home. He needed a woman who could either travel with him or handle his long absences alone. Suzanne Cassidy didn't strike him as a woman who could do either.

Despite the decision he made, he found himself asking Alicia, "You know a lot about art, don't you?"

She shot him a quizzically intrigued glance. "I know a little. It depends on what kind of art we're talking about. Why?"

"Trey and I went for a few drinks after rehearsal last night and I met this woman. She's a sketch artist. A damned good one, too. She sketched me from across the bar and it was almost like looking into a mirror."

"A woman sketched you from across a bar?" Derek joined the conversation as he walked into the living room.

He was five-foot-seven without the platform boots he generally wore that Garrett had spotted by the front door when he walked in. The vocalist shaved his head, something that made nearly all their

female fans drool like puppies. He was muscular, about as broad as Garrett, and wearing a pair of black sweat pants he'd cut into shorts and a black muscle shirt. A white towel was rolled and draped over his shoulders. He regarded Garrett with amusement as he sat down on the sofa behind Alicia, pulling her into his arms.

"Yeah, it shocked the hell out of me, too. She's a painter as well. Apparently, her work is going to be displayed at the Philadelphia Gallery of Modern Arts in the coming weeks."

"What's her name Maybe I've heard of her."

"Suzanne Cassidy."

"Suzanne Cassidy!" Alicia sat straight up so fast she nearly choked herself with Derek's arm around her. "You're kidding me."

"I take it you've heard of her." Garrett laughed, but inside his heart was doing acrobatic flips.

"Heard of her? I went to school with her! She's younger than me, so we weren't in the same classes. We didn't hang out with the same people either, but I've known her since we were both in pigtails."

"You wore pigtails?" Derek grinned and pulled her to him again. "Sounds stimulating." He kissed the top of her head.

"Oh, shut up." She elbowed him in the stomach.

Garrett wasn't sure what it was that made the word 'stimulating' an ongoing joke between the couple, and he'd never asked. Right now he was too shocked and keyed up by the news that Alicia knew Suzanne to be concerned with anything else.

"It really is a small world after all." Alicia's chuckle held a hint of disbelief. "Diana and I saw Suzanne at the gallery in St. Pete not long before I flew to Atlantic City. Since somebody won't let me go back to Florida right now," she shot Derek a teasingly accusing glance over her shoulder, "I had no idea Suzanne had left, but I can't believe she's here in Philadelphia."

"Is she single?" Garrett could've kicked himself. Hadn't he decided he was never going to see the woman again? Yet he was prying his best friend's girlfriend for more information. Good one!

“As far as I know.” Alicia’s eyes sparkling with mischief. “She really got to you, didn’t she?”

Garrett shrugged, suddenly growing uncomfortable with both the conversation and his need for information about the stunning little blonde he couldn’t get out of his head. “You could say that.”

“I can’t tell you all that much about her.” Alicia sighed. “Her family runs in the same circles as mine, so our paths have crossed a time or two. We’ve never actually hung out, so we were never all that close. I can tell you she is a fairly private person, pretty much keeps to herself. The sweet, shy type...or at least she was in school. Family and art always seemed to be the only things she cared about. I don’t even think I’ve ever seen her with a man, though I’m sure she’s dated. But to my knowledge, she has never had a serious relationship.”

Never had a serious relationship? Never even seen her with a man? Christ! Was it possible she was a freaking virgin?

Damn if the idea didn’t have his cock stiffening even as his fingers itched to pick up the phone.

* * * *

Suzanne set up her easel, canvas and paints before the bay window in the bedroom of her suite. She was on the top floor of the hotel and, though there were two other windows in the suite, this one overlooked the city. Tall skyscrapers towered into the clouds decorating the baby blue sky. Looking down, she saw the streets stretching between the many buildings and hints of cars passing and people walking.

She should probably be one of those people, she mused, spending her day touring the city. She spotted several places yesterday she would like to visit. But the overpowering desire to paint hit her almost the instant she opened her eyes, and when such a powerful urge struck she could do nothing else.

Picking up her brush, she stared blindly at the blank canvas. The feeling was so strong inside her, yet she had no idea where to begin. It was because she couldn't focus, she knew. She had been having a heck of a time focusing on anything since her first night in Philadelphia. Focusing on anything but Garrett Henry, that is.

It had been two days since her lunch date with Georgiana. Two days since she discovered the man she'd danced with, the man she'd kissed on her first night in town, was a heavy metal rock star. Two days since she realized she would never see or hear from him again.

Good thing she had listened to the sweet little angel.

He'd said he would call. He hadn't, of course. She knew now that he wouldn't. She had simply been a woman he met in a bar, shared a few dances with, and kissed at the end of the night. Yeah, good thing she'd listened to the angel and hadn't slept with him!

Not that she would have. She had only come close to sleeping with two men in her twenty-five years of life, and she had known both of them a lot longer than a couple of hours. She was a virgin, not necessarily saving herself for marriage but definitely saving herself for...What? Love? Probably. Maybe. Possibly. Oh, she didn't know. How could she? She'd never been in love before.

Then again, maybe she was simply waiting for that special feeling, that *right* feeling. Surely a person got some kind of indication like that when the right time came. Didn't they? Oh, she was so confused.

"And that's why he hasn't called," she said aloud. She sighed and put down her brush on the holder extending from the easel. It was Thursday. Her exhibit would be opening at the gallery tonight and tomorrow Tony would be back from his trip. She would check out of the hotel and go to his place for the remainder of her stay in Philadelphia.

Suzanne met Tony last summer during her visit to Paris as part of her studies at the University of South Florida. He'd been there on vacation, touring the museums and exquisite structures of the

romantic city. It was in one of those art museums that they met and instantly hit it off. Generally uncomfortable with men, she found herself pleasantly surprised at how instantly at ease she'd felt with Tony. Probably because he was gay, she had decided later. With him, none of the insecurities she usually felt with men existed.

Her thoughts reverted to Garrett, and she sighed again. Even if he truly had planned to call, if he didn't do so before tomorrow, he wouldn't know how to reach her. Her heart sank at the thought. She didn't know why she wanted him to call so badly, why she longed to see him again. With her discovery of his profession had come the realization they were more opposite than she could have guessed.

Despite all she'd learned, all she'd realized, never before had a man invaded her mind the way Garrett Henry was doing now. The mere thought of his hard muscular arms around her, of his lips on hers, of the state of his arousal she'd felt against her belly when he held her close made her juices flow, soaking her feminine lips. She'd turned him on, and oh, boy, had he done the same for her.

Suzanne couldn't believe some of the things, the vivid pictures that had popped into her mind since that night. Her own thoughts embarrassed her! Last night she dreamt of being in his arms again, but this time, they hadn't been surrounded by people. They'd been alone in her hotel room, alone in her bed.

In her dream, he ravished her. He sucked her nipples until she squirmed beneath him, fingered her clit until she nearly exploded, and pounded his cock inside her until she cried out with pleasure. The bluntness and detail of her dream shocked her into a level of ecstasy she had never before experienced. She awoke sweaty and breathless, her underwear soaked with her own juices. It had been the first wet dream of her life! Too bad for her it had only been a dream.

Chapter Three

A tall, slinky man in a black and white server uniform carrying a tray of champagne flutes greeted Garrett when he stepped through the door of the Philadelphia Gallery of Modern Arts on Thursday night. He wasn't much of a champagne drinker, but he took a glass and said a polite thank you anyway.

He scanned the crowd of elegantly dressed people and felt completely out of place. The room he'd walked into was large and open, the floor hardwood, the walls painted a pale shade of tan. Paintings hung scattered about on those walls, being admired by some of the guests while others stood conversing in small groups around the room. He didn't recognize a single soul. Not even the woman he had come to see.

He'd thought endlessly of calling Suzanne Cassidy over the last couple of days. Hell, he'd been unable to get the woman out of his mind! His resolve to stay away from her had been too weak, his desire to see her again far too strong. Last night as he sat alone in his newly finished house, he finally had enough. He had picked up the phone to make the call, but instead had called the gallery. The attendant had informed him of tonight's opening of the exhibit of her work, and he had decided to surprise her by showing up.

It seemed like a great idea at the time, but gazing around now at a place in which he didn't belong, it no longer felt like the smart thing to do. If he'd needed any more indication that the woman was *way* out of his league, the gallery and the crowd filling it should have been enough.

He would give it half an hour, he decided as he began to walk along the wall, looking at the paintings spaced throughout. The scribbled signature in the bottom right corner confirmed they were Suzanne's work. Her talent was incredible, her eye for detail and contrast amazing.

Damn, he wanted to see her again! The yearning he had felt since the moment he held her in his arms rekindled inside him. The feeling worried him because it wasn't merely a sexual yearning. He wanted her, yes. He longed to bury his stiff cock inside her as far as it would go and then some, to taste every soft, sweet inch of her, to feel her beneath him. But the few short hours he spent with her that night at the bar had aroused more in him than his hormones.

A half an hour, he thought again. And if he didn't see her in those thirty minutes, he would call her in the morning at the hotel. She'd said she would be checking out on Friday but he could catch her before she left. He would have to. One way or another, he had to see Suzanne Cassidy again.

* * * *

"Heads up," Georgiana whispered in Suzanne's ear and then scurried away like a little mouse.

Suzanne stared after her, then turned her head and froze. Her heartbeat accelerated. Her attention glued on a tall man with a well-sculpted, muscular body who was studying her paintings displayed on the front wall of the gallery. He turned slightly, and her stomach flip-flopped as she took in his side profile. He'd pulled his shoulder-length dark hair into a ponytail at the nape of his neck, exposing a silver loop earring she hadn't noticed the other night. He'd shaved, too. The well-groomed goatee and mustache he'd had that night in the bar were gone, the silver stud in his lower lip now more prominent. He was dressed in a crisp white shirt with the sleeves rolled to just below his elbows, a pair of dark navy slacks and boots.

Nervously, she brought the glass of champagne she held to her lips and took a large sip, hoping the alcohol would calm her racing pulse and give her the courage she would need to approach him. She couldn't believe he had come! It had been days since that night at the bar. He hadn't called and she'd resigned herself to the fact that she would never see him again. Yet, there he was, Garrett Henry in the flesh. One look at his tightly muscled biceps and forearms made her waist scream for their capture.

"Is something wrong, Suzanne?" Walter Alden's baritone voice broke through her thoughts.

Suzanne jumped, startled. In her appraisal of Garrett, she'd forgotten her conversation with the older, distinguished, balding gentleman. "No, nothing is wrong." She turned to the man and forced a smile. "I just spotted someone I haven't seen in a while. If you would excuse me..."

Her heart hammered in her chest. Her pulse surged through her veins so fast she could hear it in her ears drowning out the sound of the conversations around her as she made her way across the open room toward Garrett. She was only a few feet away from him when he saw her, and his lips spread in that oh-so-sexy smile that had haunted her dreams of the past nights.

Run, the sweet little angel whispered.

Straight to his arms, the devious devil added.

He will hurt you, the angel warned.

But it will feel oh so good, the devil argued.

Suzanne shook her head to rid herself of the contradicting thoughts. A few of the gallery patrons spoke to her as she passed. She greeted them with a pleasant hello but didn't falter in her pursuit of Garrett. Right or wrong, angel or devil, she wouldn't ignore him, nor would she run from him. Shivering with nerves, she reached him and managed a hello that sounded far more calm and cool than she felt.

“I thought I might find you here.” He spoke in that soft, deep tone that was like music to her ears. “Though I admit, I was about to give up.”

“How long have you been here?” She gazed into his eyes and found herself instantly caught in his spell.

“A while. I called the gallery. The receptionist told me your exhibit was opening tonight. I wanted to see your work. I wanted to see you.”

He stepped closer, not so much as to raise suspicions, but close enough to drive her hormones on a speeding ride to fantasy land. Visions of him naked and on top of her, of the look in his eyes as he slid his hard cock into her eagerly awaiting pussy the way he had in her dreams, assailed her, saturating her folds and wetting her panties. Her cheeks burned. Thank God he couldn't read her thoughts!

Or could he? His eyes darkened as he gazed down at her with an intensity that made her weak in the knees. She'd seen that look before the night outside the bar just before he kissed her. It was a look of dark passion, of seduction and deep need.

For a moment, all the people in the gallery disappeared. It was only the two of them in her mind, wrapped in each other's arms, feeling, tasting, exploring. She wanted those lips on hers again, wanted those arms around her, longed for so much more.

Sweet Jesus, what was happening to her? She'd never had such thoughts, such visions, such yearning for a man. What was it about this one that made her want to push all reason, all morals aside and fall into bed with him?

“I'm glad you came. I wanted to see you, too.”

He flashed her a sideways grin so boyishly cute it made her chuckle. “Your paintings,” he lifted his chin toward one on the wall behind her head, “they're very good. Hell, who am I kidding? They're excellent! Your talent is amazing.”

“From what I hear, you're equally as talented. You didn't tell me you're an artist, too.”

Confusion moved through his expression before realization dawned. “My music.” He nodded. “Yeah, I guess it is a type of art, though I’ve never thought of it as such.”

“You should. It takes talent to do what you do.”

He lifted a brow. “You listen to heavy metal?”

Suzanne laughed. “I didn’t. Georgiana, the gallery manager, she recognized you from the sketch I drew. She told me you’re the guitarist for the band Façade. Naturally, I had to check it out.”

What she’d done was find herself on an almost desperate search for the closest music store. She’d found one not three blocks from the hotel where she purchased the two CDs and DVD in stock, then rushed back to the hotel to listen. She’d planned to watch the DVD after tonight’s gallery show.

“Naturally.” He grinned. “So, uh, what did you think?”

“It’s heavy, hard, fast, forceful...” She trailed off when she realized how erotic her description sounded. “It’s not my usual style but I liked it. The lyrics of the songs are oddly touching, and the vocalist has an amazing voice.”

“Derek Kadin.” Garrett nodded. “His voice is pretty incredible. Back when we were looking for a vocalist for the band, we held open auditions. The instant Derek opened his mouth, we knew he was the one. You know his girlfriend. Did you know that?”

Suzanne looked at him. Know Derek’s girlfriend? She couldn’t possibly. “Are you sure you aren’t confusing me with someone else?”

“Her name is Alicia, Alicia Addison. She said she went to school with you.”

“You’re kidding! Wow, I had no idea. Is she here in Philadelphia?” Maybe that would help ease some of this homesickness she couldn’t seem to shake. Having someone else around from her hometown, someone she knew even if only a little.

Garrett nodded again. “She’s living with Derek these days. If you aren’t busy tomorrow, I could take you over there.”

That wasn't merely an offer to take her to see a friend. No, he wanted to see her again tomorrow. Her tummy did a happy boogie and she had to bite her bottom lip to hold back the grin that wanted to spread her lips from ear to ear. But darn it, she couldn't see him tomorrow. She would be checking out of the hotel, moving to Tony's place, and who knew what her friend had in store.

"Can we make it Saturday?" Oh, what was she doing to herself? Waiting another full day to see this man again would be sheer torture! It couldn't be helped, she told herself. It simply couldn't be helped. "I'm spending the afternoon with a friend. We met in Paris last year and he lives here in Philadelphia. I don't know what he has planned."

Something passed through Garrett's eyes. Jealously? It sure looked that way. This time, she bit the inside of her cheek, loving the fact that he could be jealous over her spending time with another man. She waited for several heartbeats and then added, "He's gay, but he's one of the sweetest people I've ever met."

Garrett eyes brightened and his features relaxed, a confirmation so clear that yes, he had been jealous, he might as well have screamed busted!

"What are your plans when this is over?"

To do whatever I must to be with you. "Grab a bite to eat, read a book." She shrugged. "Nothing special."

"Mind if I join you?"

"No." Her heart thumped against her ribcage, the word coming out breathless and just a bit shaky.

"Good." He turned and slowly began walking to the next of her paintings on the wall.

* * * *

The show at the gallery stretched on for hours. While Garrett couldn't wait for it to end, he found he liked having the opportunity to watch her. Suzanne Cassidy was simple, yet sophisticated. Timid and

even skittish at times and yet, in the presence of all the gallery patrons, she exuded confidence and absolute control.

He studied her as she drifted away from him, caught in a conversation with a prospective buyer of one of her paintings. She'd pulled her hair into a vertical twist in the back, the style exposing the long expanse of her fair-skinned neck and his mouth watered at the idea of tasting that sweet flesh, tracing the delicate curve of her throat with his tongue, nipping lightly at her jaw.

She'd gone for a dress of pastel blue tonight. Long and straight with a high neckline and virtually little shape, it wasn't the sort of dress a woman would wear if looking sexy were her goal. It was more kindergarten teacher attire. Okay, maybe a kindergarten teacher who somehow found a way to afford to spend an entire paycheck on one dress, but the effect was still the same. Yet as she wandered around the room, drawn into one conversation and then another, he watched her and could only think she looked sexy as hell.

Her breasts weren't large, but they were full and perfectly shaped, and he loved the way her slim, rounded hips swayed just so when she walked. The not-so-sudden urge to get her out of that dress and explore the wonders it hid was nearly more overwhelming than he could bear. He had to look away before he sported a hard-on to the room full of people.

None too soon, she made her way back to him and said they could leave. It took another twenty minutes to say her goodbyes as they left the gallery. The air outside was cool for an October Philadelphia evening, the black sky clear with only a few twinkling stars in the distance.

They stopped on the sidewalk outside the gallery and Suzanne took a deep soothing breath.

"I'm so glad that's over."

"Really? Because you seemed to be having so much fun. You were great in there, you know?" Garrett touched her back, sliding his hand up and down her spine, loving the feel of her slender body to his

palm. "Do you want to go somewhere for a drink? You must be hungry. Where do you want to eat?"

"Some place secluded." She moaned, arching her back into his touch and the movement, the sound drifted straight to his cock. "I've had enough of crowds for one night."

"We could go to my house, or your hotel room. It's closer. We could order room service."

* * * *

Suzanne slowly looked at him. Though she didn't know this man all that well, she had no doubt she could trust him. But could she trust herself? Did she want to be alone with this man in her hotel room? Her entire body tingled, the wetness returned between her legs, and she knew the answer was yes. Could she control herself alone with this man in her hotel room? The wetness intensified, a throbbing began low, hot and deep, and she feared the answer to that question was no.

If you feel that way, you should definitely get as far away from him as you can, the angel's voice sounded in warning.

Oh, come on. She's listened to you her whole life and look where it's gotten her. She's a twenty-five-year-old virgin, for pity's sake, the devil argued.

Obviously sensing her indecision, Garrett's hand stilled on her waist, and he pulled her to face him. He lifted her chin with a finger and gazed into her eyes. "I promise to be a good boy," he said softly. "Nothing has to happen that you don't want."

Suzanne smiled, albeit shakily. She'd always listened to her little angel's voice. This time, her little devil was right. She was tired of being sensible, responsible, *boring*! And damn it, she was tired of being a virgin. She had no idea exactly what it was that came over her, but in that moment she decided if this man wanted to sleep with her tonight, she was going to let him.

“My hotel room is fine,” she said firmly and absolutely. In her mind’s eye, her little angel hung her head and turned her back. Of course, the little devil smiled like never before.

The hotel was only a few blocks from the gallery, and they decided to walk. Garrett’s strong arm stayed around her waist. She reveled in the feel of being so close to him again. The heat radiating from his body broke the chill of the night and she felt a comfort she’d never before felt with a man.

Once in her hotel room, Garrett ordered room service as Suzanne shed her stockings and heels and let down her hair.

“How do you do it?” She sank down on the side of the bed, resting one foot on the opposite knee, and rubbed. God, her feet hurt!

“Do what?” Garrett knelt in front of her, covering her foot with his large hand and taking over the massage.

Suzanne placed her hands behind her on the bed and leaned back. His gentle pressured strokes on her aching feet felt like heaven. “Handle the people, the traveling. I’m sure the crowd at the gallery tonight was nothing compared to the sizes you deal with.”

“You’d be right about that. Multiply tonight’s crowd by about five hundred and you might come close.”

“And how often do you deal with that many people?”

“When we’re touring, we usually do three or four shows a week.”

“And every one of them in a different city, different state, even.”

“Usually.” He nodded. His hand moved up her leg, kneading her calf muscle.

“I don’t think I could live that way.” Her head fell back and she stared up at the ceiling. “I hate to travel and I’m completely uncomfortable in large crowds.”

“You did well tonight. No one guessed you were the slightest bit uncomfortable.”

“It was all an act. The whole time I couldn’t think of anything but getting out of there.” *To be with you.*

“I feel that way sometimes.” His massage on her muscles turned to a gentle caress of her leg. “It hits most before or after a show, when me and the guys are signing autographs and talking with fans. But it’s something that comes with the territory of being a professional musician, just like tonight was for you as an artist. If you hate to travel so much, why are you here in Philadelphia?”

Suzanne sat up straight and looked at him, thinking the answer to that should be obvious. “Because the gallery wanted to display my paintings.”

“And why do you paint?” His hand slid down her leg and he lifted it, resting her ankle on his wide shoulder.

Her eyes widened at the intimacy of the position. Her heart tripped and she fought to keep her composure. “I love to paint. It’s a way of expressing myself, I guess. Everything I paint is a part of me. I can’t imagine my life without art.”

“It’s the same with me.” His lips brushed the side of her leg and tingles shot through her all the way to the roots of her hair. “I love playing guitar. There’s no bigger rush for me than playing for a crowd of fans. Playing guitar is what I want out of life, just as painting is what you want. Traveling and crowds are simply part of the job.”

He continued to kiss her leg sporadically as he spoke, leaving a trail of blazing fire everywhere his lips touched. He, too, had let down his hair, and Suzanne reached out to run her fingers through the silky-smooth strands. Her leg dropped from his shoulder as his arm encircled her waist. He sat up straighter between her legs.

“I guess you’re right,” she said breathlessly as he pulled her to him. Their gazes locked and she could see his intention in his eyes before his lips touched hers.

Her lips parted on a trembling breath and his tongue slid into her mouth. Slowly, seductively it moved over hers. She fisted his hair in her hand, pulling his head closer still, deepening the kiss. He nibbled her bottom lip and then soothed it with a slow lick.

His tongue moved over her chin, down her neck and she let her head fall back, a soft moan escaping her lips. She felt a touch of coolness mixed with the warmth of his kisses and knew it was from the silver stud earring he wore under his lower lip. The feeling was more erotic than anything she'd ever known. His mouth returned to hers, his hand moving to her breast, and his fingers skimmed like a whisper over her taut nipple.

"Oh, God," she gasped into his mouth. The electric current that ripped through her short-circuited all sense of reason. Her insides shook with desire. Her juices soaked her underwear. She wanted to feel his mouth on other parts of her body, feel his tongue as it left a blazing fire of wetness all over her bare flesh. She wanted to touch him, see him, experience his well-sculpted body in a way she'd never experienced another man.

He caught her lower lip between his teeth and stole another nibble before he pulled away. When he gazed at her, she saw her own sexual need mirrored in the depths of his eyes.

"Don't stop. Please." She cupped his jaw, brushing her thumb lightly over the silver stud above his chin. She knew what she was asking, knew what she was offering by that simple request. This man wouldn't be satisfied by mere kisses and caresses. He would want it all. And for the first time in her life, she was ready to give it.

He cupped her breast, his hand covering her completely, his fingers massaging and everything she knew she shouldn't do went out the window. Then a knock sounded at the door and reality came slamming back.

"Room service," she said breathlessly.

Garrett grazed his lips over hers in a feather like caress as stood. "Stay here. I'll be right back."

She nodded and watched him as he moved through the room to the door. If she were going to stop what was happening, now would be the time. But as her gaze scanned his godlike exterior, she knew she couldn't stop the natural series of events that were happening

tonight. She'd waited twenty-five years and, though she knew what she was feeling right now wasn't love, it was a conglomeration of emotions she'd never felt with a man.

She waited for the doubts, for the second thoughts to come and when they didn't, she knew it was right. Determined but nervous, she stood and boldly walked to Garrett.

* * * *

Garrett paid the waiter and closed the door. When he turned around, it was nearly into Suzanne's arms. Her eyes hadn't lost an ounce of the desire he'd seen there before he answered the door. Her angelic features were flushed, her lips red and swollen from his kisses. Damn, she was beautiful!

He should have left. He should have followed that waiter out the door and ran like hell. Only minutes ago, this woman had confirmed everything he'd thought about her, everything he suspected. She wasn't the woman for him. She would never be able to handle the life he had to offer. Yet even knowing he was correct in his assumptions, he couldn't bring himself to leave her.

Without a word, he hooked his arms around her and bent his head to capture her mouth with his. She felt so small, so fragile in his arms and tasted so sweet, so warm, and so freaking innocent. Was she really as innocent as he suspected? The way she responded to his kisses was doing wonderful and amazing things to him, but her slight skittishness told him she was nowhere near being a pro at this.

He should stop before things got out of hand. There were so many reasons why he didn't need to go any further with this woman. Even though she'd asked him not to only moments ago, even though he didn't want to, he knew he should stop. But he couldn't. He wanted her that badly. Had a woman ever made him yearn for her so much he'd lost all self-control, all sense of reason? With his brain so fogged by sexual desire, he couldn't remember.

Her small hands gripped his biceps as she molded her petite body to his. Her breasts flattened against him, her lower body beginning an instinctive grind against his groin. He realized she was standing on her tiptoes. With his knees slightly bent, their bodies were perfectly in line.

“I want you, Suzanne,” he breathed softly, breaking the kiss.

She flattened her feet on the floor, lowering with a slowness against him that made his dick throb. She looked up at him and visibly swallowed. Then she nodded. Her hand slid down his arm to catch his and she pulled him back to the bed.

