



ANNY
COOK

Prisoner
OF THE HEART

C a r n a l R e u n i o n s

Prisoner of the Heart

A Carnal Reunions Tale

By Anny Cook

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Prisoner of the Heart

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and occurrences are a product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, places or occurrences, is purely coincidental.

*For my daughter and granddaughters who lived gracefully with the heartbreak
only the family of a prison inmate can comprehend. I am so incredibly proud of
all of you.*

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Chapter One

To: BelkerB@THMed.com

From: SikorskiK@WIndiU.edu

Hello to all of Gracie's Girls, class of 1999. Once again, thanks to all of you for the flowers and phone calls after my aunt Gracie's passing last winter. You all meant so much to her, and to me.

As I'm sure you all know, our tenth college reunion is coming up this fall. Since I now have Gracie's big rambling house all to myself, I'd like to extend an invitation. If any of you are coming back for the reunion, you're more than welcome to stay here, in your old rooms. Gracie quit taking in college students several years back, so there's no one here but me, and I'd love to have some company while I'm getting the house ready to put on the market. So what do you say? One last time as roommates? It would be great to see all of you again.

Hugs,

Karen

* * * *

With a wheeze and clank, the car died just as Becky parked at the curb in front of the familiar Victorian house. A cloud of steam billowed from under the hood with a hiss as she pounded on the steering wheel and muttered a curse. "You should go to the reunion. It will do you good to get away," she parroted her Aunt Mary. "Get away, my ass. Now what the heck am I gonna do?"

She unfastened the seat belt and climbed out just as the man mowing the lawn across the street turned off the mower and ambled in her direction. Marching to the front of the car, she bent to find the hood latch, barely sparing him a glance until he hooked his thumbs in his pockets and said, “I wouldn’t do that if I were you—not unless you want to deal with second degree burns.”

Becky paused in confusion. “What?”

“You need to let the car cool down before you pop that hood,” he elaborated. “Right now, all you’ll receive for your trouble is some nasty steam burns.”

Back peddling in a hurry, she moved away from the car, scowling at the smoky clouds. “So what am I supposed to do now?”

His dark hair flopped over the bandana tied around his head when he bent over to glance at the hot water dribbling to the pavement. “Well. It could be worse. I recommend something cold to drink. We can sit on my porch and have iced tea while we wait.”

She shook her head. “Thanks, but this was my destination, anyway.” She pointed over her shoulder. “I’m staying here with my friend, Karen.”

“I thought I recognized you,” he said with satisfaction. “You’re Becky Iversen.”

“Becky Belker,” she corrected.

“So you married good ol’ Tom.”

“And divorced good ol’ Tom,” she added with faint bitterness.

He dusted his hand on his jeans before offering it, “Don’t know if you remember me. Joe Harris.”

Becky took a long second look. Joe Harris had grown up. The shy lanky teenager who was on the verge of manhood the last time she’d seen him had matured and filled out in all the right places. Beneath his sweat-dampened tee shirt, his broad shoulders and wide chest rippled with the kind of muscle you developed from physical labor. Her eyes skimmed over his flat stomach, halted briefly as she speculated about that interesting package his faded jeans cupped so lovingly, and finally came to rest on the battered work boots covering his feet.

Yum.

When the odd silence finally penetrated, an embarrassed flush blazed across her cheeks. She realized he was still holding his hand out. Quickly, she slipped her hand in his and gently shook it. “Wow, you’ve changed!” she blurted out.

Her cheeks turned pink when he subjected her to a slow appraisal of his own. She fidgeted under his gaze, knowing what he saw. Her white blond hair was pulled back in a fancy braid that brushed her butt. Her blue denim shirt and jeans matched her eyes. After two children, a few more pounds padded her curves. “You’re still beautiful,” he said softly.

Nervously, she tucked her hands in her jeans pockets. “Thank you.” She looked away, frowning when she realized Karen’s driveway was empty. “Well. I’m sure I’ll see you again before I leave. I better go let Karen know I’m here.”

“Good enough.” Joe loped back across the street to his mower, leaving her standing on the curb by her car.

With a sigh, she retrieved her purple fake leather hobo bag from the front seat. Her lips curved in a reluctant smile as she hugged the bag against her breasts. It was a birthday gift from her kids. Lizzie had gravely pointed out the bag’s color because she knew it was Becky’s favorite. And Sean had eagerly explained that they were able to buy it because it was *on sale*. Becky remembered looking up from the crumpled Sunday comics wrapping paper at the smiles on her kids’ faces, and wanting to cry because children shouldn’t have to know about buying presents on sale.

She thought about the interview she had scheduled at the Heartwood Medical Center this weekend and prayed that she was hired. Life would be so much easier for all of them if she got the new job. And the kids could attend a school where everyone didn’t know their dad was in prison. When the invitation arrived from Karen, it was like an answer to her prayers. With money so tight, a free place to stay was a true blessing.