Turning to him, she splayed her hands on his chest. There was something in her eyes, something that hadn’t been there seconds ago, but what? He couldn’t quite tell.

“There’s s—something you should know before we...proceed.” She was nervous, so much so that she quivered in his arms. Her hands opened and closed on his chest, almost as if they were undecided. Should they hold on to him, or push him away?

Careful to keep his touch tender, he cupped her cheek in his hand, half framing her face. “We don’t have to do this, Suzanne.” God, he almost *wanted* her to say no. If she did he would have no choice but to stop. Damn it, at the same time, he didn’t want her to say no. How could he walk away from this woman, from this moment, this chance when his body hummed so desperately to be with her in every erotic and soul consuming way a man could be with a woman? “Our salads are getting cold. I would be perfectly happy eating and talking for the rest of the night.” And wasn’t that the lie to top them all? Good ole Pinocchio had nothing on him.

She giggled and the sound moved over him like a physical caress, so soft and sweet he nearly groaned. A small smile unfolded across her lips and, oh yeah, that had definitely been a lie. He wanted far more out of tonight than dinner and chat time—unless she was serving herself as the main course.

“The salads are supposed to be cold, silly.”

Garrett couldn't help but smile. His arms encircled her waist and he felt her relax, but only marginally. "You're so beautiful."

She looked away, her cheeks growing pink. "No one has ever told me that before."

He leaned back and knew his surprise was written on his face. "You're kidding, right?"

She shook her head. "Men have said I'm pretty in a homely sort of way, but never beautiful."

Jesus! What? Were they gay? "Sweetheart, the men you've been with have been blind."

"That's just it, Garrett." She took a deep breath and let it out on a shaky sigh. "I've..." She stopped and then, as if the world would end before she could get the words out, she rushed on. "I've never actually been *with* a man."

Chapter Four

Garrett stared down at her, unable to comprehend and then suddenly understanding far more clearly than he might have liked. She'd never been with a man. She'd never slept with a man. She was a...

Whoa! His arms dropped from her waist and he took a startled step backwards. He jammed his fingers through his hair, closing his eyes as a new wave of emotions flooded him. It was an odd combination of shock, disbelief, compassion, want, need and even a bit of fear that blended into a confusing blur. Once again, his assumption had been correct. But this one...this one was huge. He'd pegged her for innocent, known she wasn't as experienced as he, but a virgin...Holy shit!

"Garrett?" Suzanne spoke questioningly, so softly he almost didn't hear her. "Please say something."

He opened his eyes, forcing himself to focus on her. To her credit, she kept her chin high, her gaze locked on him. But he could see the fear, the sadness and the embarrassment swirling in her eyes, and his heart sank. Oh, man. His reaction had to have stung. He saw it written all over her face. But, geezus, she'd shocked the hell out of him. How had she expected him to react to something like that? She was a virgin!

He took a deep breath, latching on to that last word and what it meant. At the age of twenty-five, Suzanne Cassidy was as inexperienced as a woman could get. There were reasons why she'd lived all these years without giving her flower to a man. He'd read that somewhere, he didn't remember when or where, but the term

seemed to fit the moment. Because this woman was a flower, he realized, a bud, really. She was a bud that had yet to bloom.

Suzanne was the type of woman to whom her virginity would be a prized possession. For twenty-five years she'd purposely kept herself from blooming. That fact told him just how inexperienced she really was. She'd never been in love. If she had, she wouldn't still possess the gift that she did. Sure, she'd probably dated, but she obviously never dated anyone who became special enough to her to give him her gift. Geezus, had the woman ever even been touched?

His cock throbbed and he felt like a pig. He'd been hard enough before her admission, but the revelation had stiffened his dick to the point of pain. The thought of untouched flesh was one hell of an aphrodisiac. Oh, yeah, he was definitely a pig. Worse, he was scum of the earth.

"Garrett."

Her voice cracked and this time he reached for her. How could he not? He pulled her close, rubbing the back of her silky smooth hair as she rested her forehead on his chest. "I'm sorry," he whispered, closing his eyes, breathing in her sweet scent. "You just surprised me."

Her shoulders rose and fell on a shaky breath and he feared she might cry. *Please don't let her cry.*

After several long heartbeats, she looked up at him. Her expression was serious, her eyes clear and bright. "I—I want...I want to make love with you."

He stared at her in utter speechlessness. God, she was without a doubt the most beautiful woman he'd ever met. She awoke feelings inside him he hadn't felt in too long to remember. Maybe he'd never felt them. At the moment, he couldn't be sure. And she was offering him her most prized possession, her virginity. Something she apparently never offered to a man.

Oh, boy, he was toast. If they had sex tonight, there was no way the act could be deemed as simply one of carnal pleasure. For a man,

losing his virginity was just a thing. But for a woman—for a woman like Suzanne—it was supposed to be a declaration, a moment she could forever look back on fondly with absolutely no regrets. How could he give her that when they hardly knew one another? They weren't in love. Heck, they weren't even dating. They were simply two people who had met in a bar and been attracted enough to see each other again.

Yet even as the thoughts crossed his mind, he knew there was already more between them. He felt it now, he'd felt it that night at the bar. Wasn't that why he'd tried to stay away from her? Did she feel it too? Obviously she did. Why else would she make such a statement, such an offer?

"Suzanne." He had to stop, to take a deep breath because, geezus, his voice actually cracked with emotion. He sat down on the bed, pulling her to sit sideways on his lap. "Sweetheart, I'm touched, flattered more than you could ever know that you want to share your first time with me. But if we have s—if we make love tonight, I'll be taking something from you that you can't get back."

"I won't want it back. I want you."

God, when she said that he wanted nothing more than to throw caution to the wind and take her. But he couldn't. Not yet. Not until he was certain she wouldn't have second thoughts, certain she wouldn't have regrets. "People make tough decisions in life all the time. They give up things for the sake of other things. Sometimes it's right, but sometimes it isn't. They're left with regrets and your virginity...Suzanne, you may think you want to give that up now in the heat of the moment. But what if you regret that decision when it's over or even in the morning? It's something that no matter how badly you regret losing it, you can *never* get it back."

She wasn't stupid. He knew she wasn't. She knew what he was saying was the truth. Yet he felt the need to say it anyway. Maybe hearing the words would magnify the seriousness of the matter. She'd

relaxed in his arms. The realization made him as grateful as it did weary.

“I know what I’m asking, what I’m offering. I won’t have any regrets.” The determination and confidence in her voice surprised him. She raised a hand to his face, stroked his cheek. “You’re special, Garrett. I think I realized that the moment I spotted you at the bar. And your concern about this...this...situation tells me just how special you really are.”

Her eyes turned glassy and he felt a lump form in his throat. God, he felt like crying, too. “Why, Suzanne?” he asked on a choked whisper. “Why me? After twenty-five years, why are you choosing to share something like this with a man you’ve know less than a week, a man you know next to nothing about?”

“I know all I need to know,” she said softly as a single tear slid down her cheek.

* * * *

Wow! This was so not how she expected this to happen. Not that she’d thought he would gloat over the fact she was willing to make him her first. Nor had she thought he would simply take her without being touched by any emotion at all. But she hadn’t expected such *deep* emotion. She hadn’t expected him to take the situation so very seriously.

If she *had* had any doubts whatsoever about the decision she was making, she certainly didn’t have any now. His reaction erased any twinges of lingering uncertainty. He was truly a special man. One whom, even though she knew she shouldn’t, even though she knew he couldn’t offer her the life she desired, she could give her heart and so much more to and he would treat it like a prize for as long as he could. Even the angel in her head, the one who had turned her back on her when the evening began, was looking over her shoulder now with surprise and encouragement on her face.

Suzanne brushed the tear from her cheek with the swipe of one finger, took a deep breath for confidence, and went on. “I—I’m tired of being the sweet, responsible, innocent virgin. I want to know what it’s like to be with a man. I want to know what it’s like to be made love to. It’s right. I know it is. I don’t know how I know, but I do. I can feel it.”

She covered her heart with her palm. Jesus, she definitely hadn’t expected to have to talk the man into making love to her! And wow, she couldn’t even believe she was attempting to convince him to do it. “*You* are right. I’ve never had this feeling with any other man before.”

He stared at her in silence, his eyes searching. What was he thinking? Oh, if only she could read minds. But his face was now carefully expressionless. He wanted her. She knew he did. He wanted to make love to her. She hadn’t imagined the erection she felt against her belly when he held her close. Nor had she imagined the heat, the desire she saw in his so-green eyes. If she weren’t a virgin, there was no doubt in her mind they would be making love right now. Instead, she was sitting in his lap, her heart pounding in wonderment, her mind praying he wouldn’t turn her down.

“Man.” He growled the word as he threw his head back, inhaled deeply, and then looked at her again. “You don’t know how bad I want to have sex with you right now.”

“Then why—” she began, but he bulldozed over her.

“But I can’t get past the fact that you deserve more than I can give you.”

“You mean more than a one-night stand?” Embarrassment and confusion had her wanting to look away but she forced herself to hold his gaze.

“I *can* give you more than a one-night stand.” He said it with such earnest that she almost believed him. “What I’m not sure of is how much more.” He sighed and shook his head. “I don’t know exactly what I was hoping we could have between us. I enjoyed the time we spent together the other night. I came to the gallery because I wanted

more of that. I wanted more time with you. But beyond that, I don't know what promises I can make. I don't know..."

Suzanne placed a finger over his lips to silence him. "I'm not asking for any promises, Garrett." She knew neither of them could honestly make them. There was no love between them, no commitment, and yet it still felt right. The attraction between them, the magnetic pull felt right. Wanting to make love to him, offering him her virginity felt right.

"I'm asking for the opportunity to..." She paused, searched for the words she wanted, but came up frustratingly empty.

"I know you've never had sex, but exactly how far have you gone with a man?"

Darn it, her cheeks heated again! This was so not the way to convince the man she was certain of her decision. "How far?" Her gaze did drop from his now. She couldn't help it. It embarrassed her to admit how very little she'd ever done with a man. Oh, she'd kissed and allowed a few to fondle, but when the man had attempted to move further she'd chickened out.

Come to her senses was more like it, she realized now. Because the man hadn't been right, the time hadn't been right. Her little angel said so and she had always listened. But her little angel wasn't speaking to her now, even though she'd shown a bit of encouragement. Suzanne knew she wouldn't chicken out with Garrett. All of her senses were currently working at a heightened point of certainty. Still, he'd asked, and she felt she had to give him an answer.

"In terms of how far," she said slowly, still staring at his chest rather than meeting his eyes. "Let's just say if we were talking about a trip from Florida to Philadelphia, I would have never made it out of St. Petersburg."

"That far, huh?" He chuckled slightly, but it was tight, humorless. He hooked a finger under her chin and gently tugged her face up, forcing her to look at him again. "There are a lot of cities, several states between St. Petersburg and Philadelphia, just as there are a lot

of stages between a simple kiss and having sex. I believe you're attempting to skip several of those stages. There are other ways of exploring, of achieving sexual pleasure without intercourse. I suggest we begin there and take it slowly, for both our sakes."

Suzanne wasn't a complete idiot when it came to sex. She understood what he was saying. Maybe he was right, she reluctantly conceded. Maybe they *should* take it slowly. But they couldn't take things *too* slow. She was only in Philadelphia for a couple of weeks.

"I don't want this to be our only night together," he said as if reading her thoughts. His hand slid under her hair to cup her nape as his lips neared hers. "So let's take everything one step at a time."

She nodded and then he was kissing her. His lips were so soft, so tender on hers. She wrapped her arms around him, turning her upper body even more to move into the kiss. Her lips parted on a moan and his tongue swept into her mouth. Oh, sweet Mother Mary, he had the most amazing tongue and knew exactly what to do with it.

Butterflies went wild in the pit of her stomach. She felt his hand move up her back and slowly begin to lower the clasp of the back zipper on her dress. The sound of the zipper disengaging seemed to echo in the silence of the room. She shivered as his knuckles brushed the bare flesh.

Slowly, his hand moved beneath the material of the dress to stroke her back, her spine then moving to her shoulder. With a feather-like caress that left a trail of fire on her skin, he eased the dress off first one shoulder and then the other, all the while kissing her breathless. He gently nibbled her bottom lip before running that magnificent tongue down her chin, her neck and lower still across her collarbone. Her head fell back as her back arched and she leaned away from him, allowing him more room to explore. She felt the clasp of her bra give and tingles exploded throughout her body.

He removed her bra with the same ease and tenderness that he used with her dress and, when he sucked one of her breasts into his mouth, she thought she might die from the pleasure. His tongue

circled the pebbled surface around her already taut nipple, then his teeth gently enclosed around it, nibbling, sending a bolt of desire straight to her pussy. She felt the juices leak between her already sodden folds, the throbbing in her clit and channel so excruciating it drew a moan from low in her throat.

She writhed on his lap, her butt grinding against the bulge she felt beneath it. He was hard, and the movement of her butt cheek on his growing erection elicited a sound from him that was both exciting and mesmerizing.

His arms moved around her as he slowly lowered her to lie on the bed, but he didn't move over her as she expected. Instead, he stood. Her legs dangled off the side of the bed and he ran his hands up them to the top of her dress now gathered around her waist. He lifted her hips, at the same time pulling the dress and her panties from her body. Her cheeks flamed as he stared down at her. She was completely naked now and on display for his appraisal.

"God, you're beautiful," he said on a rush of air. He leaned over her, his hands flattening on her shoulders and slowly skimming down over her breasts, her belly, and her thighs. She sighed at the pleasure of his touch and her eyes closed involuntarily. His hands tugged at her thighs, urging them to spread, and she squeezed her eyes tighter, let her legs fall open.

She felt him move between her legs, sucking in a breath when his hand cupped her wet mound. One wide finger slid between her saturated folds, over her throbbing bud, then continuing down. Her eyes fluttered open in time to see him bring that finger to his mouth for a taste.

"And you taste beautiful, too," he whispered, meeting her gaze. His eyes were darkened by passion and desire, his features soft and comforting.

Her gaze fell to his still-clothed chest as uneasiness pulled at her. What was she was supposed to do, to say?

Between her legs, he lowered himself to his knees. As if sensing her uncertainty, he whispered, "Relax. Just lay back and enjoy." Then he lifted her legs to rest on his shoulders, lowering his face to her mound.

She couldn't see what he was doing, wasn't even sure she wanted to, but she felt his fingers slide over the outer edges of her pussy lips and the gentle pressure as he used those fingers to spread her flesh apart. Her back arched when the tip of his tongue connected with her swollen bud. Electricity ricocheted through her, bringing with it a heat so exotic she cried out from the surprise and sheer pleasure.

"Does that feel good?" he whispered against her flesh and stole another lick.

"Oh, God, *yes*." She fisted the bedspread in her hands, her head lolling uncontrollably from side to side. The pleasure was so intense it nearly drove her mad! How could she have gone twenty-five years without feeling this?

"Do you want more?" He licked her in one slow, tantalizing slide, beginning just above her most secret hole and moving all the way up.

She wiggled, gasped, her fists gripping the bedspread so tightly her nails dug through the material and into her palms. "Please!"

Again, his tongue found her clit, this time lingering there. It circled, tickled, then moved slowly down to the never before touched opening of her vagina. When his tongue entered her, she thought for sure she would die. But oh, what a way to go!

"Garrett," she gasped, her head tipping back as a pressure she'd never known built between her legs. What was happening? What was he doing to her? The feel of his mouth on her most intimate spot, of his tongue as he lapped at the wetness there was complete torture, and yet more pleasure than any she'd ever dreamed.

Her lower body instinctively writhed against his face, against his tongue as the feeling drove her to the brink of insanity. The pressure grew even more intense, unbelievably exquisite. She didn't know if she was supposed to fight against it, didn't know how she could, and

when the callused tip of his finger touched her clit as his tongue sank deeper into her, she knew there was no way to fight it.

A small cry escaped her lips as white-hot fireworks exploded behind her eyelids brighter than that on the Fourth of July. Her insides convulsed, her toes curled, and her entire body shook with release. She barely felt him as he stood and moved, easing onto the bed to lie beside her.

Slowly her eyes fluttered open. He lay on his side, his upper body propped on one elbow as he gazed down at her. His green eyes were almost black, darkened by his own sexual need.

“W—what was that?” she asked when she was able to catch her breath.

A smile tilted his lips. “An orgasm. I take it that was your first.”

She nodded. “It was incredible.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it.” He grinned as he leaned down to kiss her.

His lips, his mouth, tasted sweet and warm with the remains of her juices. It was unbelievably erotic and, despite the exhaustion the orgasm left in its wake, she felt her insides stir again.

“Sleepy?”

“A little.” More than a little actually. Her body hummed even as her muscles refused to cooperate, sated and satisfied as she was.

He chuckled. “Come here.” He shifted them until they were laying long-ways on the bed. Suzanne noticed that at some point he’d kicked off his boots but other than that, he was still completely dressed. He pulled her into the curve of his arm, his hand lightly stroking her side. “Go to sleep, sweetheart.”

She laid her head on his shoulder and breathed in his innately male scent. Though she tried to fight it, her eyes closed. “Don’t leave,” she said as she felt the sleep take over.

“Don’t worry. I won’t,” she heard him say and then her body succumbed to unconsciousness.

* * * *

Garrett switched off the bedside lamp and lay in the darkness, staring up at the ceiling. He felt the warmth of Suzanne's even breaths against his shoulder through the material of his shirt as she fell into deep sleep. He hadn't intended to stay, had figured he would sneak out once she was asleep. But she'd asked him to stay, and he told her he would.

He worried that she might grow cold. She was still naked, and they lay on top of the bed sheets and quilt. He had no way of covering her without waking her, so he hugged her tightly in his arms, hoping his own body heat would be enough to keep her warm. It should be, he mused. He felt as though he were burning up. His dick throbbed painfully behind the zipper of his slacks. What he'd done to her, tasting her, fucking her with his tongue, had driven him as wild as it had her. But he put the need for his own sexual release on the back burner, so to speak. Now, he longed for a cold shower. Or, better yet, a few minutes alone with his active fantasies and his palm.

He tried to move, thinking he could get both the release he craved and the shower, if he could make it to the bathroom without waking her. But the moment he eased his embrace, she stirred, cuddling closer. So much for that idea.

He sighed and tried to focus on something other than his dire need to come. He'd screwed himself out of that one. But what should he have done? Sure, she'd been ready and willing, even almost to the point of sheer desperation. He could have taken her. He'd wanted to. Oh boy, how he'd wanted to. But he couldn't. Not yet. Not when he was still too unsure of what was happening between them. And something *was* happening.

A trickle of alarm moved through him. Yeah, something was happening alright. He'd known her less than a week, spent less than twenty-four hours with her in all. Yet, he already felt her reaching places within him no woman had touched in so very long.

Nothing had changed, he reminded himself, and nothing would. Starting something with her was complete madness. His lifestyle, his own freaking resolve, allowed him no more opportunity to offer her anything beyond a short fling. He knew that, just as he knew a short fling wouldn't be enough for her.

Would it be enough for him? He was starting to think not. He'd offered her more than a one-night stand. He'd told her tonight was only the beginning, told her they would take things slowly. That certainly implied more than a fling.

God help him, he wanted more, *needed* more. He honestly wanted to spend more time with her, wanted to share more of what they had begun tonight. He *wanted* to be the man to take her virginity.

But did he want to share his heart with her? It was a question he wasn't ready to answer. He signed, ruthlessly pushed it from his mind, and drifted to sleep.

Chapter Five

Suzanne was pulled from a sound sleep the next morning by the shrill ring of the hotel phone. It wasn't until she attempted to move and couldn't that she realized she was pinned by Garrett's possessive embrace. She lay with her head on his shoulder, both his arms wrapped tightly around her like a straightjacket.

She lifted her head, gazing at the sleeping man beside her. Relief tangled with a riot of other emotions in her stomach. She'd been afraid he would leave at some time during the night. A part of her had been terrified she would wake to an empty bed, that even though she'd asked him to stay, even though he promised last night wouldn't be their only night together, he would leave and she would never see him again. But he'd stayed. Hallelujah!

The phone rang again and this time, he grunted. On the third ring, he finally moved his arm and opened his eyes. Suzanne lunged over him and snagged up the receiver. "Hello."

"Suzanne? Honey, did I wake you?"

Suzanne bolted upright, one finger flying to her lips in the universal gesture of silence as she looked at Garrett wide-eyed. When she said, "Hi, Mom," a sly grin unfolded on his handsome just-out-of-sleep face.

"Were you still sleeping? It's nearly ten. You aren't ill, are you, sweetheart?"

"No, Mom." The lie rolled from her lips so easily it made her cringe. Did she sound convincing enough? God, her heart hammered against her ribcage so hard it hurt.

She covered her eyes with her free hand, feeling like a teenager who'd just been caught naked in bed with a boy by her mother. Okay, parts of that were correct. She *was* naked and she *was* in bed with a man and her mother *was* on the phone. So what if she was twenty-five years old and her mother had no idea what she was doing on the other end of the phone line?

Completely embarrassed by her state of undress while on the phone with her mother, Suzanne reached for the blanket only to discover she was sitting on it. Garrett grinned from ear to ear and watched her struggle for a moment. Finally, he reached down and pulled the comforter from the end of the bed to cover her. Her cheeks flaming red, she mouthed a thank you and attempted to focus on the phone conversation.

"I'm fine," she said to her mother, forcing a level of calmness to her words. "I was up late last night with the opening of the exhibit. I had no idea how late it was."

Beside her, Garrett had pushed himself up to lean back on the headboard. His arm encircled her waist and he pulled her back to lean in the curve of his arm, where she'd spent most of the night.

His warmth enveloped her. God, she loved being in his arms. He was touching her now for the sake of touching, not with the intent of arousal. He wanted her near him, against him. That was the kind of stuff she used to dream about. At least before she met him and her dreams heated to volcanic proportions. As a young girl, she'd dreamed of having a man who wanted her close, who wanted to be with her for her and not simply for sex. Until she met Garrett, she hadn't fantasized about having sex with a man as much as she had waking with one just like this, sleeping in his arms throughout the night and waking the next morning to find she was still cuddled against him.

While it was another first in her life, it wasn't quite the one she truly longed for with him. *Let's take everything one step at a time*, he'd said last night, and she couldn't help but wonder what that next

step might be. More, she found herself hoping it was part of a very short staircase because the anticipation had her in a massive state of arousal.

“Are you still checking out of the hotel today and moving to Tony’s?” her mother wanted to know.

Suzanne knew it was her mother’s love and desire to protect that gave her words the hinted edge of disapproval. As an only child born to parents who’d waited until their prime before having a child, she was well loved and often a bit too much. Yet, in this she did her best to understand her mother’s reservations. Her parents had never met Tony. Staying with a man, gay or not, was something completely out of character for Suzanne.

And how protective would her mother be if she knew about the man in her bed now?

She smiled at him as he cupped her cheek and pushed her hair from her face. He leaned in to brush his lips to her forehead and then silently slipped from the bed.

“Yes, I have to check out at noon,” she told her mother, even as she angled her head and watched Garrett until he disappeared into the bathroom.

Her mother kept her on the phone for twenty minutes, wanting every detail of last night’s gallery showing. Garrett remained silent, returning to the bed to sit quietly by as she finished her conversation. Though he touched her, his fingers lightly grazing her arms, her back, her thigh, his touch was more one of idle caress than intent to arouse.

She let out a long sigh as she hung up the phone, turning to him to brush her lips over his cheek. “Thank you, for being quiet.” She settled against him, in the crook of his shoulder, one hand splaying on his chest, her fingers dipping inside the unbuttoned neckline to twirl with his dark chest hair.

“You didn’t tell your mother about me.” He spoke conversationally, without a trace of anger or relief. In fact, his tone

was so unrevealing she lifted her head to look at him only to find his expression equally vague.

“I didn’t know if I should,” she said honestly. “And if I did, what to tell her.” A dart of hope shot through her and dared to ask, “Did you want me to tell my parents about you?”

Uncertainty flashed through his eyes, then he blinked and it was gone. Her hope died an instant death. He opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again without uttering a word.

She laid her head back on his chest, not wanting him to see the disappointment she feared he might see in her eyes. “I’ll tell her about you. When I return to Florida, I’ll tell her. There isn’t much I keep from my parents.”

Seemingly satisfied, she felt him kiss the top of her head as his arms tightened around her.

* * * *

“Spill it. I want to know *everything*.” Tony plopped down on the opposite end of the sofa and grinned at Suzanne. A large man, not much taller than she, but nearly three times her size, she found it odd how he managed to move with the grace of a dancer. He wasn’t handsome by any definition of the word. Dark hair, dark eyes, dark skin, all contributed by his Spanish ancestry, he was average to the max.

“The turnout was fantastic. Surprising, really. I didn’t expect so many to show up for an exhibit of an unknown artist.”

“You’ve made more of a name for yourself than you realize. I wish I had been there.” He sighed and his face fell.

Suzanne reached for him, covering his hand with hers. It was a gesture she would’ve hesitated making with most men, but with Tony, she felt comfortable. Like she did with Garrett, she thought and her stomach did a happy dance in memory.

God, she missed him already. Only a few hours ago, they'd been in her hotel room. She hadn't wanted him to leave. Now she couldn't wait to see him again, to be with him again, to move to that next step.

"I understand why you weren't there. You know that." She gave Tony's hand a light squeeze. "You were where you needed to be. Branford needed you more. How was he when you left, by the way?"

"Devastated, angry, about what you would expect from anyone who just lost a loved one," he said of the man whose partner of twelve years had recently died of AIDS. "I almost hated to leave, but he has a swarm of people around him. And I promised to call every day."

"I'm sure he will call you too, if he needs you."

Tony nodded then looked at her and his saddened expression brightened. It was cool, really, the way his mood so obviously changed from dark to light, almost as if an artist approached a canvas of a gloomy scene and painted over it, replacing it with the brightest of sunrises. "I wasn't talking about the gallery when I told you to spill it."

Suzanne leaned back, puzzled. "Then what were you talking about?"

"The man." His eyes twinkling, he clapped his hands. "Girl, you are positively *glowing*! So I say it again, spill it. Who is he?"

Ohmigod, how could he know? "What makes you think there is a man? I never mentioned a man."

"Honey, you didn't have to. I see your face!"

Attempting to appear as calm as she'd felt mere seconds ago, Suzanne sipped her glass of iced tea then leaned forward to place it on the coffee table. Tony's apartment was small and designed for the single man. Roughly seven hundred square feet of kitchen, living room, bathroom and one bedroom all decorated in artful colors and new age furniture.

"How do you know it's not just happiness over last night?"

"Oh, it's happiness over last night, I'm sure." He wagged his brows, making her laugh. "You know you can't keep anything from

me, girl. You have that look about you today that only a man can give. I've gotta tell you, I was beginning to think you would die a virgin."

Suzanne choked. "Tony!"

"Well, I'm right, aren't I? You had sex, and the way you've been blinding me since you walked into my apartment half an hour ago, I can only assume it was last night. So who is he? I can't believe it's someone you met at the gallery. There may be some hotties coming around lately," he fanned his face with his hand, "but you're not one to go with a man you just met. Is it someone you brought from Florida? Where is he?" He shot a glance over his shoulder, leaned forward to peer around her, pushed himself up and even looked over the back of the sofa.

"Will you stop?" Laughing, Suzanne swatted his arm. "Settle down and I'll tell you everything." He wouldn't stop until she came clean anyway. She hadn't planned to tell him about Garrett—at least, not everything—but maybe talking about it would be a good thing. Surprisingly, the only regret she had about last night was that she and Garrett hadn't gone further than they did. She'd so desperately wanted him to make love to her. Yet, despite the intimacy they shared, the things he did to her, the fact that she slept naked in his arms all night long, he held his self-control and his ground. Oh, yeah, he *was* truly an amazing man.

But in the light of the new day and the forced distance now between them, she silently admitted she did have worries. Garrett left her hotel room that morning with the promise of seeing her tomorrow. He was still planning to take her to see Alicia. The thought thrilled her. Not because of the chance to see Alicia, but because she was guaranteed to see Garrett again. But what would happen after that? She knew she shouldn't be attempting to look so far into the future, but she couldn't help herself. After the night they shared, she couldn't come to terms with the thought of never seeing him again. That was

so not good, because one day soon she would be forced to accept exactly that.

“First of all, I’m still a virgin.” Tony frowned and she giggled. “But believe me, it’s not from lack of trying to lose it.”

“You mean you tried to give it up and the man turned you down?” Tony shrieked, his eyes widening in utter shock. “What is he? A brainless nut job?”

“He is the most compassionate, sweet, gentle, amazing man I have ever met.”

Tony’s jaw dropped and his hand flew over his heart. “I’m hurt. My heart is trashed beyond repair,” he said dramatically, feigning a pained expression. “I thought I was the most sweet and amazing man you ever met.”

“You forgot compassionate and gentle.” She giggled. “And you are, but that’s in a friend way. Garrett, on the other hand, is...”

“So, his name is Garrett. And where is he from?”

“Here, in Philadelphia. I met him my first night in town. The night Georgiana was supposed to meet me, but was held up.”

“You picked him up in a bar!” He gasped, his eyes wide. Then his eyes narrowed and he slanted her a look. “Who are you, and what have you done with my sweet, innocent friend Suzanne Cassidy?”

“I’m still sweet.”

“Uh huh, just no longer innocent.”

Her cheeks flushed. “I’m still innocent, too. Just not as much as I was twenty-four hours ago,” she muttered. “He came to the show last night and afterward we went back to my room and...”

“And...” Tony prodded. “You’ve already told me you didn’t have sex. So what exactly did you do?”

“He, umm...he...” Suzanne was certain her face was inventing new shades of red, her cheeks burned that badly.

“Did he give you an orgasm?”

She nodded.

“Fingers or tongue?”

“T—tongue.”

“Was it good?”

“Oh, my,” she sighed and stared off into space as she remembered exactly how it felt to have his face between her legs, that magnificent tongue doing such wonderfully delicious things to her most intimate spot.

“Good enough.” Tony chuckled. “I get the picture. Is he anyone I know?”

“I doubt it, though you may know *of* him. Are you familiar with the heavy metal band Façade?”

“I’ve heard of them.” Caution rang with his words. “They’re a local band, pretty famous in their genre, I believe.”

“He’s the guitarist, Garrett Henry.”

“You had almost sex with a rock star!” His jaw dropped.

Suzanne winced. “Are you going to give me the third degree now?”

“I probably should, because I know you are a virgin and I can’t believe you offered to give that up for a fly-by-night affair, but...”

“But?”

“He turned you down?” Tony nearly shrilled the words. “A rock star turned down the chance to take a woman’s virginity. You’ve got to be kidding me! You’re lying. You really did have sex with him and just don’t want to tell me.”

“No, Tony. I swear we did not have sex. We were on our way to that point, but he stopped the moment I told him I am a virgin.” They’d been so close, she’d been so close, and the way he’d sprang away from her when she dumped her little bombshell, she almost wish she hadn’t said anything at all. “Honestly Tony, you wouldn’t believe how quickly things changed, how serious everything suddenly became.”

“The man obviously took your virginity seriously. I admire him for that. How could I not? Kudos to the guitar player for his sensitivity.” He applauded.

“Yeah, kudos to Garrett,” she said dryly. “I think he took it more seriously than I was.”

“Yet another reason to admire the man. Are you going to see him again?”

“He’s supposed to pick me up here tomorrow. I think, well, from the way he was talking last night, I think he’s planning on seeing me as long as I’m in town. He said we should take things slow, one day at a time. Doesn’t that sound to you like he intends to continue seeing me?”

“Girl, what it sounds like to me is that you better guard your heart, because if this man is as perfect as he sounds, I know it wouldn’t take long for me to fall head over heels in love.”

Head over heels in love. Was it possible she was already part of the way there?

* * * *

Meet us at Derek’s when you get this message. I need to talk to you guys.

Trey’s message left on Garrett’s answering machine replayed in Garrett’s mind as he drove to Derek’s apartment. The message had come in an hour before he walked in the door from Suzanne’s hotel room.

Suzanne’s hotel room—the mere thought brought a smile to his face so wide it made his cheeks hurt. He hadn’t meant to stay all night but, by morning, when it came time to leave, he hadn’t wanted to go. He’d wanted to stay with her, to spend the day with her, more. But she’d had things to do, and apparently, so did he.

His blood turned to ice as Trey’s message played through his memory yet again. He thought he knew what was coming and the idea had his gut churning. Trey wanted to meet with the band. Because he wanted to leave the band? The other guys thought so. They’d been expecting it for a while now though neither of them wanted to voice

their fears aloud. It had simply become something in the air between them, something floating heavily over their heads at each practice session, each face-to-face meeting.

Maybe he was wrong. Maybe they all were. The amount of hope Garrett felt at that was almost insane. He pulled into the parking lot of Derek's apartment complex and got out of the car, slowly walking to the front door of the building, prolonging the inevitable.

While hope was a good thing to have, too much lead to pure denial. Truth was, he knew Trey better than anyone. They'd been friends for years, playing in other bands together before setting out on their own to form Façade. In those years, he'd learned to read Trey like a book and the pages he'd seen lately were all scribble with the words all crossed out.

It was Reese who answered the door of Derek's loft apartment. The tall, slim, dark-haired drummer smiled, but the look in his eyes confirmed Garrett's suspicions and fears. He said nothing, turning instead to lead Garrett into the living room where Trey and Derek sat on opposite ends of the leather sectional sofa. Reese plopped down in a wrought iron chair someone had brought into the room from the dining room table.

"Grab a chair, man," the drummer said.

"I'll stand." Garrett moved to lean against the wall where he could see the other three men.

"Where have you been?" Trey asked conversationally, stretching his long legs in front of him. "I tried to call you several times last night and this morning. I kept getting the answering machine and voicemail."

"I wasn't at home, and I turned off my cell." He had turned it off before entering the gallery last night, not wanting anything to interrupt the time he might get to spend with Suzanne. Apparently, it was a good thing he had.

"An all night date?" Reese cocked a brow.

Garrett simply nodded.

“With Alicia’s friend?” Derek’s lips kicked into a mischievous grin.

This time, Garrett chuckled. “Yeah.”

“Who is Alicia’s friend?” Trey looked at each man in turn.

“Remember the blonde from the bar the other night? Come to find out, she and Alicia went to school together.”

“No shit! I’ll be damned.”

“I told her I would bring her by tomorrow to see Alicia,” Garrett told Derek. “Where is she, anyway?”

“She ducked out as soon as I told her the four of us were meeting.” Derek shrugged. “You know how Alicia is. She’s not comfortable sticking her nose in band business.”

“When are you going to set that woman straight?” Reese asked Derek.

Derek chuckled. “Believe me man, I *have* tried. That woman has a head as hard as a brick sometimes.”

“Thus the reason the two of you are so good together,” Trey said and they all laughed. “I’m really going to miss you guys,” he said after a moment, and the laughter slowly died.

“Miss us?” Derek looked at him, frowning.

Trey met Derek’s gaze, then looked at Garrett and Reese before saying, “I want out.”

They fell into an uncomfortable silence. Garrett closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Yep, it was exactly what he’d expected, what the three of them had suspected. He glanced at Reese and Derek, each of them looking at him in return before they all looked at Trey.

Derek was the first to speak. “Are you absolutely sure, man?” he asked without a trace of anger in his tone.

Trey nodded. “I’ve thought about it constantly since our tour with Metalfest ended. Hell, for five months I’ve hardly thought of anything else.” He leaned forward and rested his forearms on his knees. “I love you guys like brothers, all of you,” again he looked at each of them in turn, “and I love the band, but I have a baby being born soon. He or

she is going to need a father who will be around, and not just some of the time. I want to be home with him, be the father he needs, and I don't feel I can be the bassist the band needs and a father and husband, too."

When no one spoke, Trey continued. "I'll play the benefit show in two weeks. I know you'll need time to find a replacement. But if everyone is agreed, I would like to make that my last performance."

"The band won't be the same without you," Derek said.

"But you have to do what you feel is best," Reese chimed in.

"Garrett?" Trey stared at him and Garrett knew it was his opinion that would matter most to the other man.

"I agree with them," he finally said. Man, the band wouldn't be the same without him. "If leaving the band is what you want, then it's what you should do."

Chapter Six

By the time Garrett called late Saturday afternoon, Suzanne had begun to think she wouldn't hear from him at all. She hung up the phone and danced across the living room. Tony doubled over with laughter so hard he nearly fell off the sofa.

Her entire body ached with the need to feel his touch. So much so that when she opened the door to find him standing there fifteen minutes later, it was all she could do not to throw herself into his arms.

Garrett smiled at her and, as if sensing her desires, pulled her into his arms and captured her mouth with his.

She melted in his arms, in the kiss, her lips parting instinctively. His miraculous tongue swept inside her mouth at the invitation, crossing over hers and she moaned, her lower body arching to get closer to his.

She wanted to protest when he broke the kiss too soon until she saw the half embarrassed, half amused expression on his face. Tony loudly cleared his throat behind them.

"If you two will move out of the doorway, I'll be happy to lend you the apartment for a few hours," Tony said, complete delight lacing his words.

"Umm, oh, oops." Suzanne flushed, her mind scattered, her thoughts incoherent after that soul-blazing kiss.

Garrett walked her back as he stepped into the apartment. "My apologies," he said to Tony and extended his hand. "I'm Garrett Henry."

“Tony Turner.” The men shook hands. “Seriously, if you need some alone time with my girl here, I can make myself disappear for a while.”

Both men looked at Suzanne and grinned. Suddenly, even though she knew Tony was gay, even though she doubted Garrett was the type to engage in a ménage à trois and certainly not with a gay man, she felt like a slab of beef sandwiched between two slices of bread. She knew her face had to be the color of a fire engine. She could almost see its red glow lighting the room.

“Thanks, but Derek and Alicia are expecting us,” Garrett declined.

Suzanne stepped out of Garrett’s embrace and into Tony’s. She hugged him, planting a quick kiss on his cheek. “I’ll see you later.”

“You bet, sweet cakes.” Tony hugged her back. Then he nuzzled his lips in her ear and whispered, “That looks like one hell of a package.” He leaned back and the twinkle in his eyes left no mistaking his meaning.

“Hopefully, I’ll get to find out tonight,” she said with a conspiratorial wink and turned to walk back to Garrett.

“Girl, you’re killing me,” Tony called as Suzanne and Garrett walked out the door.

Suzanne laughed as Garrett led her to a black Dodge Durango in the parking lot.

“He seems like a nice guy.” Garrett opened the passenger door for her.

“Yeah, I think he thought the same about you.” Garrett moved to give her a boost in the truck, but froze, his hands on her waist, and leaned over her shoulder to give her a look. She couldn’t help but laugh. “Don’t worry. He would never hit on you. He isn’t like that.”

Garrett let out a breath on a whoosh. “I really don’t have anything against homosexuals.”

“I know,” she said and reached up to caress his cheek. “I’m so glad you called.”

His eyes softened and he bent to brush his lips over hers. “I couldn’t have stayed away a moment longer.”

Her spirits soared. He lifted her with little effort and she climbed into the truck.

“I would have called earlier, but the guys and I had to have an unscheduled meeting with our manager.” He slid in behind the wheel. “Trey, our bassist, the guy who was with me at the bar the night we met, he’s decided to leave the band.”

Suzanne turned sideways in her seat. “What is that going to do to the band?” She was genuinely concerned. Listening to him talk about the band, it was clearly obvious how much Façade meant to him and he had told her playing guitar was his life.

He was silent for several heartbeats as he started the truck and pulled out onto the street. “Derek, Reese and I are hoping we can find a replacement. I hate that Trey has decided to leave, but I have to admit, he picked a good time. We’re taking some time off right now before hitting the studio to record a new CD. We don’t even have half the songs written yet, so we have time to hold auditions for a new bass player.”

“Why is Trey leaving?” she asked. Then, afraid she was prying too much, she added, “If it’s private, just tell me it’s none of my business.”

He smiled and reached for her hand. “He just got married last month and has a baby on the way. Long story short, he wants to be able to be home with his family all the time and he can’t do that and be in the band, too.”

Trey was giving up the rock n’ roll life for a family. How many rock stars actually did that? Would Garrett? Did he even want a family? She started to ask, but thought better of it. Their relationship, or whatever this was between them, was too new for such questions.

Still, the girlish need inside her for a fairy tale ending had her wondering. What if things between them didn’t end when she returned to Florida? What if their relationship grew serious? What if

they fell in love? What if they got married and had a child? Would he leave the band as Trey had? Would she want him to? Could she handle a life with this man if he didn't?

He'd said last night she deserved more than he could give her. Were those the sort of things he'd been referring to? And God, could she come up with any more questions she dared not ask right now?

She decided not to try, settling back instead for the drive through Philadelphia.

It only took one look at Derek Kadin, and she instantly saw why he was considered a heartthrob in the heavy metal music world. He stood only a couple of inches taller than she dressed in a pair of black shorts and a black muscle shirt that displayed every ripple of his hard toned body. His eyes were the color of milk chocolate under equally dark eyebrows. His head was shaved, but his lack of hair did nothing to tone down his innate sexuality.

Suzanne often thought the actor Vin Diesel was good looking for a bald man in a rugged, hard sort of way. That was before she met Derek Kadin. Bald or not, heavy metal heartthrob or not, the man was unbelievably gorgeous. Not that she would have gone for him over Garrett if she'd had the choice. Derek was gorgeous, yes, but he didn't stir the juices inside her the way one look at Garrett did. She didn't feel the heat between her legs when Derek looked at her. But when Garrett looked at her...Oh, man, all she wanted was for him to take her to bed!

After visiting the gallery last night, she and Tony returned to his apartment to surf the Internet, reading up on Façade and the members that made up the band. It hadn't taken much digging to discover loads of news. The official Façade website offered a message board that allowed fans to post questions and comments to the band members. It was the band's responses that offered the most insight.

Derek had one hell of a female fan base, all of which were seemingly too happy to sleep with him if ever given the chance.

Suzanne guessed the man could have a different woman in his bed every night if he chose.

A wave of jealousy turned her green, catching her completely off guard. Garrett had his share of female admirers, too. Those who would most likely be all too happy to give him anything he wanted. And she had actually entertained the thought of having a serious relationship with the man. Get real!

No wonder he'd said she deserved more than he could give her. More correctly put, she deserved more than he was *willing* to give her. Garrett Henry may be compassionate and amazing...*You forgot gentle and sweet*, she heard Tony's mocking voice in her head. But to him she was probably nothing more than a play toy of sorts, a challenge, a student.

Not that he treated her that way. He wouldn't. He wasn't that sort of man. But after the night in her motel room, he likely viewed her as a sexually inexperienced woman whom he could teach. Soon he would tire of her lack of knowledge in the sexual department and move on to someone who could fulfill his every need.

"Alicia is on the phone in the bedroom," Derek told Suzanne, leading her and Garrett to the living room. The loft apartment was spacious and sparsely furnished, but it was the hot tub under the big screen TV that caught her eye. Vivid images of things she and Garrett could do in a hot tub like that flashed through her mind, making her heart trip and heat rise to her cheeks.

"I'm sure Derek won't mind if we kick back in that later," Garrett said to her, following her gaze to the hot tub. "Or we can go back to my house and use mine," he added, his eyes sparkling as if he were having the same thoughts as she.

"Have at it," Derek said, leaving them to walk to a fully stocked bar across the room. "Drink?" He picked up a bottle of Crown Royal and tilted it toward Garrett.

"Yeah, I'll take one." Garrett looked down at Suzanne. "I'm sure he has wine if you would rather have that."

“Please.” She wasn’t much of a drinker. One glass of straight Crown Royal and she would be plastered.

“Red or white?” Derek asked.

“White, please.”

* * * *

Alicia gripped the receiver so tightly her knuckles turned white. She should have never answered the phone. Oh, why hadn’t she let the answering machine pick it up? She leaned against the bedroom door and sighed. If only she could rewind time. Twenty minutes would be sufficient. It wasn’t like she hadn’t been busy twenty minutes ago. Delightfully, fantastically, deliciously busy.

Twenty minutes ago she’d been leaning against this very wall, but the hard object in her hand sure as hell hadn’t been a telephone. She closed her eyes, remembering as her mother continued to ramble on the other end of the line. Derek had lifted her into his arms, holding her back firmly against the wall, his hands squeezing her ass cheeks as he pounded his cock inside her sodden channel.

She could still feel it, the way his cock filled her so completely, the heat of his body against hers, the warmth of his seed as he came inside her. Damn but the man could take her to levels of ecstasy even her wild imagination couldn’t conjure!

Their bodies had still been in the midst of violent quivers of release when a knock sounded at the front door and the phone rang. Talk about one heck of an afterglow soundtrack. They’d pulled apart, quickly cleaned up, and Derek went for the door, leaving her to answer the phone.

Next time, she mused, rolling her eyes and forcing herself to listen to her mother’s latest tirade. Next time, the door was hers.

“When are you coming home?” Margaret Addison demanded.

Alicia sighed and pushed herself away from the wall. If only this rant were about something new. But it wasn’t. “I’m not sure exactly.”

She moved to the bed she shared with Derek and plopped down on the edge. "Derek and I are talking about making a trip down there soon."

It was a lie. They hadn't discussed anything of the sort. Derek had too much going on with the band to leave Philadelphia any time soon. Not that she really wanted to return to St. Petersburg anyway. The only thing she missed was her best friend Diana. Okay, and maybe her father. But he was too busy with the Addison hotel empire to enjoy a visit right now.

"That's not what I meant and you know it," her mother spat in that high-society I'm-the-queen-of-the-world voice she used so well. "I want to know when you are going to come to your senses and return for good. This rebellion thing you're doing has gone on long enough."

"I am not rebelling, Mother," Alicia said through gritted teeth. *I'm living my life. It's just a life in which you have no say so, a life you can't control.*

"William is still here waiting for you to come back. It isn't too late to make things right, to fix everything you destroyed."

William, William, William. Was it too cruel to wish the man would die a tragic death? "How many times do I have to explain to you, Mother, that if I wanted to be with William Templeton I would've never broken our engagement in the first place?"

"No, you would rather waste your life with a man who is only after your money," Margaret snarled. "Thank God you haven't made plans to marry that loser. You can still get out with only a minimal embarrassment."

I do plan to marry him as soon as he asks me. Alicia fell back on the bed, staring at the ceiling. She wanted nothing more than to marry Derek. But the subject of marriage had yet to come anywhere near the topic of conversation.

"I have no intentions of ending my relationship with Derek," she finally said. "Look, Mom, I have to go. Suzanne Cassidy is here. Did you know her paintings are on exhibit at the gallery here?"

“Suzanne Cassidy? She’s such a sweet young woman,” Margaret said, approval spewing from her tone. “She’s there? I’m so glad. She’ll be a good influence on you. That young woman certainly knows how a daughter in our place in society should act and who she should get involved with.”

Alicia swallowed a laugh. If her mother only knew Suzanne was keeping company with Garrett Henry. Her mother would be more surprised than she was herself. Suzanne Cassidy *was* a sweet young woman. One that Alicia never dreamed would hook up with a man like Garrett. She had a feeling if Suzanne were truly interested in Garrett, it would be Suzanne looking to her for instruction rather than the other way around.

* * * *

“Uggg!” The frustrated scream was followed by a loud crash in the back of the apartment.

Suzanne winced and looked at Derek in alarm.

“Sounds like I’m going to need to buy a new phone for the bedroom,” Derek said quietly as he handed Suzanne and Garrett their drinks. An amused grin tilted his lips. He raised his voice. “Sweetheart, do I need to bring the broom to sweep up the pieces?”

“Watch it or one of us is going to be sweeping up the pieces of you,” Garrett whispered, laughing.

“I heard that, Garrett Damon Henry,” Alicia yelled.

Suzanne bit her lower lip to hold back a giggle. “Sounds like you’re the one in trouble, Damon.”

Garrett grimaced, groaned and pulled her into his arms. “Please don’t call me that.”

“Suzanne!” Alicia sailed into the room, a bright smile on her lovely face. If she hadn’t heard the other woman’s little temper tantrum in the back, Suzanne never would have guessed she’d been

angry only seconds ago. "I never thought I would see you here. It's such a small world."

"Isn't it just?" Suzanne stood, letting Alicia pull her into a hug. She'd always envied Alicia's beauty and outgoing personality. The same height as Derek, with a size six figure of perfect curves and proportions, she was everything Suzanne wished she could be.

Alicia's hair was dark brown, her eyes deep ocean blue, and she had flawless features. She wore an oversized T-shirt with a pentagram and the word *Godsmack* written across it—Suzanne guessed that was another heavy metal band—and a pair of black spandex shorts. Around her neck hung a pentagram set in a wreath of vines in sterling silver and attached to an eighteen-inch sterling silver chain. For gothic style jewelry, it was quite beautiful.

"I love your necklace."

Alicia covered the pendant with her hand and flashed a radiant smile in Derek's direction. "Thank you. It was a birthday present. Derek bought it at Diana's shop. You know, *All Things Magical*?"

Diana Thompson, Alicia's best friend. For as far back as Suzanne could remember, the two women had been practically attached at the hip. Well, almost. There'd been a few years where they seemed to drift apart, but it appeared that time was over now. Alicia's friendship with Diana was another thing Suzanne always envied the woman. She longed to have a close female friendship like that.

"Does she own that place now?"

"No, she's just the manager. Believe me the business would be in better shape if she did own it. Diana's amazing when it comes to business. If she had complete control over that place, it would make a killing."

"I still say you should buy it and let her run it for you," Derek said.

"It isn't for sale."

"Anything is for sale when the right amount of money is offered," Garrett interjected.

“Or buy a place here in Philadelphia and ask her to run it,” Derek suggested. He wrapped his arms around Alicia’s waist, pulling her lower body against his. “Then you would have your best friend here, too, and you would never have to go back to Florida.”

“Nice try, darling.” Alicia kissed him. “First of all, Diana would never consider leaving Florida. Second, I doubt she’d let me buy any place for her to run. And third, you know when you start touring again I plan to return to my little cottage in St. Petersburg. As long as the four of you are on the road there isn’t anything here for me in Philadelphia.”

“I gather the conversation with your mother didn’t go well,” Derek changed the subject. He walked back to the bar and returned with two more glasses of Crown, one of which he handed to Alicia.

Suzanne looked down at her wine and suddenly felt out of place. Somehow no matter how she tried, she never seemed to fit in.

“Do conversations with my mother ever go well?” Alicia sighed and sipped her glass. “It’s sad to say, but that’s one thing makes staying in Philadelphia so tempting. It’s hundreds of miles away from Margaret Addison. Can you believe she’s still ragging me about William? After almost six months, she’s continuing her relentless pursuit to get me to go back to him.”

“William Templeton?” Suzanne asked and a bit of her uneasiness faded. At least she could get involved in the conversation. “Weren’t you engaged to him?”

Alicia moaned and moved to sit on the sofa. “For a horribly yucky and pleasantly brief time.”

“He called me about two months ago.” Suzanne followed, curling up beside Alicia. “It was completely out of the blue. He asked me to some kind of party at the club.”