Of course, Aunt Mary tartly suggested that she find a hunky man who would take her to bed for some hot sweaty sex. Becky giggled under her breath at the memory of her gaunt spinster aunt standing in the kitchen with her hands buried in hot soapy dishwater, her tall angular body swathed in a snowy white apron while she lectured Becky on the best way to find a man with a hard body and a big penis.

Trust Aunt Mary to be up front about what she thought.

Becky shook her head and walked across Karen’s freshly mowed lawn to the front door as she wondered what Aunt Mary would think of Joe. Knowing her Aunt Mary as well as she did, Becky had an idea that her aunt would be busily planning ways to get her in bed with Joe.

When she reached the front door, a bright yellow sticky note caught her attention: *Becky!*

We've run out on some quick errands. If you get here before we get back, go over to the Harris house (across the street). Joe will be happy to entertain you until we get back. Karen

Softly snorting under her breath, Becky turned to watch Joe mow another row of grass. Evidently, Aunt Mary wasn't the only one with matchmaking on the mind. With a mental shrug, she headed back across the street, privately admitting that the view was certainly entertaining, even if Joe didn't choose to follow up on his opportunities.

He turned at the edge of the lawn and immediately shut off the lawnmower when he saw her standing on the sidewalk in front of his house. "Change your mind?"

"No one's home."

"Great! Let's sit on the porch in the shade." He wiped his damp palm on his jeans before gently grasping her elbow, herding her up the steps before she changed her mind. "Have a seat. I'll be right back with iced tea."

As soon as Becky settled into the porch rocker, he whisked indoors, catching the screen door before it could slam. Humming under his breath, Joe took a few moments to whip his sweaty tee shirt off and slip on a dry one. He ran a warm washcloth over his face and arms, brushed his hair, and then went into the bright kitchen. While he prepared a tray with two glasses of ice and a pitcher of tea, he wondered if Becky would like the renovations he'd made in the big room. Of course, he conceded, almost anything would be better than the old avocado appliances and counters that were there when he was growing up.

He carried the tray through the cool dim hallway to the front door, edging the screen open with his shoulder. With one sneaker shod foot tucked under her, Becky lazily nudged the rocker with her other toe. Her eyes closed, she rested her head against the high chair back. Noting the pale smudges under her eyes, Joe thought he would have served her better by offering her a pillow and a bed, but he was pretty sure she would refuse. "You look like you're ready for a nap. Long drive?"

Her eyes fluttered open as she stifled a yawn. "No. Just a long day. Lizzie had a soccer game early this morning. Then I took Aunt Mary grocery shopping. Packed my bags. Packed the car. And by that time it was after lunch."

"Lizzie's your daughter?" he asked as he filled her glass and handed it to her.

"Yep. She's nine and Sean's seven. They're a handful some days, but mostly they're

good kids.” Becky sat up and sipped her tea. “What about you? No woman around?”

Joe poured his own tea before perching his butt on the porch railing. He took a hearty gulp while he decided how to answer her. *Nothing ventured, nothing gained*, he thought. “Nope. No woman. I’ve been waiting for you.”

Delicate color stained her cheeks. Becky peered at him over the edge of her glass as she took another sip. “Trying out a new line, Joe?”

“Old truth,” he countered. “I’ve wanted you since I was sixteen.”

“What?” Becky swallowed her tea the wrong way. Coughing, her eyes watering, she glared at him. “What did you just say?”

Calmly he offered her a paper napkin from the tray. “You heard me. And in case you didn’t notice, I’m not sixteen anymore.”

She dabbed at her mouth with the napkin. “I noticed,” she admitted dryly.

“Good. I just wanted to give you a heads up. I plan to have you in my bed by tomorrow. And once you’re there, I’m not going to let you go without a fight.”

Becky’s mouth opened and closed but no sound came out.

He nodded with a satisfied smile then leaned closer. “The time wasn’t right ten years ago. I was too young. But I’m a man now, Bec. I’ve waited long enough.”

“B-but I have kids! And responsibilities!” she protested.

“I like kids. And it seems to me that it’s time someone lent you a hand with those responsibilities. Obviously Tom’s not around to pull his weight.”

“Tom’s still in prison. He won’t be up for parole again for another five years.”

“Even better. I wasn’t sure how long he was in for. This way, I won’t have to wonder if he’s going to be around to interfere.” Joe stood up and moved closer. Setting his glass on the tray, he bent over so he could plant his hands on the arms of the rocker, hemming her in. “You’re my woman, Becky. I want to take care of you, body and soul.” His lips brushed hers gently, giving her time to protest before settling on her mouth with tenderness.

Madly scrabbling for some rebuttal, Becky’s mind completely shut down when Joe kissed her. She had no idea there could be so much pleasure from the simple pressure of a man’s lips on hers. And then he deepened the kiss, sliding his tongue inside, exploring her mouth with an alluring mix of tender persuasion and control. When he straightened and backed away, she

carefully set her tea glass on the tray, stood and walked across the porch, brushing past him.