“Did you go?”

“No, he makes me uneasy.” She shivered. “He’s nice enough and kind of cute, but he’s too...”

“All business, boring, stuck up?” Alicia offered.

Suzanne giggled. "I guess that's why you didn't marry him."

"You got it." Alicia toasted the air with her glass.

"And then I took her away," Derek said from the kitchen. "That's the part her mother can't stand."

"Margaret can't stand that I no longer allow her to run my life," Alicia corrected. Her attention returned to Suzanne. "Are your parents like that? Always telling you what to do and what not to do?"

Suzanne shook her head. "They've always let me live my own life. They're very protective," she quickly added. "But they rarely try to interfere."

"You're so lucky," Alicia sighed. "Margaret thinks Derek is after my money, and she can't stand that he's the vocalist for a heavy metal band. She acts like he's a gigolo or something."

"Hey, sweetheart," Derek called from the kitchen. "Give me a million dollars."

Alicia grinned. "Honey, you can have *anything* you want," she said, her words dripping with sexual innuendo.

"Take it to the bedroom," Garrett said in the kitchen, and they all laughed.

Chapter Seven

Suzanne's heart raced as she stepped through the door of Garrett's house later that evening. They'd stayed at Derek and Alicia's through a wonderful dinner of steaks, potatoes and steamed vegetables and chatted over drinks for nearly an hour after. It had been a new experience for her, hanging out with another couple as if they were on a double date, and she had enjoyed herself immensely.

She half expected Garrett to take her back to Tony's after leaving Derek's. Instead, he had driven straight to his house. No questions asked. It was almost as if it was a given she would be staying with him tonight. Of course, she had no arguments to that.

She walked into the living room area, closing her eyes as she took a deep breath. The air inside still had that new smell. She loved that indescribable scent. She gazed around and was amazed by what she saw.

"You built this?" She turned in a circle in the spacious living room.

"I designed it," Garrett answered from the front door. "And I had a hand in building it, too."

"It's remarkable!" Did the man's talents ever end?

The house was a single story brick, and much larger on the inside than it had looked when they pulled into the driveway. Like Derek's apartment, it was sparsely furnished. The living room held only a sofa, small entertainment center, coffee table, and a grand piano off to one side. The connecting dining room was completely bare.

"You play piano, too?"

“My second musical love.” He grinned. “The place is pretty bare right now. I don’t have a lot of furniture yet.” He kicked off his boots as he spoke, placing them on a mat by the front door before stepping onto the carpeted floor.

Suzanne backtracked her steps and slid out of the navy blue pumps she wore with her navy blue skirt and floral print blouse. “Sorry.” She winced.

Garrett pulled her into his arms. “Don’t be. It’s just a habit I’m trying to get into. A man’s shoes often get far dirtier than a woman’s.”

He kissed her softly and she felt the effects all the way to her toes. God, but the man could kiss! His lips brushed over hers like sweet velvet, the lingering taste of crown adding to the intoxicating thrill that fluttered down her spine.

Do you want to see the rest of the house?” His voice was low and sexy and she wondered if it was the bedroom he wished to show her most. Oh, how she hoped so.

“I would like that.”

His hand slid to capture hers, their fingers lacing together. “No one else has been here yet except for the guys in the band and a few members of my family,” he said as he took her on the tour. “You can give me an outsider’s opinion.”

No one else had been in the house. No women except for Alicia and maybe his mother. Another flutter moved through her, this one a heated arousal that sparked between her legs. She was the first woman he’d brought home. She would be the first woman he made love to in his new house. And they *would* make love eventually, she was sure of it. He was the only man to whom she’d ever offered her virginity, and step by painstakingly slow step, they would get to the point where they’d reach the top of that staircase and there was nothing left but for him to accept that offer.

It appeared tonight was another night for firsts, this time for both of them. She was astonished at how wet she became from the mere thought.

He showed her each room of the house and she could picture herself going about her daily business as if she lived there. That was not a good thing to do and she tried to stop the thoughts, put a halt to the images that assailed her, but she couldn't. She would like living in this house, with this man.

She saw herself in the large rectangular kitchen preparing meals for him, in the dining room—in her mind there was an oblong table that sat six—lighting candles and setting out their best china for their meals together. She saw them curled up on the sofa watching late night television. They would take baths in the enormous garden tub in the master bathroom, make wild passionate love in the bed, and then soak in the hot tub down the hall for hours. In the unfurnished guest bedroom, she pictured a nursery decorated with rabbits, ribbons and bows.

Whoa, Suzanne! That's taking it a bit far, girl. As if fantasizing about moving into the man's house, cooking dinner for him, making love to him until neither of them had the strength to walk wasn't.

Across the long hall from the guest bedroom was a smaller room filled with guitars. The walls were more heavily insulated than the other rooms, he told her, as to keep down the sound when he played. Next to his music room was another, this one filled with games. Old arcade machines lined the walls with a pool table in the center.

"Are you ready to go for that soak in the hot tub?" Garrett tugged her back down the hall before she could answer.

"But I don't have a swimsuit!"

"You don't need one." He stopped just inside the door of the room, spun her around and drew her against him. He was hard. She felt the evidence of his arousal against her belly and she nearly whimpered from the desire that moved through her. God, she wanted so badly to know what it felt like to have that rigid cock inside of her!

"That's the advantage to kicking back in my hot tub rather than Derek's. We don't have to wear clothes here." His voice was low, raspy, and full of heated meaning.

Skinny-dipping! He wanted her to go skinny-dipping with him in his hot tub. Oh boy, oh boy. Suzanne's body hummed with anticipation even as her pulse hammered so loudly she felt certain he could hear it, too. She'd never gone skinny-dipping in her life! More, she had yet to see this man naked.

He cupped her chin in his hand, brushed his lips over hers. "Of course, if you would rather, I can find a shirt you can wear and I'll put on a pair of shorts."

She gazed into his oh so beautiful eyes and wondered, what would be the point? He'd already seen every inch of her, *tasted* nearly every part of her. She wanted to move to the next step. Though, okay, yeah, she'd thought that would be making love. So, slow things down a bit like he'd said. Obviously the next step would be to see this man in all his artfully sculptured glory naked.

Suzanne took a small step back, pulling herself out of his arms as she let her gaze slide down his body, slowly work its way up again. Her nerve surprised her and yet her stomach fluttered with trepidation. "W—would you undress first? I know it sounds silly," she rushed on before he could respond, "but you've seen me without my clothes and I haven't seen you."

He lifted a hand to the side of her face, his fingers playing in the strands of her hair framing her cheek. It was a tender touch, almost absent, idle, and so sweet it nearly brought tears to her eyes. "Do you want to help?"

"Not this time. I want to watch." Her cheeks flamed and for a fleeting instant she thought of turning off the lights. She dismissed the idea just as quickly because no way would she be able to see him the way she wanted to in the dark.

Garrett nodded wordlessly and took a couple of steps back, putting enough distance between them for her to easily see him from head to toe. He wore a pair of black slacks and a solid chest-hugging black T-shirt. He slowly peeled the shirt from his body, his eyes

leaving hers only long enough to pull the shirt over his head, then dropping it to the floor beside his feet.

Her gaze lowered and she greedily drank in the sight of his bare muscles, the dark curls covering his chest, the narrow patch of still more curls leading down his abdomen, around his navel, and disappearing beneath the waistline of his slacks.

Leisurely, teasingly, he unbuttoned his slacks and slid down the zipper. Her heartbeat accelerated and her mouth went dry as he removed the slacks and stood before her in nothing but a pair of white briefs.

Her fingers burned with the need to touch and she fisted the sides of her long skirt in her hands. For now, she would allow her eyes to do the touching. She reveled in the sight of him, memorizing every ripple, every ridge. She'd thought him beautiful clothed, but nearly naked, the man was truly a work of art. Her gaze transfixed on his briefs and the bulge they barely concealed. She knew she should pull her attention away, look at him instead of his groin, but she couldn't.

"Are you sure you don't want me to leave these on?" he asked in a low, husky tone, and her head bobbed up and down. His cock sprang free as his briefs fell to the floor around his ankles.

Her hand flew to her mouth and she gasped. "Oh," she said in a barely audible whisper of shock. "He's so...big!" Her gaze darted up to meet his and she didn't miss the faint satisfied smile that toyed at the corners of his lips. "Wow!"

"Your turn." He moved toward her.

Seconds later, she stood before him completely naked and trembling with unsatisfied sexual need. Though he stood closer to her now, he was still far enough away that if she looked down, she could see his hard cock standing ramrod straight at attention. Her mouth watered at the sight of him, and instinctively she knew what she wanted the next step to be. If only she knew how to express that want to him.

“You drive me crazy when you stare at me that way.” He moved another step closer, his gaze transfixed on her face, his green eyes nearly black from desire. “You know that, don’t you?”

“And how is it that I look at you?” She forced herself to meet his gaze, to hold it.

“Like you want to devour me.” Oh man, that low, sexy voice did amazing things to her insides. Flames erupted between her legs, licking the inner walls of her channel, drawing juices from her core to saturate her folds. He took the final step that would bring his body against hers and pulled her into his arms, bending down to brush a kiss to her lips in a feathery caress. “Like you want to eat me alive.” He leaned back to look down at her, his lips tilting in a wicked grin. “I like it.”

Suzanne gulped, averted her gaze, pulled it back to meet his, and then took a deep breath for courage. “Can I?”

Garrett angled his head, his eyes narrowing slightly. “Can you what?”

“E—eat you.” Darn it, she stammered that time. So much for sounding confident and sure. Instead, her blasted cheeks heated again, the warmth raining through her clear to her toes, likely turning every inch of her flesh a deep I-just-embarrassed-the-hell-out-of-myself crimson. “I mean...I want...I meant to say...” She gave up, her gaze dropping to the floor. No way could she hold his gaze now. Hell, she didn’t know what she meant. Why hadn’t she simply kept her mouth shut? “Never mind.” She shook her head and continued to look at a spot of the floor far away from their naked bodies.

“Suzanne, look at me, sweetheart.” He hooked a finger under her chin and tugged her face up. “Are you trying to tell me you want to suck my d...penis?”

She would have smiled if she hadn’t been so embarrassed. He obviously picked up on the fact that blunt or crude words and descriptions often made her uncomfortable, and was trying not to use them. Sure, the words crossed her mind far more than a time or two

but to actually say them...Yet here she was telling him, in so many less explicit words, exactly that. She wanted to suck his dick.

She nodded. "I don't know how."

"To tell me? You just did, baby."

"No, I don't know how to...How to..." She sighed and took a different track. "It seems like the logical next step. I want to do for you what you did for me last night. But I've never...I mean, I know the concept. I know what is supposed to be done...I think. But I've never..."

A slow lazy smile spread across his oh-so-kissable lips as realization dawned in his come-to-bed eyes. "It'll come to you. I think it's something women are born knowing how to do, you just don't know it until you try it."

She gulped and nodded. "So can I? Do you mind?"

He laughed. "Mind! Sweetheart, I don't know a man alive that would turn down the offer of a blowjob from a beautiful woman." He took her hand and led her into the hot tub. He turned her to stand in front of him as he sat down on the side where the acrylic shell of the tub met the tiled floor.

She moved between his spread legs and slowly lowered to her knees. The water of the hot tub was warm. He'd turned on the jets. She felt a rippling stream of water pushing against her knees. His hand slid beneath her hair to cup the back of her neck. "Spread your legs a bit," he told her softly.

She did and gasped when the pressure of the jet stream hit her most intimate spot.

He raised a brow, his lips tilting in a smile. "I can't reach you from here, so I'll have to let the hot tub do my job for me."

Tingles erotically sweet and deliciously amazing surged through her from the gentle pulsating pressure of the shooting water against her exposed clit and she understood. Her hand shook only slightly as she reached for his cock, curling her fingers around his thick girth.

He was fully aroused, rock hard and huge. She gulped as she stroked his length, exploring the size of him. There was no way she could get all of that in her mouth.

“Take what you can,” he said, accurately reading her thoughts.

She lowered her mouth to his cock and he leaned back on his hands, fully surrendering to her. She was in complete control. She swallowed, licked her lips and then wrapped them around the head of his dick. Her tongue swept across the tip, licking away the beads of pre-cum that had pooled there. Her lips created a suction around his thickness and slowly slid down his length, taking in more of him.

She felt more than heard his quick intake of breath and knew she must be doing it right so far. The knowledge calmed her uneasiness and she pulled back, letting him nearly slide out of her mouth before taking him in again. Her throat opened on the downward stroke, but she didn’t go any further for fear she might choke.

His hand fisted in the back of her hair. “That’s it, baby,” she heard him say on a ragged whisper. “Let it go down the back of your throat.”

So she did and, to her surprise, she didn’t choke. It was incredible and unbelievably erotic. He tasted sweet and hot, the skin of his dick soft and stretched taut from his arousal. In the water, she spread her knees wider, opening herself more to the steady pulsating jet stream, the feeling driving her wild. Her mouth picked up pace on his dick, her head bobbing up and down as she took him in and pulled back in quickening steady movements, her lips and tongue squeezing and licking his every inch.

Her speed continued to increase as her own body climbed the orgasmic mountain. She heard him call out her name in pleasure. Or was it warning? She couldn’t be sure and she didn’t care. She was too close to her own release to stop. Suddenly, his hand tightened in her hair and she felt the thick hotness of his seed as he emptied himself in her mouth. She swallowed, sucked, licked and milked him with her lips as she too fell over the edge.

* * * *

A soft piano melody drifted to Garrett's ears as he stepped from the shower the next morning. He'd left Suzanne sleeping in his bed, but apparently she had awakened in his absence. He wished fleetingly that she'd chosen to join him in the shower, but doubted she was quite ready to take such an initiative on her own just yet.

It was probably a good thing anyway, he mused as he dried off and slipped into a long terry-cloth robe. Being alone with her, exploring the different steps of intimacy with her, was quickly becoming more than he could handle. Though he'd achieved a level of release last night brought on by her...or more specifically, her mouth—God, he never would have dreamed a woman with such inexperience could be so good with her mouth!—it was still not the level in which his body truly craved. His body wanted more. His mind wanted more. His heart wanted more. Oh, shit!

He walked out of the master bath and followed the sound of the music out of the bedroom and down the hall, the melody growing louder as he neared the living room. The way the piano was positioned, he could see Suzanne's side profile as she sat on the hardwood bench, her delicate, artistic fingers moving over the porcelain keys like whispers of breath. She hadn't told him she could play.

He stopped at the end of the hallway and leaned a shoulder against the doorframe to study her. The way her whole body swayed in time with the song she played, the way her fingers moved so gracefully, the expression of intense concentration mixed with pure contentment that brightened her face. His heart swelled.

She was getting to him, he realized. Hell, she had already gotten to him. He hadn't thought it possible to fall for a woman so quickly, but it was damned sure happening, and he was finding himself powerless to stop it. It was disconcerting and it scared him shitless.

Falling in love with her would change everything, the time they spent together, their relationship, hell, it would change their entire *lives*. He hadn't thought he wanted his life to change. He loved his life. But the life he'd so loved a week ago started changing the moment he spotted Suzanne Cassidy across the barroom.

If he had only kept his distance, none of this would be happening now. But his resolve had been too weak. In one night, over the span of a mere few hours, she got to him that much. Just as she was now, watching her playing the piano in his home, his entire body screamed with the need to be near her.

Once again, unable to keep the distance between them any longer, he pushed himself off the wall and walked up behind her as she continued to play. He didn't recognize the song. It was a classical piece, but he couldn't put a composer's name to it. Though he played the piano himself, he often used it for writing his own tunes rather than playing the classics.

She was good, he realized. Whatever the piece, it was certainly complex, and yet her fingers never faltered. Where had she learned to play like that? Lessons, probably, he thought in answer to his own question. Didn't all rich people know how to play the piano? They did in the movies. Children of wealthy families were given piano lessons beginning at a very young age. He suspected that was how it had been with her.

As Suzanne's playing drew to an end, he reached out, pulling her hair to the side so he could lean into her and nuzzle his lips on the warm flesh of her neck. He heard her quick, surprised intake of breath, followed by a soft moan as her head tilted, exposing more skin. Unable to resist, he stole a quick lick of her silky smooth skin, then kissed her gently before returning to stand upright behind her.

She looked over her shoulder, her gaze slowly traveling upward until she met his eyes. "Good morning," she said with a smile.

"You didn't tell me you played." He moved to sit beside her on the bench, his arm instinctively sliding around her waist.

She grinned. "I play pool, too. Another thing I forgot to mention."

"Really? We'll have to get to that later. So who taught you to play the piano like that?"

"My mother. She plays. She's much better than I am. When I was young, she used to play a song for me before bedtime. On Sunday mornings, I would wake to the sound of her at the piano." Her eyes took on a glassy look as she remembered. "She developed arthritis in her hands a couple of years ago and can't play as much now, but she can still be found at that piano every Sunday morning for at least long enough to play one complete song."

"You miss her," he said quietly, gently stroking the back of her hair.

Suzanne nodded and then let out a small laugh. "It's so odd. I've always hated being away from home, being away from my parents. I know how childish that sounds, especially since I'm in my mid-twenties now, but it's true. I spent last summer in Paris. Did I tell you that?" She turned her head to look at him.

"No."

"I went there to study art. It was fabulous! The entire city is so unbelievably beautiful and the art...Oh, what am I saying? You've probably been to Paris yourself, so you already know what I'm talking about."

"I do." He nodded. "But go on."

"The thing is, despite the beauty of the city and the opportunity to study all that fantastic art, I was so homesick I had a difficult time enjoying myself." She sighed. "That's why I hate to travel. Everywhere I go, every time I've gone, it's been like that. It's exactly the way I was feeling that night at the bar. I was alone, in a strange place so far from home and all I could think about was getting back to St. Petersburg."

"And now?"

She touched his cheek. "Now, I hardly think about going home. Because of you," she added, her voice dropping to barely a whisper.

Whoa! His fingers had been lightly grazing the side of her neck but they stilled at that. His eyes wanted to bug out of his head, his heart threatening to race out of his chest, but he fought them both, not wishing her to see just how completely she'd freaked him out.

This was when he should put a stop to it all. It was definitely time to make the next step, one where he walked away. Before things between them went any further, he should stop things where they were. She was growing attached, *emotionally* attached. She'd just told him as much. Problem was, so was he. Heaven help him!

Instead of stopping anything, instead of telling her she should go, that she *should* be thinking about home, he kissed her. What was meant to be only a soft peck on the lips turned to that of heated passion. She sighed into his mouth as her arms encircled his neck. Her head angled to one side, allowing him to deepen the kiss, his tongue darting between her lips, tangling, dancing with hers.

Her scent, her feel, her taste enveloped him, pulling him captive with the promise of never letting go. And even though he knew he should, even though he knew the repercussions of what was happening were going to scare him even more shitless than he already was, he also knew he didn't want to let her go.

"I want to make love to you, Suzanne."

* * * *

Suzanne froze. Did he really say what she thought she heard? Her heartbeat accelerated, her stomach flipped, her blood hummed in her veins. He wanted to make love to her. Finally, he was ready to take the last step. She pulled back and gazed at him, knowing her surprise was evident in her expression.

A slight smile tilted the corner of his lips for an instant, and then it was gone. "You can say no," he said softly. "If you aren't ready, if you've changed your mind and decided you don't want to. I don't want you to feel pressured."

Sweet Mary, the man was truly amazing. After the moments of intimacy they shared, the talks they'd had, after he finally reached the point where he was ready to take her completely, he was still willing to wait, still concerned more for *her* than his own wants and needs.

It was then she knew without a doubt she was falling in love with this man. He'd told her he couldn't give her what she deserved, but right now he was giving her everything and offering her even more.

She'd known almost from the start that making love with him would be right. Even her little angel, who at first had been furious enough to turn her back on Suzanne because she even considered the thought, had begun to change her mind. Now, that little angel turned back to her fully and smiled.

Suzanne had been ready to give herself to him days ago, but the fact that they had waited, that he had made her wait, had obviously been the right thing. Now the emotions she felt for him were complete and true. Making love to him would be exactly that, making love.

"No pressure." She leaned into him to whisper in his ear. "No doubts. No regrets now or later. I want you to make love to me, Garrett." Brazenly, she licked and nibbled his earlobe around the silver looped earring. "Please make love to me."

He grunted. It was a deep, helpless sound and she knew when his arms tightened around her this time he wouldn't deny her request. In one swift, fluid motion, he lifted her into his arms and carried her back to his bedroom. Handling her as though she were a delicate flower, he eased her down onto his king-size bed and moved over her.

The warmth of his breath on her face as his lips once again neared hers sent a riot of delectable emotions shooting through every fiber of her body. But instead of kissing her, his tongue traced over her parted lips, then down the side of her face to her neck. He rested his weight on one arm as he moved a hand between them to unfasten the buttons of the pale blue shirt—his shirt—that she wore. When the last of the buttons were freed, he bent his head and sucked one nipple between his succulent lips.

Her hands traveled down the back of the terry-cloth robe he still wore, just barely reaching his tight buttocks. She squeezed. He moaned, arching his hardness farther to her middle. Spears of heat shot through her as he sucked harder on her nipple.

The hand he used to unfasten the shirt continued its descent, sinking beneath the elastic waistband of her cotton bikini panties until it found her mound. She was already soaked with her own juices. His finger swam in that wetness, stroked over and around her throbbing clit before moving further down and easing into the throbbing opening of her vagina.

Her hips rose to meet his finger, drawing it in deeper, but not deep enough. "Garrett," she breathed on a frustrated cry. "Please."

He withdrew from her, reached for something inside the bedside drawer and pushed himself up to sit between her legs. He quickly removed her panties, followed by his robe and then pulled her to a sitting position with him. "Do you want to put on the condom?"

"I don't know how."

"We'll do it together." He tore open the foil wrapper and held the condom out for her.

Her hand trembling as she reached for it. Together, they smoothed the condom down the length of his thick cock. Her fingers wrapped around him at the base of his dick, testing its girth though she already knew how wide he was. He was nearly as large as her wrist! She'd taken it inside her mouth. The width of that had been easy, though the length had been a challenge. But she knew how big her mouth was. The hole where his cock belonged, however, was much smaller. Wasn't it? She squeezed slightly, not really meaning to, but was pleasantly surprised by his quick intake of breath at the pressure.

"Don't do that too much, or we'll have to wait for me to recover," he warned gruffly.

Feeling more bold and completely unlike her usual self, she looked up at him and grinned. "And how long would that take?"

He chuckled. “Woman, with what you do to me, probably only a couple of minutes.”

“Maybe next time.” She released her grip. “I’ve waited twenty-five years for what comes next and another few minutes is far too long.”

Chapter Eight

Garrett smiled and slowly lowered her back on the bed. His body shook as he rested on his forearms, one on either side of her. But it wasn't his holding his weight off her that was making him tremble. She was nervous, as he had expected her to be. But he was equally as nervous, he realized. He'd never made love to a virgin. What if he screwed up? What if he hurt her? One wrong move and sex could be ruined for her forever.

This would be her first experience with sexual intercourse and he had to make it special for her, enjoyable. He wanted to leave her with the want to experience it again and again. He often thought he did his best work under pressure. Well, if this wasn't pressure, he didn't know what was.

His dick was like an iron arrow and needed no guidance to find its target. Touching her, tasting her, sharing all he had with her over the past several days had already pushed him that close to the edge of insanity. All he could think about was being buried inside her warm body, and he would be in a matter of seconds.

But he couldn't allow himself to lose total control.

He had to take it painstakingly slow and torturously easy despite the magnitude of his desire for this woman, despite his own needs to take her fast and hard. This would be her first time. He couldn't allow himself to forget that. If he did he might rip her to shreds.

His size concerned her. He saw that much in the depths of her innocent eyes. She had a right to be. She was tiny, petite and, virgin or not, she would be incredibly tight. Even experienced women had

found his size to be more than they could handle. How did he expect Suzanne to be any different?

He hovered over her and gazed into her eyes as his dick found its mark. He heard her suck in a breath as he inched inside her, just the head at first, and then slowly a little more. He waited for her to tell him to stop, that she changed her mind and couldn't go through with it. And he *would* stop. It would be one hell of a test in the strength of his will, but he would stop. Despite the fact that he wanted her at that moment more than he'd ever wanted any woman, he *would* stop if she told him to.

But she didn't. Instead, she flattened one hand on the side of his face, her other hand around his neck, gripping his back between his shoulder blades. "Don't stop," she said on a cracked whisper so low he read the words on her lips more than heard her.

He eased in further, feeling the wonder as her body stretched to accommodate his thickness. God, she was tight! He was tearing her, he knew, and guessed it had to be painful, but her only reaction was to grip his back more tightly.

Incredible sensations shot through him. The feel of her heat, the grip of her inner muscles around his cock...Oh, how he wished he could feel that without the barrier of the condom.

And risk getting her pregnant? Not a chance, buddy.

Her eyes widened and her nails dug into his skin as he slowly pushed through the barrier that proclaimed her virginity. He knew it when it hit, felt it when he broke through. A wave of unidentifiable emotion washed over him as he thrust a little deeper before he stopped. Sweet Jesus, he was worrying about her and this was tearing *him* apart! He actually felt tears rise to his eyes as he gazed down at her.

"Are you okay?" he asked, his voice gruff to his own ears.

She swallowed visibly and nodded. A single tear trickled down her cheek.

"Does it hurt?"

“A little, but I’m okay. How much more?”

He knew what she was asking. “Not much, sweetheart.” Jesus, Mary and Joseph, he was definitely a goner. But he’d just reached the point where it was too late to turn back now. He had no choice but to give her everything she desired. “We can stop here if you like,” he offered, even knowing it would drive him one step closer to his grave not to be buried inside her sweet hot channel to the hilt.

“No, I want to feel all of you.” She took a deep breath and nodded again. “I’m ready.”

He continued his slow inward thrust until finally he was buried balls-deep in her sodden core. “Oh, Suzanne,” he whispered, the cry coming out on its own accord. Swimming in a pool of emotion, he kissed her.

As their tongues danced, he pulled back an inch, then eased into her again. Her hips met his on the second thrust and a quiet “Oh, yeah” escaped his lips. Soon their bodies fell into the slow, natural tempo created only for lovers.

Garrett didn’t know how long he could last like this, how long he could ward off his release, but he was determined not to come until she did. His thrusts became longer, deeper and beneath him, Suzanne moaned and met him stroke for stroke.

Her long nails scratched his shoulder as she pulled him closer still. He reached between them, finding her clit with the pad of his finger and almost the instant he made contact, he heard her crying out his name as she violently exploded around him. Her body shook, her inner muscles convulsed, milking his dick until he too was calling out her name with his own release.

His arms trembled as he struggled to hold his upper body weight off her. He was no lightweight, and if he fell on top of her as his body wanted, he feared he might squash her. Seconds that felt like minutes passed as their breathing slowed and their heartbeats returned to normal.

Resting the bulk of his weight on one arm, he brushed strands of her sweaty hair away from her face. “Are you okay?”

* * * *

Okay? Suzanne was more than okay. She was wonderful, stupendous, floating on a musical cloud created by Garrett Henry. The orgasm he’d given her this time hadn’t felt the same as the others. It had been better, more mind-blowingly incredible than she could have dreamed.

“I didn’t know it could be like that.” Her entire body tingled from the aftereffects of their lovemaking. He had just taken her over the edge of orgasmic insanity and she felt as though she was glowing like the sun, with all its warmth captured inside her.

“No regrets?” he asked softly, and she saw all his worry and concern in the depths of his eyes.

She shook her head. “Can we do it again?” she asked shyly, and he chuckled as she’d hoped he would.

“I’m starting to get the feeling I’m creating a sexual monster.” He laughed. Then his smile faded and he gazed down at her with an intensity that made her heart swell. “I’m still not sure why you chose me, but I’m glad you did, Suzanne.”

Tears rose to her eyes and she tenderly stroked his cheek. *I chose you because I love you.* She wanted to say it, but knew she shouldn’t. How would he react? He’d grown to care for her. She had no doubts he did. But how deeply he cared was the million dollar question. Was he falling in love with her as she was with him? She didn’t know.

And what if it was a lie? At that moment, she felt as though she truly was in love with him, but what if she was only feeling that way because of what they just shared? How did a person really know when they were in love?

"I'm glad it was you, too," she said around the lump in her throat. She had absolutely no regrets. Her twenty-five years had been well worth the wait for this man.

His lips brushed hers and then he slid out of her. She tightened her grip on his shoulders, effectively stopping his retreat. "Don't pull out. Not yet. I finally got you inside me and now I don't want you to go."

"I have to, sweetheart. Condoms are nowhere near fool-proof, especially once they're filled. And believe me, this one is full." He chuckled. "They have the tendency to leak, burst. There's too big of a risk of getting pregnant."

As he slid out and rolled off of her, she thought fleetingly that having a baby with this man wouldn't be such a bad thing. But she pushed the thought aside as quickly as it came. That was a prime example of the things he said she deserved that he couldn't offer her. She knew that, understood that, and accepted that. But that didn't mean she couldn't dream.

* * * *

He was lying on the bed, his hands behind his head, one knee bent, staring at the ceiling when Suzanne walked out of the bathroom. He hadn't noticed her yet, and she stopped just outside the doorway to admire the view.

He was beautiful. She knew such a word wasn't usually used to describe a man, but that was how she saw him. Every time she looked at him all she could think was how incredibly beautiful he was.

With her artist's eye she took in all the curves and contours of his still naked body. She watched his taut stomach and rippled chest rise and fall with each steady breath. She loved the way his dark brown hair spilled over the white pillow. Then her gaze landed on his glorious cock. Even soft, it was huge, and she felt the stirrings of arousal in her center as she remembered what it felt like to have that delicious part of him inside her.

She wanted to feel it again. He'd told her they should wait a while, that she would be sore and most likely bruised after her first time and she was. But even the dull ache wasn't enough to keep her from wanting him again. Right now!

She didn't want to wait until later. She'd done enough waiting. Her body would handle it. It would adjust. Men and women had been sharing the intimacies of sex since the beginning of time. A woman's body was made for it, designed for the constant probing of the male organ. And what a male organ his was!

His head turned slightly and he looked at her, that super-sexy smile curving his oh-so-sexy lips. Still naked herself, she felt a twinge of self-consciousness as his eyes traveled slowly down her bare flesh. It was ridiculous. This man had seen her naked many times in the past several days. She should be used to him looking at her that way by now.

"God, you're beautiful!" he said, his low, sexy voice floating to her like a sensuous wave.

She walked to the bed and sat on the edge next to him. "Funny," she said, gently stroking his chest. "I was just thinking the same about you." At the look he gave her, she said, "I've surprised you. Why?"

He reached up, twisting strands of her hair around his finger. "Everything about you surprises me. You've surprised me since the first night we met. When I first saw you in the bar that night, I thought you were out of my league."

"And now?" She leaned over to brush her lips over his nipple.

The sound he made was a combination of a chuckle and a moan. "I still think you're out of my league."

"Got any clue about what I can do to change that?" Boldly, she licked his nipple. It hardened, beaded and she smiled.

"It can't be changed, sweetheart. We're from two different worlds."

"Opposites attract," she reminded him, stealing a quick nibble of his now taut bud.

“Woman!” He sucked in a breath through clenched teeth.

“Alicia and Derek are from different worlds, aren’t they?” She licked her way across the valley of muscles to his other nipple and continued her exploration.

“Yes and no.” His voice grew gruff with building desire. “Alicia’s roots stem from wealth, and from what I understand, the crème de la crème of society. I haven’t met her family yet, but I’ve thought since the moment I saw you that the two of you were in the same class.”

“We are.” She rested her chin on his chest and looked up at him through her lashes. “Her family is worth a bit more than mine, I believe, but our mothers belong to many of the same organizations.”

“But Alicia doesn’t truly fit into that world. She can if she wants to, but for her, it’s an act. Under the expensive clothes and glamorous jewelry lies a fast, crazy, heavy metal woman, so to speak.”

Suzanne sat up. She knew he was right. Alicia Addison did fit more into his world than she. But she refused to let that fact get her down now. If that was what he had meant by her deserving more than he could give her she could learn to fit in. It couldn’t be all that hard. Could it?

“And what do you see under my glamorous jewelry and expensive clothes?” she felt compelled to ask.

Garrett grinned from ear to ear and pulled her into his arms. “An unbelievably sexy body.”

“That’s not what I meant, and you know it.” She laughed and might have given him a playful slap if she hadn’t been pressed against him, unable to move.

His hand slid under her hair to grip the back of her neck and he tugged her face to him. “You know what you’ve done to me,” he said against her lips.

She accepted his change of subject and shook her head.

“You’ve made me hard again.”

“I did?” She feigned innocence. It wasn’t all that difficult considering she’d *been* innocent until mere minutes ago.

He lifted a brow and tried not to smile, but she saw the twitch at the corners of his lips. "In case you have forgotten, darling, I put one hell of a crack in that innocence wall of yours several nights ago and the more time you and I spend together, the larger that crack gets. The purity act can't work on me now."

"Damn," she said softly and was rewarded with another surprised look from him. "What?"

"I think that's the first cuss word I've heard come out of your sweet little mouth."

"I guess this is another day for firsts." She shrugged. "So what first are you going to let me check off next?"

"Check off? Do we have a running list?"

Her cheeks flamed. Apparently that crack in her innocence wall wasn't as large as he thought. "I do," she admitted, focusing her gaze on his nose because she was unable to meet his eyes. "Well, not a list, exactly, but there are so many things I've never tried."

"Why didn't you tell me this before now?"

"Because the things I want to try that we haven't done yet couldn't be done as long as I was a virgin."

"Ahh, so what's next on that list?"

"I want to..." She paused, sucking her bottom lip between her teeth as she searched for the right words. "What's that term? When the woman is on top?"

"You want to ride me?"

"Can I?"

"Are you sure you're ready for that? I mean, the penetration is a lot deeper in that position."

"I want to try." Brazenly, she sat up and swung one leg over his waist, straddling him.

"Wait, baby." His hands closed on her waist. "We need to prepare you."

"Prepare me?"

"Foreplay, finger you, make you wet."

“Looking at you makes me wet,” she said before she could stop herself, following her words with a glance at his erection. She could’ve sworn it grew another inch as she watched.

“In that case,” he said, sounding pleased. He grabbed another of the foil-wrapped condoms from the nightstand and opened it.

“Let me.” She took the prophylactic from his hand. “I want to do it this time.”

Wordlessly, he nodded.

She sat back on her heels and forced her shaky hands to steady as she smoothed the condom over his length the way they did together earlier. Well, almost. This time she allowed her fingers to touch him more, lightly squeezing all the way down. It was easier this time. She wasn’t quite as nervous as she’d been the last. She knew what to expect, knew the wondrous joy he would bring her. It gave her confidence and the ability to ignore her inhibitions.

“Suzanne,” he breathed warningly.

She giggled, reveling in the effect her touch had on him. It empowered her, made her feel like a real woman. “You know what else I want to do?” She allowed her eyes to scan his body as he had that first night, when it had been her naked on the bed and he’d been between her legs.

“What’s that, sweetheart?”

“I want to paint you. Would you let me?”

“Are we talking body paint, as in kinky sexy play? Or canvas?”

Body paint? Hmm, she hadn’t thought of that. “We’ll definitely have to try the first but I was actually talking about canvas.”

“You mean naked, don’t you?”

“Or almost.” She shrugged. “My best work so far was the sketch I did of you at the bar. But I want to paint you...all of you. I want to see you captured on canvas. That is, if I can pull it off.”

“Honey, with your talent, I’m sure you could pull it off.” His confidence in her made her heart swell.

“Then you’ll let me?”

“Sure.” He shrugged. “I only wish you could paint yourself for me.”

She laughed. “I’m not sure I’m that good. Maybe if I sat in front of a mirror...” She eased over him again and reached a hand between them. She caught his dick with three fingers, effectively ending their conversation, and guided it to her opening as she lowered herself onto him.

“Take it slow, baby,” he gasped as their bodies met.

His hands gripped her waist to control her descent.

Her eyes closed as he filled her. She ignored the dull ache, the protest of her inner muscles as they once again stretched to take all of his cock inside her, concentrating on the electric sensations that shot through her very core.

When he was buried deep, he pulled her down to him. “Can you do it?” His eyes glowed with the same concern they had the first time he’d entered her.

She pushed her knees into the mattress, lifting her lower body at the same time. She allowed him to nearly slide out of her before she lowered herself again, taking him so excruciatingly slowly it teetered between pure pleasure and sheer torture. She watched his eyes roll back in his head and bit back a grin.

“I guess you can,” he gasped as she repeated the movement.

Wanting to feel even more of him, she splayed her hands on his chest and pushed herself up to a sitting position and began to...ride. So that was how this position got its name.

His hands moved from her waist to her breasts. Cupping one in each hand, he squeezed, rolling her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers, and a jolt of electricity shot straight to her pussy.

She began to ride him harder, faster, moaning louder with each thrust of his dick into her, with each tweak of her nipples. She rocked slightly on the downward strokes, grinding her clit against his body. She was in total control and yet totally out of control, as if some

experienced, sex-starved woman had possessed her body. God, it felt great!

“Suzanne, slow down, baby. You’re going to make me...”

His words were drowned out by her own fierce cry as she shattered around him. It wasn’t until she floated down from her musical cloud that she understood what he’d been trying to say.

She fell on top of him, nuzzling her face against his neck so he wouldn’t see the uncertainty and embarrassment that suddenly flooded her face. In essence, he was the teacher and she the student. How could she not have listened to him?

“Did I mess up?” she asked, her question muffled by his neck.

“Hell no!” he said on a jittery breath. “I don’t think I’ve ever come so hard.”

Though his bluntness at times still surprised her, she smiled in satisfaction from knowing it had been her who had done that to him.

Chapter Nine

“Have you ever been married?”

Garrett’s hand froze above the rack in the dishwasher, his grip tightening on the dirty plate. He shot a glance over his shoulder, surprised to find Suzanne steadily wiping the Formica countertop rather than looking at him. He put the last plate in the rack and closed the dishwasher.

“No.” He hoped the single word answer didn’t sound as cautious to her as it did to his own ears. He turned to the sink, rinsing the stainless steel before turning off the faucet.

This was starting to get weird. For the third night in a row, he and Suzanne were in the kitchen of his new home together, putting the room to rights after dinner...together. She hadn’t been back to Tony’s apartment since Sunday when he drove her back so she could get more clothes.

Okay, in all honesty, he hadn’t allowed her to go back to Tony’s. She offered, said on more than one occasion that she should go back, but he hadn’t wanted her to and so convinced her to stay with him instead. In truth, it hadn’t taken much convincing. She wanted to stay as badly as he wanted her to.

But it wasn’t until she asked him if he’d ever been married that he realized just how strange his relationship with her was becoming. He’d developed feelings for her. He knew that. A large part of him was falling for her. He knew that, too. Yet, the way they had been living since Sunday, what they were doing now, it was all stuff that married people did. Or at least couples that lived together and planned

to make their relationship one of a long-term completely committed status.

Sweet Jesus! What was he getting himself into? Did he want something long term with Suzanne? Could they have something long term when she lived hundreds of miles away and he spent most of his life on the road? Was that why she was asking him such a question now? Did *she* want something long term from him?

He'd told her from the very beginning she deserved more than he could give her, and that remained true. Okay, so it wasn't that he couldn't give her what she deserved. He could. If he gave up the band and chose the family life as Trey had.

But giving up the band? How could he even consider the option? His life practically revolved around Façade. His life's dream, all his goals and happiness rolled into one. Or at least he thought the band held all his happiness. Apparently, he'd been wrong on that point, because he had found a new level of happiness with Suzanne. But could he really give up one for the other?

"Have you ever been engaged?" She walked up beside him and started rinsing the dirty sponge.

"I came close once." He leaned a hip against the counter. "It was several years ago."

Suzanne turned off the faucet, placed the sponge on the back of the sink and looked up at him. "What happened?"

Garrett sighed, not because the question irritated him, but because he never told anyone the real reason he and Lacey split. Yet, telling Suzanne the age-old simplistic answer that it just hadn't worked out between them didn't seem right. It didn't *feel* right.

"It was before Façade, before I even knew Derek and Reese. Trey and I were in another band at the time. A band that was going nowhere fast, but we were trying to make something out of it."

He pushed himself from the counter and walked to the refrigerator for a beer. "Want one?" he offered, but she shook her head. He twisted the cap off the bottle and continued. "I was working for a

company framing houses. There were many days I worked from sun up to sun down and then went to practice with the band. Still, I made a point of going to Lacey's house for at least an hour every night."

He leaned against the opposite counter from Suzanne, who was listening with her undivided attention, and took a swig of the cold beer. "We fell behind schedule on this one house and started pulling some pretty late hours to catch up. There were a few nights I didn't make it to Lacey's house at all." He paused, drank from the bottle again. "Then one night, well, I'd called to tell her I wouldn't be stopping by. Only I decided to even though it was pretty late. I wanted to see her, you know? I'd had a long, rough day and well...Anyway, I'm sure you can guess what I found when I got there."

"She was cheating on you," Suzanne whispered, her eyes full of apology.

Garrett nodded. "That discovery was bad enough, but to make it worse, she was cheating on me with the drummer of the band I was in at the time."

Her jaw dropped. "Ohmigod! She cheated with a friend of yours?"

"I thought of him as a friend. Guess I was wrong." He shrugged. "Needless to say, I lost my woman and my band in the same night."

"Oh, Garrett." She walked to him, stood on her tiptoes and lightly touched his cheek. "I'm so sorry."

"It was for the best, actually," he said and he really meant it. It had hurt like hell at the time, but he realized much later a life with Lacey would have never worked. It wouldn't have lasted. Though he hadn't noticed it then, she'd already been on the hunt for his replacement. And the last he heard of her, she'd been through a handful of boyfriends and two husbands since their breakup. "It was better to find out about her infidelity before I asked her to marry me than after we tied the knot."

"Did you love her?" Suzanne asked and then laughed, shaking her head. "Stupid question. You wouldn't have planned to ask her to marry you if you hadn't loved her."

"It isn't as stupid of a question as you think." He drew her into his arms. "I mean, I loved her but not enough to get married, spend my life with her. I didn't love her like..."

I love you. The words were on the tip of his tongue but he stopped them just in time. The mere realization that he nearly said them struck his heart like a physical blow. Good thing he was leaning against the counter because the force of it would have surely knocked him on his ass.

"Like I should have," he finished quickly. "Let's go shoot some pool." He pulled Suzanne out of the kitchen before she could utter a word of protest or, *God*, ask him anymore questions about his past. "I'm a game junkie and you haven't showed me yet how good you can play."

"I'll say you're a game junkie." She laughed, stopping at the doorway of the room, her eyes wide and full of amusement. "Where did you find all these arcade machines? Some of them are really old, aren't they?"

"They are. I found a few through ads in the papers, the rest I came by on eBay." He tugged her the rest of the way into the room and drew her against him but she turned in his arms, putting her back to his front.

"I love the pool table! Regulation size, green felt, oak finish, it looks brand new."

"It is. Well, I've had it for about a year. Between touring and getting the house built, I haven't had much time to play."

"Well, let's see how rusty you are." She tipped her head back, flashing him a grin over her shoulder.

Garrett lifted a brow. "Should I be worried?"

"Probably not. My father loves to play. He taught me as soon as I was old enough to hold a stick." She laughed. "I was so short I had to pull a chair to the table so I could reach to make the shot."

"Did you ever win?"

“When I was little? Many times. Though it was probably more out of sympathy than skill. I like to think these days I win because I deserve to, but you know how parents can be.”

“Then let’s see what you’ve got.” He kissed her nose and released her to begin racking the balls.

She chose a stick from a rack on the wall and walked back to the table.

“Do you want to break or should I?” he asked.

“I will.” She moved into position at the end of the pool table, leaned over, and aimed for the shot. He watched her hesitate, saw her gaze flick to him, then her expression morphed to one of utter concentration as she pushed the stick into the cue ball with all her might. The white ball sailed into the triangle of colored balls, breaking them cleanly. Two solid balls fell into opposite corner pockets.

“Damn!” Garrett whistled. “Something tells me I’m in trouble.”

* * * *

Suzanne smiled and lined up for her next shot. She saw him in her peripheral vision as he walked behind her and felt his eyes on her butt as she leaned over the table. She called the shot, watching with a wide-mouth grin as it sailed into the appropriate pocket. She made one more clean shot before missing another.

She turned, stood on her tiptoes and quickly pecked his lips. “It’s your turn, big boy. Don’t hold back.”

“Hold back? Are you kidding? It’s going to take all of my skill just to keep up!”

He was right. Daddy *had* taught her good. Suzanne beat him two out of three games before he returned his stick to the rack. When he turned to her, he was grinning from ear to ear.

“I give up.” He threw his hands in the air in surrender. “For now.” His grin turned mischievous as he backed her against the pool table.

He was hard. She felt his erection in her stomach and instinctively rubbed against it. "Watching you play makes me want to play at other things. I never thought getting beat by a woman would be such a turn-on."

She gazed up at him, her pulse picking up pace as a now familiar throbbing began between her legs. She wanted him inside her again, hated it when he wasn't there where she felt he belonged. Now that she'd experienced the pleasures of having him inside her on more than one occasion, she felt empty when he wasn't there.

He kissed her and fire surged through her veins. Her nipples tightened as she pressed her body more firmly against his, needing the contact, needing to feel his warmth. "Make love to me," she whispered against his lips.

His hands skimmed up her sides, slid down again in a sensual caress that had her body slinking and swaying with the touch. The tantalizing glide continued down her hips, his fingers catching the waistband of her panties and tugging them down as his hands moved behind her to grasp her buttocks. He lifted her, setting her on the edge of the pool table as he kissed her neck, licking his way down the neckline of her blouse. The air conditioner kicked on, cooling the fire his trail of kisses left behind.

"Unbutton your blouse for me, baby," he said, his voice heated with his own need.

As she did as he requested, he slipped out of his pants and sheathed himself with a condom.

"Is it okay if we skip the foreplay for now?" he asked, spreading her legs wide as he moved between them. Her sitting on the pool table brought their lower bodies perfectly in line. "I want to be inside you so bad I don't think I can wait."

"Neither can I," she said in a whispered breath. "Take me now."

In one swift move, he buried his cock inside her to the hilt. The gentle force of his plunge, the instant stretching of her insides had

Suzanne crying out his name. He hesitated only a moment before pulling back, only to thrust in again.

Her head fell back as their bodies settled into a fast paced mating. His hands still gripped her ass and when he thrust inside her, he squeezed and pulled her hard to him. He bent his head, catching one nipple in his mouth. He licked, sucked, nibbled, tenderly at first and then gaining a bit of pressure as he continued to pound his hard cock inside her.

“Come for me, Suzanne,” he said against her nipple. “I want to feel your body quiver around me.”

His words were so erotic, his breath so hot against her taut nipple that she could do nothing else. A loud moan escaped as she crumbled around him. Her body quivered just as he’d wanted and he continued to piston his cock hard and deep inside her until the quivering stopped, and he groaned from his own release.

* * * *

Breathless and sweating, he laid his forehead on her shoulder. He squeezed his eyes shut, his mind reeling. What the fuck was this woman doing to him? He couldn’t get enough of her. Even now, totally spent with his dick buried inside her, it still wasn’t enough. His need for her scared the living hell out of him, so much so that he knew he should insist they both get dressed and he should take her back to Tony’s place.

He couldn’t do it, didn’t want to. He wanted her to stay with him again tonight. And, holy fuck, every night for as long as he could get her to stay.

She caressed his hair with the palm of her hand, light, petting strokes that felt so fucking good. Too fucking good. Everything about her was too fucking good. Her other arm wrapped around him and hugged him close.

“Thank you.”

Thank you? She was thanking him! Good heavens, *he* should be thanking *her*. He lifted his head and looked at her. His confusion apparently showed in his eyes, because she smiled sheepishly and said, “I never thought making love could be like this, like it is with you.”

His heart stilled. Making love? She always called it that, but was that truly how she saw having sex with him? Was that how she felt? Or had she simply used the term because saying fucking or even having sex was too improper for her? Jesus! He had no idea. As cruel as it sounded even to his own mind at that moment, he didn’t care. All he knew was fucking, making love or merely having sex, whatever they called it, he wanted to do it again, and again, and again, and, God help him, again.

He pulled his cock out of her sweet heat albeit reluctantly and removed the condom, carelessly letting it fall to the floor. Then he lifted her off the pool table, cradling her soft ass in his arms.

She laughed. Man, he loved to hear her laugh! Her legs locked tightly around his waist as he started to walk with her. “What are you doing?” she asked.

“I’m taking you to the bedroom, where I can get you completely naked and take advantage of you for the rest of the night.”

“Can we make a detour by the kitchen first? I’m thirsty.”

He groaned and was glad when it sounded more playful than tortured because the last was exactly how he felt. Every second he spent not inside her had become pure and absolute agony. “Only if you insist.”

“I do.” She giggled and he detoured for the kitchen.

* * * *

Suzanne awoke the next morning to a faint knocking. Darn it! She’d hoped to wake in the early morning light and draw Garrett out

of sleep in a purely erotic way. Why were her plans always being interrupted by something?

She glanced at the red digital numbers of the bedside clock, rubbed her eyes and then looked again. It was nearly noon! Holy cow! So much for making love by dawn's early light. They'd missed dawn completely.

Garrett stirred beside her just as the faint knocking sound came again.

"Garrett." She rolled on her side, propping herself on one elbow. Unable to resist touching him, she traced the outline of the muscles in his shoulder with her fingertip.

His only response was a low grunt.

She smiled. "Garrett, sweetheart." She spoke louder this time and gave his shoulder a slight shake. "I think someone is at the door."

His eyes slowly fluttered open and he gazed at her in sleepy confusion.

"Someone is at the door," she repeated.

He turned his head to the side then rolled it back to face her, a grin spreading across his lips. "It's nearly twelve o'clock."

"Yeah, no kidding." She chuckled. "I can't believe we slept so late."

"It isn't really late when you think about what time we went to bed." He rose, planting a quick kiss on her lips before crawling out of bed to put on his pants.

"Yeah, we did go to bed late," she smiled as memories of last night assailed her. "What was it? God, nearly nine o'clock!"

He chuckled. "We may have gone to bed at nine, but it was a hell of a lot later when you finally let me go to sleep." His green eyes twinkled as he walked to the bedroom door.

"When I let you!" She gasped and threw a pillow at him. It hit the floor right behind his feet as he walked out of the room.

She heard him laugh and fell back on the bed. What time *had* it been when they finally fell asleep? She couldn't remember exactly, but she knew it had been late...or early...or whatever.

Sitting up again, she pulled the sheet to her breasts and looked around. Though she'd been staying at his house every night for a while now, she really hadn't taken the time to fully survey his bedroom. When they were in here, the décor was generally the last thing on her mind.

Like the rest of the house, it was simplistic and decidedly male. The king size bed, chest of drawers and two nightstands were the only furnishings. Midnight blue shades covered the two windows and precisely matched with the solid sheets and bedspread. A clothesbasket sat in the far corner, but it appeared the clothes tossed toward it had missed their mark on several occasions.

She smiled, thinking that was just like a bachelor man. Then her eyes widened and her mouth gapped as her gaze landed on a painting across the room. She crawled out of the bed, taking the sheet with her as she stepped closer to the painting. Not that she needed a closer look. The painting was one of hers. She knew its every detail with her eyes closed.

It was one of the many that had been part of the gallery exhibit. The painting was of a marshland with the brightest round sun rising behind fluffy white clouds in the distant sky. How could she have not noticed it hanging there before? When had he bought it? She hadn't seen him purchase it that night at the gallery show, and he hadn't said anything about picking it up later.

"Mom, Dad," Garrett's voice traveled to the bedroom. "I wasn't expecting you this morning."

Suzanne whirled around, the painting completely forgotten. No shit they hadn't expected them! Alarm sent her heartbeat through the preverbal roof.

Okay, okay. Calm. She needed to stay calm. Panicking would do her absolutely no good. She should get dressed. Yes, that was

certainly the calmest move to make first. But her clothes...Oh dear God, where were her clothes? Her suitcases were in the spare bedroom, her dresses hanging in the closet there. She'd somewhat taken over that room for her belongings, not wanting to invade Garrett's closet space in his bedroom. But where were the clothes she'd been wearing last night?

In the game room, the hallway, the kitchen, oh sweet heavens!

"No, no, no." She covered her face with her hands. In her mind's eye she could picture each article of clothing where it lay. Her underwear on the floor beneath the edge of the pool table in the game room right beside...

"Shit!" she gasped, her hand falling to cover her mouth as her jaw dropped open in utter mortification. They were on the floor with the used condom!

Her skirt was in the kitchen where Garrett had removed it before feasting on her in combination with vanilla ice cream—and oh, boy, hadn't that been one for the books—after fixing them something to drink.

At least they hadn't needed a condom there, she mused. Her shirt and bra were in the hallway where he'd stopped to remove them and drive her wild with kisses and caresses to her breasts before they finally made it to the bedroom.

She heard his parents talking and what sounded like two small voices chatting wildly in the background from the living room. No way could she gather her clothes without being seen. She couldn't even make it the short distance to the guest bedroom without taking the risk of being spotted.

She rushed to Garrett's closet and took out the first button-down shirt she could find. It was tan, big and swallowed her whole, but it was better than nothing. In the second drawer of the chest she found a pair of black sweat pants. They too were incredibly large, the legs bunching thickly at her ankles, the waist barely staying up even for the tight drawstring. So this was what it felt like to be Lily Tomlin in

The Incredible Shrinking Woman. Only Suzanne hadn't needed a unique mixture of chemicals to achieve the effect. Nope, she'd only needed a visit from the parents on a morning when her clothes had been left like a proof-positive strip tease all over their son's house.

* * * *

Garrett couldn't believe his parents had shown up without even so much as a call of warning. Then again, he could. Actually, come to think of it, he couldn't believe it hadn't happened before now. It was why he never brought a woman home and Suzanne had been essentially *living* with him for days now. His family was tight and as comfortable at one another's house as they were at their own. It was nice and he'd always loved the closeness of his family, but it made privacy a real bitch at times.

"I brought this casserole," his mother said as she made her way to the kitchen. Great, they planned to stay for lunch. "I know it's been days since you've had a home cooked meal."

"Actually, Mom, I had steaks and steamed vegetables at Derek and Alicia's the other night," he said, following her. He and Suzanne had been eating fairly well every night since. He spotted the pile of navy blue material on the counter the moment he entered the kitchen and snatched it up before his mother could figure out what it was.

Suzanne! He had to get to Suzanne. She was probably freaking in his bedroom by now. She didn't have any clothes in there. They were...all over the freaking house! Oh, shit!

"Uncle Garrett, can we play in the game room?" his nephews asked in unison.

Garrett spun on his heel. Suzanne's underwear, the freaking condom! "Uh, wait a minute, guys. I left a few things out in the game room I need to pick up first."

He couldn't remember when he moved so fast in his life. The guys in the band would die of hysteria if they could see him now. He

dashed into the game room, picking up Suzanne's underwear and the condom with one sweep of his hand and burying them in the skirt in his arm. He was picking up her bra and shirt in the hallway when the bedroom door slowly opened.

"Son, are we interrupting..." his father began but stopped, gave a low whistle, then whispered, "something?"

Garrett shot a look over his shoulder, saw that his father had stopped at the other end of the hallway, flanked by his two young nephews. The old man's eyebrows winged up, a grin playing at the corners of his lips.

Suzanne froze in the doorway to Garrett's bedroom. She'd brushed her hair and covered herself with...a pair of his sweat pants and one of his shirts? Oh, but the woman was completely irresistible! Her small, trim body seemed lost in the bunch of fabric, putting him in mind of a little girl playing dress-up in her father's clothes. She looked so young and yet so cute and he knew in that instant he was a goner. No question about it. He was, without a doubt, falling in love with her. That was so not good.

"Why is everyone standing around in the hallway?" Garrett's mother stepped in front of his father, understanding and a keen dose of mischief taking over her expression when she spotted Suzanne. "Well, hello there. I'm Annabet Henry, Garrett's mother, but you can call me Anna."

* * * *

"S—Suzanne Cassidy." Suzanne gulped, her gaze darting to Garrett before settling once more on the woman moving toward her.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Suzanne. It's been so long since we have met one of Garrett's girlfriends."

One of Garrett's girlfriends? How many did he have? Did she really want to know?

Her heart sank and something in her expression must have betrayed her because Anna quickly added, "It's been a long time since we've seen Garrett with a woman at all."

And you wouldn't be seeing him with one now if you hadn't popped in unannounced. Would she have ever met his parents if they hadn't shown up this morning? She doubted it.

"Can we play now, Uncle Garrett?" a small boy asked impatiently.

Garrett moved closer to Suzanne and slipped an arm around her waist. "That's Timmy," he said, looking down at her. "He's seven. And that's his nine-year-old brother Josh. They are my nephews, my sister's kids." His attention returned to Timmy and he nodded. "You can play now. But don't touch the pool table."

Suzanne forgot about her heart as her stomach flip-flopped. Ah yes, the pool table. Garrett gave her waist a gentle squeeze and she knew he was sharing the memory.

"We know," the boys said in unison as they disappeared into the game room.

"That's my father, Garrett Senior," Garrett introduced. "Senior for short. It keeps down the confusion."

"Nice to meet you, Suzanne," the man said with a soft, comforting smile.

As Suzanne looked from Garrett Senior to Anna, she saw Garrett's looks were a combination of both parents. His dark hair was the color of Anna's as was his tanned skin, but his green eyes and long legs had come from his father. Anna was the same height as Suzanne. Go figure.

"Son, why don't you go put on a shirt?" Anna smirked as she looked up at him. "Suzanne and I will go warm up the casserole. Then we can eat."

Hours later, Suzanne crossed her arms below her breasts and leaned against the doorframe of the game room. A slow smile unfurled on her lips as she watched Garrett with his nephews. He was

good with them, she thought, and the love the boys felt for him was evident in their eyes, in their movements, in the way they clung to their uncle.

Garrett was playing a one-on-one game of Galaga with Josh while Timmy stood in a chair behind them, leaning on their shoulders to peer between their heads at the game screen. An exploding sound filled the game room and Garrett covered his face with his hands as the boys pointed at him and laughed. Apparently, it had been his space ship, or whatever that red and white thing with the pink outline was, that exploded.

"I won!" Josh declared in triumph. He pumped the air with his little fist a couple of times and jumped up and down in front of the machine.

"My turn," Timmy announced, hopping down from the chair. "I'm going to beat you badder than Josh," he said to Garrett with all the confidence of a seven-year-old.

"Worse. Worse than Josh," Garrett corrected. He ruffled the young boy's wavy brown hair. "And we'll just see about that, shortstop."

Suzanne felt a hand on her shoulder and she turned her head to look. Anna had come up behind her, smiling too as she watched the three males.

"They do love their Uncle Garrett," Anna whispered, all the pride in her heart evident in her tone.

"He's good with them," Suzanne said softly.

"He loves children. I keep hoping he'll settle down and have a few of his own, but..." The other woman shrugged.

Suzanne didn't respond to that. What was she supposed to say? Was Anna discreetly throwing her a hint? They hardly knew one another. Although, the mother hadn't said she was hoping her son would settle down with Suzanne. She merely wanted him to find someone and give her more grandchildren.

Her hand dropped to her abdomen. What would it feel like to have a life growing inside her? What would it feel like to have Garrett's baby growing there? She could only imagine.

Anna's hand was resting on Suzanne's shoulder, and Suzanne covered it with her own. "It will happen," she assured the woman and hoped it wasn't a lie. "When he is ready."

"He cares for you. It's been a long time since I've seen him look at someone the way he looks at you."

Hope filled Suzanne's with a rushing force that made her heart pound wildly behind her rib cage. But it was false hope, she feared. Annabet Henry saw what she wanted to see, not what was really there. Suzanne and Garrett hadn't known one another that long. So what if in that short time she'd given him something that she'd never given another man, something she could never get back? So what if they'd shared things she never shared with another soul? So what if they shared those things again and again in a number of different ways?

None of that meant he was in love with her, or even that she was in love with him. She'd thought she was when he made love to her the first time. But had it really been love she felt? She didn't know. How could she? She'd never been in love. She got these funny feelings inside every time she touched him, looked at him, thought about him. But was that what being in love felt like?

No! She wasn't in love with him. She couldn't be. She wouldn't allow herself to be. They had simply built a strong sexual relationship. It was strong and active and wonderful and exciting and toe-curling and...

But great sex was certainly not synonymous with being in love.

The exploding sound filled the game room again and this time it was Timmy who covered his face in his hands while Garrett and Josh pointed and laughed. Then Garrett looked at the doorway and their gazes locked. The smile slowly faded from his face as his eyes filled with emotion and desire.

She was not in love with him. She was not in love with him!

Her eyes followed his tongue as it made a slow tantalizing sweep over his bottom lip. Her breath caught, her nipples tightened and a low but forceful throb began between her legs.

Or was she?

Chapter Ten

“You’re going tomorrow night, aren’t you?” Alicia sipped her wine as she leaned back in her chair.

Suzanne sat across the table from her, her own glass of wine in hand. They were in the courtyard of one of the more upscale restaurants in Philadelphia. The guys were spending the day practicing and preparing for a benefit show they were to perform the next evening. Alicia and Suzanne stuck around Reese’s place for a while, watching the guys practice, but decided to leave them to their work and head out for lunch.

“Garrett asked me to.” Suzanne traced the rim of her wine glass thoughtfully with her fingertip.

“But you don’t want to go?”

“It’s not that I don’t *want* to.” Suzanne hesitated. “I’m just afraid I’ll be too uncomfortable,” she admitted. “I’m not used to this stuff like you are, Alicia. I’ve listened to Garrett play Façade’s music and, well, it’s growing on me. I’m starting to like it. But I’ve never been a fan of heavy metal and have certainly never been to that type of concert. Heck, Alicia, I’ve never been to *any* type of concert short of orchestra performances and the opera.”

“There’s nothing like it. The power, the energy, it’s amazing! And watching those guys onstage...” Alicia smacked her lips. “Talk about a turn-on.”

Suzanne choked a laugh.

“For them as much as us,” Alicia continued, leaning forward to prop her elbows on the table. Her voice lowered to just above a whisper. “I don’t mind telling you sex with Derek is off the scale at

any time. But the adrenaline arousal he gets when he performs, oh baby, there's nothing like it. He takes that out on me and my whole world explodes!"

Suzanne's jaw dropped. "Is it really that good?" The question was out of her mouth before she could stop it. But, Christ, she was dying to know! Sex that could make her whole world explode. She thought she'd already experienced that with Garrett but, the way Alicia talked, she hadn't even come close.

"It's really that good." Alicia grinned, then she narrowed her eyes, bit her lower lip thoughtfully as if deciding something. "I know I'm prying and you're welcome to tell me to butt out, but I'm assuming you and Garrett have slept together."

Maybe it was the way Alicia spoke, in that soothing I-want-to-be-your-friend voice or maybe it was simply her own need to talk to another woman about her relationship with Garrett. Whatever it was, Suzanne found herself warming to the conversation, loosening, wanting to spill her guts.

She nodded. "Many times."

Alicia chuckled. "I kind of figured."

"He was my first."

Alicia stared at her, her smile slowly morphing into shock. "Your first? As in your very first? Holy shit, Suzanne!"

"It felt right," Suzanne whispered, shrugged, unsure why she felt the need to explain but knowing somehow that Alicia would understand.

"Then you did the right thing." Alicia fell silent, but it was a companionable silence, an understanding silence, a comforting silence. Then a slow grin unfolded on her glossy lips and her eyes glinted with mischief. "Okay, I'm not trying to embarrass you but, well, I have to know. I'm *dying* to know. See, Garrett made this comment on the band's message board a long time ago and, well, I've never been able to ask anyone else if it's true."

Suzanne breathed deep, let it out slow. She would not be embarrassed. Not this time. Whatever it was Alicia wanted to ask, she would not let it embarrass her. Sex. She knew it was about sex and, if she could open her legs, she could darn well talk about it, couldn't she?

"Could he really lick the bottom of a Pringles can?"

The laugh spilled out of Suzanne on a burst of wildly hysterical amusement that nearly sent her falling out of her chair. At least she wasn't embarrassed. When at last she managed to catch her breath, she looked at Alicia and allowed herself to say the first thing that came to mind. "I don't know about a Pringles can, but he can damn sure lick my very soul."

"Wow!" Alicia grinned and then paused as her mind visibly switched tracks again. "You're falling in love with him, aren't you?"

Suzanne gulped, all laughter instantly died in her throat. "I—I don't know. I've never actually been in love before. I don't know what it is supposed to feel like."

"Does your body do all sorts of goofy things every time you look at him?"

Suzanne nodded.

"And can you imagine your life in, oh, say, five years from now with him in it?"

Suzanne hesitated, thought. She could. She had. What she could no longer imagine was her life five years from now *without* him in it. "I guess I am in love with him," she said on a hopeless sigh.

"You don't sound too happy about that."

"It isn't that I don't want to love him," Suzanne explained and realized she was telling herself more than Alicia. "It's that I know I *shouldn't* love him. He isn't looking for a life with me, Alicia."

"Has he told you that?"

"Well, not exactly. What he's said is that he can't give me what I deserve. I took that to mean he isn't ready to settle down, have a committed relationship, and start a life together. And I can't kid

myself into thinking he would ever want all of that with me. We're so different, from such different worlds."

Alicia laughed but there wasn't much humor in the sound. "You sound exactly like I did a few months ago when I talked about Derek and look at us now."

"But you and Derek are different than Garrett and me," Suzanne argued.

"Are we? Think about it, Suzanne. What is really so different about me and Derek than you and Garrett? You and I are basically from the same world and so are Derek and Garrett. Yet, they are choosing to be with us."

"Yes, but for how long?"

Alicia sighed, nodded. "I'm going to tell you the same thing Diana told me when I asked her a similar question. It's an old saying and I'm sure you've heard it. It's better to have loved and lost..."

"Than to have never loved at all," Suzanne finished dryly. She got the point.

* * * *

"I can't believe you talked me into this." Suzanne turned her back on the full-length mirror hanging on the door of Derek and Alicia's bedroom and looked over her shoulder. From the back she was a vision in black, but for her light skin and golden hair cascading a half inch below her bra line.

"You look fantastic." Alicia lay on her stomach sideways across the large bed, her chin propped in her hands as she watched Suzanne.

Suzanne spun again, this time glaring at her front reflection. "I'm wearing leather pants, Alicia," she said slowly as if she were speaking to a small child. She planted her fists on her hips and shifted her glare to the reflection of Alicia behind her. "Leather! Skin *tight* leather, might I add."

"It's the only way to wear it." Alicia's words rang with amusement.

Suzanne's eyes danced from Alicia's reflection to her own then traveled down her body from head to toe. She didn't look like herself. Her hair did. Well, almost. It looked like her hair when Garrett released it from whatever binding she'd chosen for the day, most often a single barrette pulling the sides together in back. It fell loose now and out of control around her face, over her shoulders, and down her back.

Her make-up looked much the same as well, she admitted, even if a bit darker than normal. But it would be dark out, so that was okay. Her clothes, however, were not her at all. It was as if her head had been transposed onto someone else's body.

Gone were her usual long comfortable dresses and skirts, her stylish blouses and pumps or flats. Tonight she wore a black baby doll tee that hugged her upper body like a second skin. The neckline was curved and low, the bra she wore underneath tight so that it pushed her breasts together and lifted them, creating a valley beginning under the seam of the shirt.

I bet Garrett's tongue could lick the complete depth of that valley. She looked down and her nipples hardened from the thought. Façade was written in bold italic lettering across the shirt.

The tee formed to her sides and abs, stopping at the waistline of a pair of impossibly tight black leather pants. They were the kind of pants worn by groupies or female rock stars, not a prim and proper artist from St. Petersburg, Florida. She wore a pair of black leather ankle high boots to complete the outfit.

"I still think you look great," Alicia insisted as she sat up in the center of the bed.

"I look like Olivia Newton John when she surprises John Travolta at the carnival in the end of *Grease*!" Suzanne flung her arms out as she turned to face Alicia.

"Nah, your hair isn't teased enough."

Suzanne slanted the other woman a look.

“And you aren’t wearing red high heels,” Alicia continued, a smile toying with the corners of her lips.

“You’re enjoying yourself, aren’t you?”

“You bet, but what I’m really going to enjoy is the look on Garrett’s face when he sees you.”

“Do you really think he’ll like this, that he’ll like *me* like this?”

“He’s going to love it!”

* * * *

“Garrett, heads up bro.” Derek slapped Garrett on the shoulder but his gaze was transfixed on a point over Garrett’s shoulder. “You better turn around. You’re not going to believe your eyes.”

“Damn!” Reese and Trey whistled in unison.

Garrett turned and barely kept his jaw from hitting the floor. Alicia was headed toward them but it was the woman at her side that captivated his mind. Derek was right. He didn’t believe his eyes. Was that? No, it couldn’t be. But it was. Holy shit!

Suzanne made her way down the narrow hallway with her head held high and her shoulders back in a stance more confident than any he’d seen in her yet. Her hips swayed like a well oiled machine clad as they were in a pair of deliciously tight black leather pants that made him want to drop to his knees and beg for what his mind couldn’t quite figure out yet. Anything and everything seemed like a good bet at the moment.

By the time she reached them, Garrett knew his eyes were bugging out of his head. Suzanne walked straight up to him, lifted her arms to rest on his shoulders, pulled herself to her tiptoes, and whispered in his ear. “Close your mouth, sweetheart. You’re drooling.” Then she boldly licked his earlobe before she fell flatfooted and took a step back.

Garrett stared down at her, utterly speechless. And damn it, he was as hard as a rock! Talk about making his own leather pants uncomfortably tight!

“You better find that tongue soon, man,” Derek laughed and slapped Garrett’s back as he and Alicia started to move away. “We’re on in ten.”

“Good thing you’re the vocalist and not him,” Reese chuckled as he and Trey followed Derek and Alicia down the hall, leaving Garrett and Suzanne alone.

Garrett saw a flash of uncertainty and nervousness move through Suzanne’s eyes before she quickly masked her expression. “I hope your speechless shock is because you like what you see,” she said in the most confident, most seductive tone he had ever heard.

This was coming from Suzanne Cassidy’s sweet, soft-spoken lips. Sweet Jesus! He’d died and gone to heaven.

She lifted a hand and slowly trailed one red-painted fingernail down his chest. She licked her lips, a slow easy sweep of her tongue that made him think of hot tubs and jet streams, and he finally snapped out of it.

“I really have created a monster.” He moved into her, his hands not waiting for instruction from his brain, at least not the brain in the head on his shoulders, anyway. They immediately reached around her and down to cup those tightly clad buttocks.

He yanked her hard against him and slammed his mouth down on hers. *We’re on in ten*, Derek had said. Ten minutes. It was nowhere near enough time.

“My God, woman, what are you trying to do to me?” he whispered hotly against her lips now red and swollen from his kiss.

* * * *

Exactly what she’d done. Suzanne smiled to herself as she gazed into the swirl of purely erotic arousal in Garrett’s eyes. God, but she

loved knowing that look was for her. And only her. She'd seen it sweep over him the instant he'd spotted her walking down the hall, watched those eyes go from their mesmerizing green to the tantalizing darkness of passion and desire the nearer she came. Desire clutched in her belly. Wetness pooled in her panties. Her channel throbbed and her body hummed from the need to have him, to feel him, to be devoured by him. Now!

But she hadn't missed Derek's ten minute warning. The fire she'd ignited inside both of them would have to continue to burn out of control until after the show.

God, could she wait that long? Didn't leather shrink when it got wet? Her pussy lips clenched and she felt more juices seep from between her folds. She didn't have on any underwear. The pants were too tight for that. And at this rate, they would only get tighter.

"I have to go," he whispered, kissing her again before pulling back. "Are you going with Alicia into the crowd?"

Suzanne shook her head. "She's meeting me on the side of the stage."

Seemingly pleased by that, he nodded. "Then you can walk with me. And I," he encircled her shoulders with his arm as he led her down the hall, "can keep my eye on you."

Guilt stabbed at her as she stepped onto the side of the stage with Alicia. She knew that even though the other woman was Derek's girlfriend and because of it had the option of watching the show from anywhere in the building, Alicia preferred to be in the crowd, front stage and center. But because Suzanne was with her tonight, Alicia chose to watch the show from the side of the stage.

"The crowd can get brutal sometimes," Alicia had said when they had talked about it on their way to the venue. "Since this is your first heavy metal concert, you'll be safer on the side of the stage."

From where they stood in the shadows, she saw exactly what Alicia had meant. The band was still minutes from taking the stage and already the crowd on the floor was squeezed tight and thick.

For as far back as she could see men, women and even a few children of all ages were cramped so tightly she wondered how they could breathe. There wasn't an open spot in the stands either, she realized as she scanned the area. And no one was sitting down.

Though it was dark, Suzanne gazed at the stage set-up. Two large white staircases extended from either side of a long platform. Two smaller staircases arched from the center with a drum set between them.

"Garrett will come out on this side," Alicia informed her. She pointed to the top right of the platform above that staircase. "He'll start up there and move down the stairs to the stage in front of those speakers as they play the opening song."

Suzanne nodded her understanding and continued to study the stage. Her attention was diverted when, opposite them on the floor at the edge of the stage, a group of men yelled a few endearments and sexy remarks.

Alicia laughed and waved and then looked at Suzanne. "You're doing it again," she said, speaking loudly over the low constant roar of the crowd. When Suzanne shot her a quizzical look, she added, "That innocent schoolgirl is taking over. You were supposed to leave her at home tonight. Remember? Innocent schoolgirls don't stand on a stage in front of thousands of screaming fans dressed in tight black leather."

"You make it sound like I'm a showgirl or something," Suzanne said, but she knew what Alicia was getting at. "Are you trying to tell me I should wave to them?"

"Absolutely! They're fans. Maybe not fans of yours or mine. Though from the way they're acting, I think they would like to be," Alicia added on a laugh. "But they're fans of the band. You're a band member's girlfriend, and as such that makes you part of it all. Wave, flirt a bit, have fun. It's expected."

So Suzanne waved. The group of guys went wild and she couldn't help but smile. Another group of voices called out, this time females, this time Alicia's name. "They know you."

Alicia shrugged. "Some pictures of Derek and I got out and word spread like wildfire. It doesn't take long."

A bright flash snapped from the security guard area between the stage and guardrail and Suzanne spotted a tall lanky man with a camera around his neck.

"That picture will make it into a magazine or newspaper somewhere," Alicia said on a laugh. "And once you're identified as Garrett's girlfriend, the word will be out on you too. Welcome to the world of fame, fans and heavy metal."

Garrett's girlfriend, Alicia had said it twice and they were the two words Suzanne centered in on now. Was she Garrett's girlfriend? In her mind, that made her more than simply a passing lover. Was that how Garrett looked at their relationship?

She'd been staying at Garrett's house, unofficially living with him at least as long as she remained in town. Only a few of her things remained at Tony's. The vision, or at least parts of it, that she'd had when he'd taken her on a tour of his house that first night had been really happening. They were doing dinner together every night. Not at the dining room table she'd pictured, the dining room was still unfurnished, but they usually settled around the coffee table together. They bathed together in the master bathroom garden tub and made love every night in his bed. And the hot tub, *oh my*, the things they had done in that hot tub.

Her gallery exhibit was going well and she was no longer needed to be there in person, yet she hadn't thought of returning to Florida, and Garrett hadn't asked when she would be leaving. The girl who'd so desperately wanted to leave the city of Philadelphia as quickly as possible such a short time ago now couldn't imagine leaving.

She and Garrett seemed to have fallen into that of a girlfriend-boyfriend relationship, as Alicia thought. But was that truly what

Garrett wanted, or was she simply a means to fill time while the band searched for a new bass player to replace Trey and prepared to go on tour again?

The lights went down, plunging the venue into darkness and pulling Suzanne from her dismal thoughts. The volume of the crowd grew from a low constant murmur to a monstrous roar in an instant. The stage was so dark she could hardly see past the tip of her nose, but she kept her gaze planted on the top right of the stage where Alicia had indicated Garrett would begin.

She jumped when several hard, fast beats of the drum sounded over the roar of the crowd and glanced to the center of the platform. Reese had somehow walked onto the stage without her noticing and was settled behind his drum set, a red spotlight trained on him. He wore a pair of dark colored shorts and an intensely concentrated expression. His feet, as well as his chest, were bare.

On cue, two blue spotlights kicked on at either end of the stage, illuminating Garrett on the right and Trey on the left. Guitar and bass joined with the beat of the drums and the spotlights faded, returned, changed and danced in time with the music.

After several measures, Garrett began a slow decent down the stairs as he played. He shot Suzanne a sexy smile as he passed her and then stopped where Alicia had said he would, a few feet from the edge of the stage in front of a set of speakers.

The beat of the music picked up and so did Suzanne's heart. The energy level of the air, the adrenaline, the sight of Garrett playing to thousands of screaming fans was absolutely wondrous and, oh yeah, it was definitely one heck of a turn-on. She'd watched the band's DVD, saw Garrett playing his guitar on the screen in live and staged videos. But seeing him on television in no way compared to what she saw now.

The opening instrumental faded into another harder, faster song and Suzanne whipped her head around as Derek's voice cut through the atmosphere. She heard a quiet breathless, "Oh, yeah" from Alicia

and had to smile. He too began at the top of the platform in the center behind Reese and slowly took one of the smaller arched staircases to the center of the stage before the crowd.

Suzanne's own energy built as she watched the four men play song after song, performing to the crowd of fans who had come to see them. She watched Derek dance across the stage and couldn't help but admire the leather-clad view when he shook his hips for the ladies in the crowd.

"God, I love it when he does that," Alicia said once and Suzanne had to laugh. "He has driven me crazy with movements like that for years, but never in my wildest dreams did I think I would ever experience them the way I can now."

Garrett didn't shake his hips as he played, but the view of him jumping, head banging and strutting about the stage in time with the music he played was far more enticing to Suzanne. In the time she'd known him she realized she'd never seen him look so content, so at home as he did now on stage. He was doing what he loved most. Every look, every movement, every smile depicted exactly that.

He'd told her that performing for thousands of screaming fans was part of the job, but she could see now to him it was far more than that. It was his first love and she knew without a doubt he would never allow anything to take that love from him.

* * * *

It was nearly four in the morning before they returned to Garrett's house. Suzanne was completely wiped from the night's events, but she knew her reeling mind would never let her rest. In the few short hours of the concert and the time thereafter, she'd learned so much and realized far more than she wanted to. She'd wondered exactly how to define their relationship, what was happening between them. There was no doubt in her mind how to classify it now.

They were in the middle of a fling. It was as simple as that. There would never be anything more between her and Garrett than a casual sexual affair. She knew that now. Any hopes she'd secretly harbored for a lasting love with this man had been doused tonight.

The realization started to come to her as she watched him perform during the concert. But it hit her like a brick after the show when he spent over two hours interacting with the fans outside the venue. It was the women that did it, actually, though she hated to admit it even to herself. The handful of attractive females that surrounded him with all their unspoken offers of hot sex and desire in their eyes made her see her relationship with him for exactly what it was...an affair.

Garrett Henry was a heartthrob, an idol, a man that women fantasized having in their bed. He was famous. A man in the prime of his life doing what he loved most. Settling down, committing his life to one woman, starting a family was not in the cards for him and probably never would be. But even if it was somewhere down the road in his high profiled life, it wouldn't be with a woman like her.

They barely made it into the house when Garrett hooked an arm around her waist, pulling her hard against him. He gazed down at her for only a moment before capturing her mouth with his. Like the rest of him, his kiss was hard, hungry, demanding and instantly wiped all other thoughts from her mind. His hand slid down to cup her bottom through the leather pants and he groaned into her mouth.

His left hand joined his right on her ass as he tilted his head to change the angle of the kiss. His tongue swept deeper into her mouth, licking her, tasting her very soul. God, he had an amazing tongue!

The suction he had on her mouth continued as he began to strip her of her clothes, stopping only once to pull her shirt over her head before devouring her again. Her hands delved in his hair as he bent further to suck on one beaded nipple. Her head rolled back, her eyes closing, reveling in the feel of him nibbling, sucking, exploring as if it were the last breast he would ever feel or taste.

He'd unfastened her pants, pulling them down to her knees. She wanted to spread her legs, wrap them around him, but couldn't for the binding of the unyielding leather. The restriction electrified her. His animal-like need drove her wild. He'd never been so forceful with her before, so wild. Flames erupted, licking the inner walls of her channel, drawing on her juices and soaking her folds. Her pussy throbbed, a deep and agonizing ache for his touch.

His name spilled from her lips on a whisper, alerting him to her growing need. His hand moved between her legs, his thick-callused finger instantly finding her swollen clit. She gasped loudly as he began to rub, softly at first, then faster and harder. Her hands fisted tightly in his hair, tugging in her sexually frustrated need to have him inside her.

His finger traveled between her moist lips until it found the opening of her vagina and plunged inside. He fucked her with that finger, fast and deep, while he stroked her clit with his thumb. Her legs shook, her body arched into him as the need for release built inside her. He buried his face in the crook of her neck and she heard his breathing, as quick and ragged as her own.

"Come for me, Suzanne," he whispered. "I want to feel your pussy contract around my finger. I want to feel you tremor. Fill my hand with your juices."

She couldn't take it. The provocative words, the low, sexy tone of his voice, the feel of his hand between her legs and the wonderful things it was doing there was too much. She exploded. Her entire body melted in his arms as the orgasm rocked her.

She didn't wait for her heartbeat to return to normal, didn't wait for her breathing to slow. She wanted to feel it again. The orgasms he gave her were more addictive than any drug and she needed another hit now. Quickly, she unfastened his pants, pulling them along with his briefs until they fell around his ankles. When his stiff cock sprang free, she caught it in the palm of her hand and immediately began to stroke. He handed her a condom and she quickly removed it from the

package, sheathing his long, thick cock. She'd become an expert at the act now and was proud of herself for no longer requiring his assistance.

Wordlessly, he caught her waist and turned her around in his arms. He walked her to the coffee table—not an easy feat with both their pants around their ankles—and slowly drew her down to her knees. She was completely under his control, following his lead. He cupped her breasts in his hands and tugged, pulling her upper body until she was leaning over the table.

The feel of the cold hard wood as her taut nipples brushed against it was incredibly erotic. Behind her, his large hands skimmed down her back to her buttocks and lifted her lower body, positioning her where he wanted her. He spread her pussy lips open with his hands and then thrust inside her without warning.

Suzanne cried out loudly as his dick entered her deeper than ever before. Her upper body lay flat on the table, the glossy finish of the wood caressing her breasts as her body pushed forward, then slid back in time with his fast, even thrusts. Her hands gripped the edge of the table as he pounded into her. There were no slow measured strokes this time, no teasing, no pausing. He took her hard, fast, deep, with all the carnal animal power of a man. When he buried his dick as deeply inside her as possible and grunted his release, she went with him.

Chapter Eleven

“Well, well, well, my long lost temporary roommate has finally returned,” Tony chided as Suzanne walked into his apartment.

Suzanne felt a pang of guilt as she set her purse on the island countertop separating the kitchen from the dining room. She turned to her friend and hoped he could see the sincerity in the apology she was about to give. This man had been nice enough to open his home to her, to invite her to stay with him while she was in Philadelphia. She’d stayed one night and then never returned. She’d taken advantage of his friendship without as much as the slightest regret. She’d used him and, oh man, she felt so bad about that now.

“I’m really sorry, Tony,” she said and meant it from the bottom of her aching heart. “I had no intentions of throwing your hospitality in your face.”

“Girl, bite your tongue! You have done nothing of the sort.” He walked to her, drawing her into a tight embrace. “If I’d had the chance to shack up with a stunning man like Garrett Henry the last couple of weeks, you can bet your sweet rump I would have done the same.”

Yeah, he would have, she realized and felt marginally better. Tony was so wonderful. She was truly lucky to have a friend like him.

Tony released her, stepped back and plated his hands on his hips. “What I want to know is why you’re here now instead of in the man’s bed.”

“It’s three in the afternoon, Tony.” She laughed.

“And who put a specific time schedule on sex?” He cocked one brow, tilted his head, and glared at her.

Suzanne rolled her eyes. "And Garrett says *I've* turned into a sex monster," she muttered. "No one put sex on a time schedule but, as unfortunate as it might be, we can't spend every moment in bed. He's at a meeting with the band and their manager or someone."

"As long as you aren't giving up precious time with him and wasting it here with me, I can let it slide."

"It wouldn't be a waste of time even if that were the case. But no, he isn't home." She stepped away from Tony, shoved her hands in the pockets of the long olive skirt she wore and moved to an easel sitting before the sliding glass door in the living room.

The painting on the canvas was a work in progress, an underwater scene of deep-sea plants, algae and fish. The detail was still awaiting attention but the base of the scene, the complete sketch, was there.

"This is beautiful," she complimented.

"Thanks." He moved behind her. "As you can see, I still have a lot to do, but it's coming along." A brief silence fell between them and then he spoke again. "Something is on your mind. Want to tell me what it is?"

"I came by to pick up the rest of my things," she said, slowly turning to face him. "And to say goodbye."

"If you were simply moving the rest of your stuff to Garrett's place, you wouldn't need to say goodbye."

"I'm going back to Florida."

"So soon?"

"I've already stayed longer than I had first intended. But I have to get back. Antonio needs me at the gallery and my homesickness is getting to be a bit much to handle. You know me. I'm a home girl. You can't get me away for too long."

"Girl, don't give me that shit. This is Tony you're talking to. I'm not buying it."

Suzanne turned away and blinked back the tears that threatened to spill. "It's time to go back," she said, and damn it, her voice cracked.

“Did Garrett tell you that?” Tony demanded, anger lacing the question. “Because if he did—”

“No, no,” she said quickly. If anything, he hadn’t seemed to want her to go. Or had that simply been her imagination, hearing what she wanted to hear rather than what was really there? Or maybe it had been an act on his part to salvage her dignity. She couldn’t be sure.

She told Garrett of her plans to leave yesterday morning while they lay tangled together after making love in the morning light. At last, she’d found a morning in which she awoke and carried out her plan of waking him erotically without being interrupted by something or someone. And she’d ruined it, at least in her own mind, by telling him she had to leave.

He hadn’t said much. In truth, she hadn’t expected him to. He’d been anticipating it, though. He told her he’d known she would have to return home eventually.

That was it. There had been no talk about their relationship, no mention of continuing what was happening between them once she was gone. Instead, he’d made love to her again and they’d spoken no more of it.

“It’s my decision,” she told Tony now. “I’m flying out at ten tomorrow morning.”

“I hope you know what you’re doing,” he said but the tone of his voice told her he believed she was making a huge mistake.

Maybe she was. She didn’t think so. While leaving didn’t feel good, it felt right. No, not right. Necessary. Yes, it felt necessary. If it didn’t, if she suspected even in the smallest of ways that going would be wrong, she would think twice, possibly even stay.

For the first time in her life, returning to Florida held all the appeal of a garbage can. Because St. Petersburg didn’t have a Garrett Henry living in it. He’d told her once she was out of his league, but he was out of her reach. The more she realized that, the more she knew she had to get away before she was eternally crushed. Tomorrow she

would be leaving him and everything they'd shared behind with her heart.

* * * *

Garrett had always hated goodbyes and, as he held Suzanne outside the airport terminal, he knew why. How did a man say goodbye to a woman who had touched his life so deeply in such a short time?

The final boarding call for Flight 221 sounded over the intercom and his arms tightened around her. He buried his nose in the top of her head, closing his eyes as he breathed in the mango scent of her golden hair.

"I have to go," he heard her say and knew he had to let her.

He lifted his head and leaned back slightly. Catching her chin with one finger, he raised her face and captured her lips for one last kiss. As his tongue swept into her mouth, he savored the sweet taste of her, the soft, silky feel of her. He wanted to pick her up and carry her back to his house, back to his bed, but he knew he couldn't. He knew better than anyone what it was like to have to leave a place where you so wanted to stay because of responsibilities. That *was* why she was leaving him now. Wasn't it?

He'd known this day would come, the day when she would leave. What he hadn't known was how hard it would be. Emotions he couldn't identify were rushing through him, ripping at his soul, and it freaking hurt. Hell and damnation nothing had ever hurt like this!

This was only a temporary goodbye. He tried to tell himself that. They weren't saying goodbye forever. He would see her again. Hold her again.

Wouldn't he? As he reluctantly broke the kiss and gazed into her tear-glazed eyes, he suddenly wasn't so sure.

"I'll call you." He forced the words around the enormous lump that had formed in this throat. He felt like crying. God, he never cried!

* * * *

Will you really call? Suzanne wanted to ask but she couldn't, she wouldn't. The way he'd just kissed her as if he'd been trying to possess her very soul, the way he held her so tightly as if he never wanted to let her go had her almost believing him.

Okay, so yeah, he probably would call once or twice. He said he would and he was the type of man to keep his word. But nothing would come of it. After two calls, three at the most, she wouldn't hear from him again. Their fling was coming to an end now. If he wanted more from her, he wouldn't be letting her go.

Ask me to stay, her mind screamed at him. *Tell me you want me to stay and I will. Tell me you love me and I'll stay with you forever.*

But he didn't, and she knew he wouldn't. He cared for her, yes, but he wasn't in love with her. And as for forever, well, she'd known going into this relationship that forever wasn't possible. That was why she was leaving now, before she allowed her heart to be crushed beyond repair.

She pushed up on her tiptoes, planted one last quick kiss on his tender lips and stepped back. "Goodbye, Garrett," she whispered and then turned and walked briskly away. Once she was on the plane, she buried her face in her hands and silently wept.

* * * *

"You fuck nut! How in the hell could you miss that shot?" Reese yelled at the television. He threw himself back on the plush brown sofa and took a long pull from his beer. "You guys better pull it together or this year's season is going to be shit."

Garrett shook his head and chuckled at his friend. The man was a hockey freak. His house was an average size two bedroom with a single car garage he'd converted to a music room. Though much of

the floor space was occupied by some piece of furniture, the décor was sparse. But what decorations he had were either band related—plaques from their CDs going platinum and other awards the band had received—or hockey memorabilia.

“I’m surprised you’re not at the game.” Garrett crossed his ankle over the opposite knee as he regarded his friend.

“I didn’t feel like traveling.” Reese shrugged, guzzling down the remainder of his beer. “I get enough of that when we’re on tour. The Flames are playing in Dallas this week. Next game is against the New York Islanders here in Philadelphia. I have tickets for the home games.”

“Do you think they’ll make the playoffs this year?” Derek asked as he and Alicia entered the living room. The couple had been on Reese’s computer in the spare room answering posts on the band’s message board.

Reese laughed but there was no humor in it. “Not if they keep playing the way they are today. Forbes is letting his personal life interfere with his game.”

Reese had met Brock Forbes, the center for the Philadelphia Flames, during last year’s hockey season. Brock’s love for heavy metal and Reese’s love for hockey had quickly made the men friends.

“How is his father doing?” Garrett remembered Reese telling him the hockey player’s father had recently been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease.

“Not good, from what I understand. Brock has a sister. I haven’t met her yet but he told me she’s moved back home to care for their father. Apparently, he has to have round the clock supervision and they decided they would rather it be one of them than to hire an outsider.” Reese shrugged. “Brock can’t be with him all of the time without leaving the team but apparently it wasn’t too difficult for his sister to relocate. She’s some kind of freelance photographer or something.” The game on the television went to a commercial break

and he turned his attention to Derek. “Anything happening on the board?”

“The usual,” Derek shrugged as he and Alicia sat beside Reese on the sofa. “A lot of repetitive questions, a few people actually put some thought into and loads of questions wanting to know who the blonde was with Garrett at the benefit concert.”

Garrett squirmed under Derek’s penetrating gaze and looked away. He’d seen the questions when he’d logged onto the board a couple of days ago. He’d thought spending some time interacting with the fans would get his mind off of Suzanne for a while. He’d been wrong.

Derek and Reese hadn’t asked him about Suzanne and he knew they wouldn’t. Though the three of them were as tight as blood brothers, they rarely discussed their personal lives. But they knew what was going on with him. Just as he and Reese had known why Derek was so out-of-sorts a few months back when he and Alicia’s relationship had been on rocky ground.

“Wayne got the announcement posted last night,” Derek continued. Wayne was the Webmaster they paid to keep the band’s website updated with the latest Façade news. “Hopefully, we’ll start getting bombarded with packages in the next few days.”

In their last meeting with management, the three of them decided to put out a call for audition tapes and promo packages in search for the band’s new bass player. Their next step if that didn’t work would be to hold open auditions. It would be a time-consuming process but choosing a new bass player wasn’t something they could take lightly. Whoever they selected would have to fit, in appearance and personality as well as talent. The personality was a definite must. The four of them would spend months at a time in severely close quarters. If personalities clashed, the band would no doubt crash in the blink of an eye.

Garrett heard Derek speaking but found it hard to concentrate on his actual words. He'd been fine until Suzanne's name had been mentioned. Now he could think of nothing else.

Though Derek and Reese would stay out of his personal business, Alicia had no qualms about butting in, so when she spoke, he wasn't the least bit surprised.

"Have you talked to her?"

Garrett shook his head. He hadn't talked with Suzanne since that morning in the airport nearly three weeks ago and he didn't want to talk about it now.

"Have you tried?" Alicia asked gently.

She wasn't going to let it go. He knew she only wanted to help. Alicia only had eyes for Derek, but there was a separate side to her, the Façade fan and friend side that had her striving to be sure each of the band members was as happy as she and Derek.

"I've called her several times," he confessed on a sigh. "She's never at home. Part of me thinks she's avoiding my calls, but for the life of me I can't figure out why."

"You're in love with her." Hearing the abrupt, bluntly spoken words by a voice other than his own was startling enough. Hearing them come from Derek's mouth totally threw him for a loop.

"Unlike Ms. Nosy here..." Derek shot Alicia a glance. "I'm not trying to pry."

"Watch it, buster. I'll make you pay for that later." Alicia playfully slapped Derek's leg. Derek grinned mischievously. "Promises, promises," he said to her and then returned his attention to Garrett. Turning serious once again, he said, "I say that because I can see the torment you're going through. I've been there, man. And it wasn't all that long ago."

"It's different with Suzanne and I than it was with you and Alicia," Garrett said quietly. "You were angry with one another and you knew why. Suzanne wasn't angry with me when she left or if she

was, I damned sure didn't know it. Hell, man, I don't know what the fuck is going on!"

Garrett leaped up from the recliner, shoved his hands in the pockets of his black chinos and began to pace. He couldn't believe he was admitting any of this aloud and yet he couldn't stop.

"All I know is a month and a half ago, I was happy and content. Then I met Suzanne Cassidy, and the sweet, innocent-as-a-schoolteacher, drop-dead blonde turned my life upside down. I can't eat, I can't sleep and, damn it, I can't even walk around the house it took me so long to build without seeing her everywhere I look."

"Yep, you're in love," Alicia declared and grinned from ear to ear.

"I guess I am," Garrett admitted on an exasperated sigh. He stopped pacing and nailed Alicia with a hard intense glare. "The question is, what do I do about it when the woman I love won't even talk to me?"

* * * *

Suzanne fell down onto her bed and then silently chastised herself for the sudden movement. Her stomach churned, her throat burned and if she vomited any more she was certain she would lose something vital, as there was no more food or even liquid inside her to come up. Yesterday hadn't been so bad. Neither had the day before, or the one before that. She'd felt nauseated but had been able to fight it off. This morning, however, she'd lost the war before she even begun to fight.

She was pregnant. Though she'd yet to go for a test, she knew she was. She didn't know how. Okay, so she did know how. But they'd always used protection. Still, she'd missed her period weeks ago and all the other warning signs were there. Problem was, she didn't have the foggiest clue what to do about it.

The baby was Garrett's, of course. No mystery there. The mystery was how she was going to handle the situation. Avoidance wasn't the

answer. Though that was exactly what she'd been doing. So what was the answer? Oh, where was Dear Abby when you needed her?

She groaned and rolled on her side as another bout of nausea assailed her. She swallowed hard and repeatedly, breathing in rapid deep breaths until the sickening feeling eased. At least she'd been able to fight that one, she mused.

She closed her eyes and an instant snapshot of Garrett formed in the darkness behind her lids. It had been almost a month since she'd left Philadelphia, since she'd left Garrett, since she'd left her heart. Four weeks of torture, heartache and sickness in more ways than one.

He'd called as he said he would. She hadn't been surprised. Nor had she been surprised when his calls stopped last week. Though he'd called nearly every day for almost three weeks, she hadn't talked to him once. She'd been at the gallery the first time he phoned, at the club having lunch with her mother and her society friends the second time, and out with her father the third.

She'd been devastated when she'd missed those first three calls but hadn't allowed herself to wait around for the next one. It had probably been for the best, that she hadn't been there to accept his calls. She longed to hear his voice more than she wanted to take her next breath. But three calls wouldn't change the facts. She'd fallen in love with a man who couldn't offer her forever and it was time to accept that fact and let go.

That was all before the morning sickness began. Then her entire world began to rock to a different beat. She'd missed each of Garrett's calls thereafter by choice. When most of them came, she'd been right here in this room.

She knew she couldn't avoid him forever. She was carrying the man's child after all. No way could she hide the truth. Even if she tried, the way word spread around the small town of St. Petersburg, Alicia would no doubt find out eventually. She'd hear that Suzanne was pregnant, put two and two together and know in an instant Garrett was the father.

That fact aside, would she really hide the baby from Garrett if she could? She'd asked herself that question more times than she cared to admit. Could she live with herself, with their baby, knowing she hadn't told him that he'd fathered a child? Would he even want to know?

Her mind rewound to that day at his house when his parents and nephews had shown up unexpectedly. She'd watched him with his nephews that day and he'd been wonderful, like a father. His mother had told her he loved children. But had that simply been words coming from a mother who wanted more grandchildren?

Her mind rewound further to the first time they'd made love and she heard his words all over again. *They have the tendency to leak, burst. There's too big a risk of getting pregnant.*

He'd been so worried about getting her pregnant. Each and every time they'd made love he'd used a condom and pulled out of her almost immediately after they both climaxed. Never once had he ever said anything that led her to believe he wanted children. That he wanted to settle down and start a family. Using a condom had been almost like a religious act for him and she suspected that was because, despite what his mother had said about his love for children, he didn't want any of his own.

Condoms are nowhere near foolproof, he'd said on that glorious day.

"You have no idea how right you were," she muttered aloud as a tear slid down her face.

"Suzanne," her mother's voice called through the closed door.

Suzanne bolted upright in the bed and quickly swiped away the tears. The door to her room slowly opened and her mother stepped inside.

Barbara Cassidy was a woman in her mid-sixties but she didn't look a day over forty. She was slim, petite and blonde just like Suzanne, and always dressed to the nines. She wore a bright smile as

she stepped into the room but the smile faded as her gaze landed on her daughter.

“Oh, honey.” Barbara sighed as she quickly made her way to her daughter. She sat down on the bed next to Suzanne and drew her into a loving embrace. “I wish you would tell me what’s going on with you.”

Suzanne hugged her mother tightly, wanting to tell her everything, needing to tell her about Garrett, about the baby she suspected was growing inside her, but she simply couldn’t find the strength.

“Antonio called. He needs you at the gallery. He didn’t say what for.”

“Today? But it’s Sunday. The gallery is closed.”

“I’m just the messenger, sweetheart.” Her mother shrugged. “But if you aren’t feeling well, you should give him a call.”

“I’ll go.” She was feeling better. That is, at least the nausea had gone away for now. Getting out of the house would help to clear her mind, if only for a few hours. Besides, she owed Antonio so much and he rarely asked anything of her.

She rose from the bed and began to straighten the pale pink and lime green sundress she had thrown on that morning. She didn’t look in the mirror, couldn’t bear to see her own reflection. She knew she probably looked a fright, but these days she didn’t care.

“Suzanne,” her mother said, walking to her. She picked up a brush from the dressing table and slowly ran it through Suzanne’s loose tresses. “When you get back from the gallery, you should call that boy,” she said in that motherly tone that left no room for argument. Suzanne hadn’t heard her mother use that tone with her in years. “I believe the two of you have a lot you need to discuss.”

She already knew, Suzanne realized and her heart skipped a beat. Somehow her mother knew everything and she was telling her that it was time to stop hiding and face the music.

Suzanne took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Her mother was right...as always.

Chapter Twelve

“Antonio,” Suzanne called as she walked into the gallery.

The gallery was housed in a much smaller building than that of the Philadelphia Gallery of Modern Arts but the quality of the works displayed were of equally high standards and beauty. Unlike the PGMA, the St. Petersburg gallery didn’t specialize in only modern art. Sketches and period paintings were scattered about the modern art canvases such as those Suzanne had created, and sculptures and statues were intricately placed throughout the show room floor.

A dead silence filled the atmosphere. Blocked by tall buildings across the street, little sunlight made it through the double glass doorway. Only the dim lights that highlighted a few displays broke the darkness. Why were there no lights on? Where was Antonio?

“Antonio,” she called again a bit louder this time. “It’s Suzanne. Are you here?”

She walked slowly through the darkness, scanning for any sign of movement, listening for the slightest sound. And then she saw it, the silhouette of a figure just outside the light that shone down over a Greek Gothic bronzed statue.

“Antonio?” she said softly, her breath quickening. “Is that you?”

Several heartbeats passed before the figure stepped into the light. “Garrett!”

“Hello, Suzanne.”

“What are you—? How did you—? Where is Antonio?” she stammered in utter shock. Her pulse pounded through her veins so hard and fast she feared she would have a heart attack. God, he looked beautiful!

Her eyes had adjusted and she could now see him perfectly in the dim light. He wore the same camouflage muscle shirt and khaki slacks he'd been wearing the night they met. He stood in a military pose with his hands clasped together in front of him and his feet slightly apart. She saw the muscles in his arms jump and wondered if it was because he was longing to hold her as badly as her body wanted to be held.

She wanted to run to him but stood her ground. How did he get inside the gallery? Why was he here?

"Antonio let me in." His voice was low, husky and brimming with emotion. "He said you would know how to lock up when we got ready to leave."

"But why?" Try as she might, she couldn't make any sense out of what was going on. Antonio didn't know Garrett. He didn't even know *she* knew Garrett. She'd never mentioned him to the gallery owner. Why would Antonio let a strange man into his gallery and leave him alone?

"I had some help from Alicia and Diana," Garrett explained. "We thought this would be one way you couldn't avoid me. I've called nearly every day, Suzanne, but you never took my calls and you never returned them, either. I figured if I showed up at your house, you would just have your mother make up some excuse for you as to why you couldn't see me."

He closed the distance between them in three long strides and, in one swift movement, yanked her hard against him. The instant their bodies touched, her insides went wild. Nerve endings exploded, butterflies kicked up in the pit of her stomach, her heart hammered, her nipples tightened and a wetness pooled at her center.

"Why have you been avoiding me, Suzanne?" He sounded so hurt, so sad.

Suzanne couldn't find the ability to speak around the lump that formed in her throat, through the desire and need surging through her

veins. There was so much to say, so much to tell him and yet she had no idea where to start.

“I—I’m sorry,” she finally managed.

“Sweetheart, I don’t want apologies.” He cupped her face in his palm, his thumb grazing lightly over her cheek. “I want answers, explanations. When you left Philadelphia, I told you I would call you. I expected...No, I had hoped that even though we live hundreds of miles apart, we could find a way to be together.”

“You did?” He wanted to continue their relationship? Oh, my God!

“What did you think, Suzanne? That I was just using you for a screw while you were in town? That once you left that would be the end of it, of us?”

She winced at the harshness that had come into his voice. “Not exactly, but I—I didn’t know what to think,” she finally confessed on a sigh. “I had no idea what you wanted or what you expected but I couldn’t see how anything beyond my time in Philadelphia could work for us. I didn’t see how we could have a chance. I still don’t.”

“Derek and Alicia are doing it,” he pointed out. “I thought we could take lessons from them.”

“But we aren’t Derek and Alicia. The miles between St. Petersburg and Philadelphia aren’t the only miles between you and me.”

“Are you referring to my career?”

“That’s another part of it.” She nodded. God, everything about them made them worlds apart. Couldn’t he see that?

“I’m afraid you’re going to have to spell it out for me, Suzanne, because all I can see is how bad I want you in my life and how much I love you.”

Suzanne’s breath lodged in her throat and she grew even weaker in the knees. Had he really just told her he loved her? No, she was hearing what she wanted to hear, not what he was truly saying. Wasn’t she?

“You’re in love with me?”

“Yes, I’m in love with you.” He brushed away a tear that trickled down her cheek. “I’m sorry it took your leaving before I was ready to admit that to myself, to you. But what I’m feeling for you, it’s definitely love, Suzanne. I love you more than I’ve ever loved anyone. I’ve been going crazy without you.”

“Oh, Garrett,” she whispered and rested her forehead on his chest as more tears started to flow. He was finally telling her everything she wanted to hear, everything she *needed* to hear, but did it really solve anything?

She stepped away from him, needing to break their physical connection. She couldn’t think as long as he was touching her. Her body screamed in protest but she ignored it. She swiped her fingers under her eyes to wipe away the tears.

“I’m in love with you, too.” Her voice trembled and she took a deep breath, swallowed. “But that doesn’t change the facts. You and I are from two different worlds and we want different things out of life. There could never be more between us than what there has been.”

She turned away from him as she continued. “You told me that first night you felt I deserved more than you could give me. How has any of that changed?”

“I was hoping we could reach some sort of compromise.”

“Your guitar is your life, Garrett. You’ve said that yourself. I’ve seen you play. The band is your life, too. You could never be happy without both of them.”

“Are you saying I can’t have the band if I want you?” he asked, the question clipped and full of rising anger.

“I’m saying that I want more than I believe you can offer me,” she explained, moving to another statue, this one a sculpture of a couple entwined with one another, a few feet away. “I *need* more. You and I want different things out of life, and I’m not sure there are any compromises we could make to fix that. Derek and Alicia are making it work, yes, and maybe the arrangement they have is right for them.

But I can't live day to day wondering when our relationship is going to end."

"I would never expect you to live that way." He moved up behind her, gently grabbed her upper arm and spun her to face him. "And I think you're wrong. I think you have no idea what I want but I believe I know exactly what you want me to offer."

When she started to shake her head, he hooked a finger under her chin and stopped her. "Let me prove to you I'm right." He leaned down to brush his lips over hers.

Red-hot heat, instantaneous and debilitating, shot through her from her lips straight to her groin.

"Let me prove to you I know what you want." He trailed the tip of his tongue across her chin and down her neck. "Let me prove to you I'm the man to give it to you," he whispered against her skin.

"Garrett," she breathed, her control slipping. Her need to be in his arms, to feel him inside her again grew to mountainous proportions. Making love with him again would solve nothing, she knew, but oh how she longed to do it anyway.

"Come here, sweetheart." He tugged her back to the lighted statue. "I want you where I can see you."

Once in front of the statue, he ran his hands flat down her body as he lowered himself to one knee. She waited, all sense of reasoning and resistance gone, for him to lift her dress and touch her throbbing wetness. Instead, he sat back on his heel, took her left hand and looked at her. In his right hand he held up a black velvet box opened to reveal a glistening heart-shaped diamond in a white gold setting.

She stared down at him, her gaze dancing from the diamond to his eyes and back to the diamond again. Her mouth was suddenly so dry she couldn't swallow, let alone speak.

"I love you, Suzanne Cassidy," Garrett said softly. Conviction, honesty and emotion rang with each word. "I want to spend my life with you. I want to have a family with you." He paused, visibly

gulped and she saw the glimmer of tears in his eyes. “Will you marry me?”

She collapsed. Her trembling legs could no longer hold her upright. Her knees buckled as she sank to the floor in front of him.

“Baby, are you all right?”

“I don’t know.” She laughed, albeit shakily. “Wow! Garrett, I—”

“Before you give me your answer, there’s more,” he said quickly. “You may want time to think about your decision, and I’ll understand if you do. This is when the compromises come to play. I want to give you the world, Suzanne. Everything you’ve ever wanted and more. I want a family with you. And if I have to give up Façade to have that, then I...I will. But I hope you won’t make me give up my own dreams and goals to have you. It sounds selfish and I don’t give a rat’s ass. I want it all and I don’t see any reason why I can’t have it.”

Suzanne was silent as she let his words, everything he’d said in the last few minutes sink in. He loved her, he wanted to marry her, have children with her, and he was willing to give up the band if she insisted. But what he really wanted was to have the band, too.

She’d known she could never ask him to give that up. No way could she do that to him. He would resent her for the rest of their lives. That single act would eventually tear them apart. But could she handle a life married to a rock star?

“I’ve wanted a family of my own for most of my life,” he continued. “But until I met you, I’d never found the woman I wanted to share that with. I know I’m asking a lot from you. I’m asking you to forego the typical marriage because being married to me would certainly not be typical.”

“You would give up the band for me?” she whispered, still unable to believe he loved her enough to offer such a thing.

He sighed. “I would. Yes, but I can’t honestly tell you that I’d be happy doing it. I’m being as truthful with you as I can, Suzanne. I can’t happily do what Trey has done. As much as I love you, I love Façade, too. And I can’t promise that someday down the road, I

would change my mind and leave the band of my own accord. That's why I'm asking for this compromise. What I *can* promise is to love you and any children you give me until my dying breath. I can promise to do anything and everything within my power to always keep you happy. I can promise you complete fidelity, because you are the only woman in the world for me."

He brought her hand to his lips and kissed it. "Either way, I want you in my life, Suzanne. I can't live without you. But can we work together so that we can both keep our professional dreams and goals alive?"

Tears gushed from her eyes. Her mind reeled. He did know what she wanted, *everything* she wanted. He was offering her all her life's dreams. In return, he only asked to keep his place in Façade.

To some it would sound like a lot. Hell, twenty minutes ago it would've sounded like a lot to her. And in truth, it was. By staying with Façade he would be gone much of the time, jumping from city to city across the country while she'd be home with the kids. It would be difficult and trying, a long distance marriage most of the time. Yet she'd have her life, her art, the children they made together and the man she wanted. He would have her, the family she now knew he wanted and he would have Façade.

There would be obstacles, she knew, and so much time apart wouldn't be easy on either of them. But she loved this beautiful man sitting before her. She could no longer imagine living her life without this man who had just poured out his heart and soul to her. Better, *he* loved *her*. Garrett Henry loved her, Suzanne Cassidy. He'd asked her to marry him. Not out of duty because she was carrying his child. He didn't even know about the baby yet. He'd asked her to marry him because he loved her.

"Yes," she said on a choked cry.

"Yes?" He made it a question as if he weren't quite sure exactly what she was saying yes to.

“Yes,” she repeated. “To everything. Yes, I want you to stay with Façade. Yes, I too will do whatever it takes to make our marriage work. Yes, I will marry you.”

* * * *

Garrett closed his eyes, almost afraid to believe she was accepting his proposal. Then he was holding her, kissing her like he’d never kissed her or any woman before. The last month had been a living hell for him and it had all been because this woman walked out of his life.

Now, not only was she back, but she’d agreed to marry him, and he was keeping his place as the guitarist of Façade, too. He had it all. Damn, how did a man get so lucky?

“Can I have my ring now?” She drew away from him to grab the box from his hand.

He smiled and gently pulled the ring from the box. “This ring,” he said as he slid it onto her finger, “has been in my family for five generations.” He watched her eyes as he spoke and saw the gleam of appreciation and happiness that filled their loving depths.

“Garrett, it’s breathtaking.”

“So are you,” he whispered and drew her close again. “I love you, Suzanne. I don’t think I’ll ever tire of saying that to you.”

“You better not,” she giggled and looked up at him. “We have many years ahead of us, and I expect to hear you say that at least twice a day, every day. Do you think you can handle that?”

“Twice a day and more.” He tucked her head under his chin as she buried her face in his chest.

For a long time they sat cuddled together on the floor of the gallery. It felt as though hours passed before Suzanne lifted her head to look at him again.

“There’s, uh, something I need to tell you. Something you need to know. Something I should’ve already told you.”

The uncertain tone of her voice was back and it scared him. Surely she wasn't having second thoughts already. Had he finally gotten all he ever wanted, only to lose it yet again in the blink of an eye?

"The family you said you wanted, the children, how soon did you have in mind to get started?"

Relief washed over him but it wasn't complete. She wasn't having second thoughts. That was good. But it sounded as though she wanted to wait to start a family. That wasn't good.

He shrugged. "I suppose our wedding night would be the most appropriate. Though you wouldn't get any arguments from me if you wanted to start sooner."

"How much sooner?" She didn't meet his gaze.

"Baby, we can start right now if you like."

She looked up at him then and smiled. His heart melted. "How about a month and a half ago, give or take a week or two?"

Garrett stared down at her and fought for comprehension. She'd said a month and a half ago? Give or take a week or two? That was almost as long as they'd known each other.

Realization and understanding struck like a physical blow and air rushed from his lungs. "Suzanne, are you telling me..."

"I'm pregnant." She nodded. "Well, I'm almost certain I'm pregnant," she added quickly. "I haven't seen a doctor or taken a test, but I've had morning sickness for the last couple of weeks and I missed my last period."

Garrett was rendered utterly speechless. His eyes burned as tears rose to blur his vision. Pregnant. She was already pregnant. He was going to be a father. Five minutes ago he'd thought he had it all. Now he knew without a doubt he truly did.

"I guess you were right when you said condoms were nowhere near foolproof," she said on a nervous laugh.

Garrett pulled her into his lap and splayed his hand over her flat belly. Soon it would become rounded from the life growing inside

her. A life the two of them had made. Soon he would be able to feel that life move and kick about. He couldn't wait for that day to come.

"In this case, I'm glad," he said, tightening his arm around her waist. "Suzanne, you have just made me the happiest man alive."

She kissed him and he felt her tears transfer to his face, mixing with his own that he allowed to fall as their mouths molded and their tongues danced. But this time, their tears were tears of joy and not sorrow, a joy that they gave to one another.

"Make love to me, Garrett," she whispered against his lips. "I need to feel you inside me."

"Here?" he asked, amused. His once innocent and bashful virgin was now asking him to make love to her in a public place? Sure, they were alone, but there was always the chance Antonio would come back. The idea made making love to her right then and there even more erotic. "Is the door locked?"

Suzanne shook her head. "I'll go lock it." She tugged at the waistband of his slacks as she stood. "You get rid of these while I'm gone."

He smiled as he stood with her and did as she requested. He watched her slim hips sway as she walked through the dim light to the door. He was ready for her, had been since the moment she walked into the gallery. It had been so long since he'd touched that silky smooth body of hers that he was afraid he wouldn't last ten seconds inside her. But if ten seconds were all he managed, then he would just have to give her ten more...and ten more...and ten more for the rest of their lives. His smile grew wider at the thought.

His eyes never left her as she turned and began walking back to him. She'd pulled a blind down over the doors so no one walking by could see inside. As she walked, her hands moved to the shoulders of the sundress and slowly eased them down her arms. Her gaze locked with his as she continued to peel the dress from her body.

She was halfway to him when she stopped and let the dress fall to the floor. His gaze traveled down her in a slow slide over the pale

pink lacy bra, down her flat stomach to the pale pink bikini panties she wore. His dick hardened painfully at the glorious sight.

She stopped again an arm's length from him, reached behind herself and unfastened the bra. As she removed the lacy garment, her hands fondled her breasts and he thought he might die. Though they'd made love many times, she'd never stripped for him like this and certainly never touched herself, teasing him the way she did now.

The bra fell to the floor and her hands slid caressingly down her front to her panties. He gulped, his eyes transfixed on those panties, waiting for them, too, to hit the floor. Slowly, ever so painfully slowly, she lowered the silk and stepped out of them.

* * * *

The heat Suzanne saw in Garrett's eyes was more intense than any she'd ever seen. It empowered her, gave her confidence, and made her feel sexy. She took the last few steps into his awaiting arms and immediately wrapped her fingers around his incredibly hard, impossibly thick erection. He groaned and she moved her hand slightly in a pressured stroke, wanting to hear that sound again.

"Baby, I can't hold out with you doing that right now," he said through gritted teeth.

"You have to," she whispered. Her voice sounded seductive even to her own ears. She hadn't known she could sound like that. She licked her way over his bare chest, found his nipple and sucked it between her lips as she continued to stroke him.

Did such a thing have the same effect on a man as it did a woman? Did darts of desire shoot through him from his nipple to his groin when she nibbled there the way it did her when he did the same to her breasts? He moaned loudly. She guessed she had her answer.

"You can't lose control until you're inside me," she told him, continuing to stroke, to tease.

"Jesus, I *have* created a monster," he breathed.

While she kissed and stroked him, his hand moved between them to the wetness between her legs. At the first contact of his finger on her swollen clit, she knew her time for teasing him was over.

“No fair,” she gasped as he rubbed the callused tip of his finger in a circular motion over her bud.

“If you can play dirty, so can I.”

They sank to their knees together as their stroking and fondling continued. Gently, he lowered her to lie on the floor, rolling on his side next to her. He grabbed both her hands in one of his, pinning them to the floor above her head. His mouth lowered to her breast and his other hand danced down her body. He lifted her leg, positioned his lower body and then he was inside her.

Suzanne cried out at the first penetration of his hard, swollen cock in her tight, wet channel. The feel of him inside her without the barrier of the condom was exquisite. She’d had no idea what a difference the thin latex had made.

Her raised leg locked around his waist, her heel digging into him, pulling him deeper inside her. He sucked, nibbled and bit on her breast as he pounded deeper and deeper with each thrust. Then his finger returned to her clit and picked up the circular caress he’d abandoned only moments before.

Pleasure shot through her, white and hot. She squirmed uncontrollably, her head thrashing from side to side as she attempted to hold back the orgasm building to mind blowing intensity.

“Don’t hold back, baby,” Garrett panted. “Come for me, sweetheart. Let me know how good it feels.”

She was pinned to the floor, her arms above her head, her legs locked with his and the inability to move combined with his fierce deep thrusts and pressured caresses was too much. She let the orgasm come, crying out so loudly anyone walking by outside could probably hear her. It wasn’t until the convulsions stopped and her breathing began to slow that she realized he had come with her.

He released her hands and her arms immediately encircled him. “Stay inside me for a minute,” she whispered, loving the feel of him growing soft inside her. “There’s no need to pull out anymore.”

He looked at her, his eyes swimming with emotion. “I love you, Suzanne, you and our baby.”

She pulled him to her, hugging him tightly and knew that no matter what they had to do they would make their marriage work. From this day forward they would always be together. Whether he was away on tour or right here in her arms, they would always be together in their hearts.

Chapter Thirteen

Six weeks later, Garrett planted a kiss on his bride's lips that was so long and full of love it had the wedding party and all the guests whooping, hollering and applauding. The uproar would've been ear-splitting had they been inside. Instead, he and Suzanne had decided on an outside wedding in the back yard of her parent's lavish home.

The Cassidy's spared no expense for their only daughter's wedding. From the decorations to the cake to their daughter's dress, everything was top dollar and utterly exquisite. But it was Suzanne that held his undivided attention. He'd never seen her look more beautiful than she did today. She'd forgone tradition and chosen a white gown. After all, though she was no longer a virgin, she had been when they met, and he was the only man she had or would ever be with.

The tiniest part of him felt a bit guilty about that. With her newfound knowledge of the wonders of sex, shouldn't she be allowed to experiment and explore a bit? Be with a few different men before tying herself to one for the rest of her life? He'd broached the subject with her a couple of nights ago and she'd assured him he was the only man she wanted now or would ever want.

The feeling that gave him was indescribable. Maybe, years from now when she was more comfortable with experimentation they could try a threesome, he mused. Then he looked at his new bride in her wedding gown and knew he could never share her with any other.

The gown was a sleeveless satin with lace appliqués accenting the front and back panels. The satin was embellished with lace, Swarovski crystals, pearls and beads. She wore her hair loose, just the

way he liked it, with a V-shaped headdress of pearls and beads and a long veil that stretched down her back. She was a princess, an absolute vision and she was all his.

He and the groomsmen—Derek, Trey and Reese—wore matching black tuxes and boutonnieres that coincided with the bouquets carried by the bridesmaids and bride. Alicia, Diana Thompson and Garrett's sister Kim stood as bridesmaids.

Garrett squeezed his new bride's hands and gazed deeply into her eyes. "I love you, Mrs. Suzanne Henry."

She beamed. "Ooo, say it again."

"I love you, Mrs. Suzanne Henry."

"Say it again."

He laughed. "I take it you like the way that sounds."

"I love the way that sounds." Even in high heels she had to rise to her tiptoes to kiss him.

"Hey, you two, save the rest of that for tonight," Derek said, hanging his arms on both Suzanne and Garrett's shoulders. "You still have stuff to do here."

Garrett and Suzanne stepped apart, albeit reluctantly, and walked hand in hand down the steps of the gazebo in which the ceremony had been held. The guests rose from their chairs as music began to play for their descent down the aisle. As soon as they reached the end, everyone began to mingle.

Suzanne had never dreamed that so much happiness could come to one woman. As she watched her new husband and all the friends and family they had invited, she felt more comfortable and complete than she ever had in her life.

She and Garrett cut the cake and shared the first slice, accepted toast after toast and then moved to the makeshift dance floor for the bride and groom dance. The song was one of Façade's, an unreleased track the band was saving for the next CD. The instant Suzanne heard it she'd fallen in love with it, just as she had the man playing the guitar in the song.

* * * *

Alicia laid her head on Derek's shoulder, losing herself in the moment, in the atmosphere, as they danced. The first song for the bride and groom ended and other couples, including her and Derek, joined the newly married couple. A few feet away, she saw her mother scowling at her and a few feet from her mother stood William Templeton. He'd obviously come to the wedding per her mother's invitation. Hell and damnation, would the woman ever learn?

She lifted her head to look at Derek. Though she hated the constant war that his presence in her life created between her and her mother, she would never throw up the white flag of surrender. The day he'd walked into her life had changed her forever and the love he gave her meant far too much to her to ever toss it away. It took several years—far more than she wanted to admit—but she was finally living her life for herself and not her mother. She could only hope one day her mother would learn to understand.

"It was a beautiful wedding," Alicia said softly.

Derek chuckled. "I think it was a bit more than Garrett had in mind."

"Money," Alicia shrugged. "In cases like this, when you've got it, flaunt it. The Cassidy's would have nothing less for their only daughter's wedding."

"Are you telling me this is what I should expect from our wedding?"

Alicia's heart stopped. Their wedding! It was the first time he'd ever hinted that there would even be a wedding for the two of them. Tears of joy dampened her eyes and she blinked to hold them in. Derek saw them. She knew he had when his expression grew soft but he didn't say anything. Instead, his arms tightened around her and he pulled her closer.

* * * *

Diana sat with Reese at a table at the edge of the dance floor and mentally urged him to ask her to dance. Was there a simple spell she could cast for such a request? she wondered and then laughed to herself. Casting a spell over him was the only way she'd ever get the man on a dance floor.

And that was simply one more difference between the two of them. Reese Torrin had been her fantasy man for years but she'd always known it was purely physical attraction. She'd told Alicia that over and over again. Yet, her best friend seemed determined to fix them up. Oh well, Alicia would see how incredibly incompatible they were for one another eventually.

But the man was becoming a good friend, Diana admitted. In the weeks since Garrett and Suzanne announced their engagement, she'd spent quite a bit of time with Reese. Not necessarily alone with him. They were usually in the company of Derek, Alicia, Garrett and Suzanne. But a friendship was growing between her and Reese, and she was beginning to hold it very dear.

"You don't have to sit here with me, you know," she said to him, drawing his attention from the dance floor. "There are plenty of single women walking around and I bet half of them would jump at the chance for a dance."

Reese chuckled. "Me, on that dance floor? I don't think so."

"You're the only single one left in the band now," Diana reminded.

"For now," Reese said, picking up on her hint. "But not for long. I'll make it a requirement for the new bass player."

Diana laughed. "You would, wouldn't you?" She shook her head. "Are you and Derek worried that Garrett might decide to leave the band, too? I mean, now that he and Suzanne are married and expecting a child."

“No.” Reese looked to the couple cuddled in the center of the dance floor. “The band means too much to Garrett. Besides, he told me they discussed it. He has no intentions of ever leaving. It won’t be easy for them, but they will find a way to make it work.”

* * * *

Suzanne found herself watching the drummer and her old school friend laughing together at a table nearby as she danced with Garrett. Was there something there? Diana and Reese *had* been spending a lot of time together lately. Wouldn’t that be interesting—three members of Façade falling in love with three St. Petersburg women? Her focus shifted to Derek and Alicia. The couple looked as happy together as she and Garrett.

“What are you thinking about, Mrs. Henry?” Garrett’s voice splintered through her thoughts.

“Derek and Alicia aren’t engaged, are they?” she asked, looking up at him.

“Not yet.” He stole a quick glance at the couple.

“I wonder why,” she said more to herself than to Garrett. “They’re obviously so in love. They live together. Why not get married?”

“I’m not completely sure, but if you want my guess, I would say Alicia is waiting for Derek to propose and Derek is scared out of his mind.”

“Derek, scared?” Suzanne shook her head. “Derek doesn’t strike me as the type of man who would be scared of anything.”

“He’s terrified of getting his heart broken. That man has been through a lot of heartbreak. The mere fact that he let Alicia in at all is saying more than you could imagine.”

“Trey looks happy,” she observed. “With his decision and his wife.”

“He is,” Garrett agreed. “He has what he wants.”

“But you, Derek and Reese haven’t found anyone to replace him in the band yet, have you?”

“Not yet.” He sighed. “We didn’t find what we’re looking for in the audition tapes and promo packages that were mailed in.”

“So what’s the next step?”

“We’re setting up a couple of dates to hold open auditions. Maybe hearing the bass players play first hand will help us better find what we’re looking for.”

“I want the three of you to find a new bass player, but I’m secretly glad it’s taking a while,” she admitted.

“It isn’t a secret anymore, silly.” He tapped the tip of her nose. “You just told me.”

“Part of me feels bad for even thinking it, but the longer it takes the longer it will be before you have to tour again.”

“You have the option of traveling with us, remember?”

“You know I hate to travel. Besides, it’s not so much the touring. I just want you to be here when our baby is born.” She was officially two and a half months pregnant, and while she knew she’d have loads of help from both their families when Garrett wasn’t around, he had to be there for the birth.

“Sweetheart, I don’t care if I have to leave in the middle of a show in Europe. When you go into labor, I *will* be there.”

She knew deep down he would. He wouldn’t miss the birth of his first child for the world. She may have to battle with Façade for time with her husband, but she knew without a doubt in the most important times there would be no battle. He would choose to be with her because he loved her and that was all that mattered.

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bestselling author Tonya Ramagos spends much of her time daydreaming about one plot or another. Give her a cup of hazelnut flavored coffee and a keyboard and she is at her happiest. When she isn't writing, thinking about writing, or plotting what to write, she can be found taking on the mother role with her two boys and the husband, too. She enjoys taking long walks on the nature trails near her home in Chattanooga, TN, playing computer games, swinging on the playground, dancing, and curling up with a good book.



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