“Running away, Bec?”

Her mind raced with possibilities. “I’m going for a walk to think about things,” she finally replied with gentle dignity. “I screwed up my life and my children’s lives once by leaping before I looked. I won’t do that again, regardless of your agenda. I can deal with whatever consequences my actions reap, but I won’t place my children in that position ever again.”

She couldn’t decipher his thoughts as he stared at her for a long moment. Then he said, “I can understand and respect that. All I ask is that you don’t automatically reject the idea. I would never hurt your children or you. In the meantime, if you’ll give me your car keys, I’ll take a look under the hood.”

Fishing the keys from her jeans pocket, she tossed them across the narrow space that separated them. He snatched them from the air and shoved them in his pants pocket. “Don’t get lost.”

With a small smile, she turned and went down the steps. “I won’t.” Without a backward look, she walked away leaving him on the cool shaded porch.

When she returned from her walk a little over an hour later, she still didn’t have any idea how to deal with Joe. It was one thing to fantasize about a hot sexy night with him, but he’d hinted at a more long-term relationship. She wasn’t sure she wanted to add to the upheaval in her life.

The last few feet seemed to take forever as she watched Joe work on her car. She sure hoped he knew what he was doing. There always seemed to be plenty of men who were willing to help her out when things went wrong. Unfortunately, she later found out most of them had no idea what they were doing. And fixing their repairs was more expensive than if she’d taken the car directly to a garage.

She moved closer and leaned over the fender. “What’s the damage?”

“A couple of hoses and some antifreeze,” he replied. “I taped the hoses for now and added some water to the radiator. Tomorrow morning I’ll move it over to the garage so I can drain it without leaving a mess on the street.”

Becky sighed as she mentally checked her non-existent bank balance. “How much will that cost?”

“Oh, about twenty bucks.” Joe shot her a grin. “Cheap fix.”

Sparing him a frank look of disbelief, she shook her head. “I’ve paid for a lot of repairs and not one of them as been that inexpensive. Maybe I should just take it to a garage.”

He backed away from the car, wiping his hands on a stained blue rag he pulled from his back pocket. “That was my intent. I have a garage over on Hill Street. Harris Motors.”

“You mean you really work on cars?”

“Yep. I’m a Master Mechanic.” He tucked the rag back in his pocket and slammed the hood. “I’ll have it back by noon tomorrow. Karen came home while you were on your walk so I carried your stuff up to your room. Check the car to make sure I got everything.”

“Karen’s home?” She walked to the back of the car, only then noticing that the trunk was open. A fast glance was all she needed to confirm that Joe had indeed taken everything into the house. She shut the trunk and went to the passenger side of her car, poking her head through the open window for a quick check. “Wow, you’re good. Thanks for taking my stuff inside.”

“You’re more than welcome. I figured you were tired enough without having to haul suitcases when you got back. Found your cookie stash in the trunk. I was tempted to steal a few but Karen said y’all are going to have a girl’s night in tonight.”

“You found Aunt Mary’s disappearing brownies, eh? Well, since you fixed the car, I’ll make sure I save some of those for you before the girls scarf ‘em down.”

He grinned. “Really? They looked delicious. Say...Karen gave me an invitation to the cocktail party tomorrow night. I wondered if you would be my date.”

Planting both hands on her hips, Becky bit her lips to keep from laughing. His dark eyes begged soulfully, and he had such a puppy dog expression on his face it was hard to resist. Finally, she chuckled. “Sure. That would be great. I love getting together with the girls but going to the party with a handsome hunk would be a real treat.”

His eyes turned hot, and he moved until his body was brushing against hers. “I’m going to kiss you now.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.” He bent his head, capturing her lips with a gentle touch that rapidly changed to a steamy melding of tongues and nipping teeth. She burrowed closer, pressing her breasts against his firm muscled chest as she wrapped her arms around his broad back. Joe planted his big hands on her butt, positioning her so their bodies fit together like puzzle pieces.

It had been years since she had enjoyed a man’s touch. The feel of his hard body, nestled

close, rubbing in all the right places sent unfamiliar sensual heat roaring through her. She squirmed, rocking her hips in rhythm with Joe's movements, whimpering and kissing with wild abandon, totally unaware of their surroundings. Just one thing impinged on her mind. That was her desperate necessity to get naked with Joe. *Now!*

"Yeow! Maybe you guys should get a room!"

Reluctantly, Becky lifted her head, focusing on the woman standing in the driveway.

Karen.

"I have to go," she whispered shakily, stunned at how out of control she felt.

"Yeah." Joe released her slowly. "I'll talk to you tomorrow."

Picking up her purple bag from the grass where she'd dropped it, Becky went to embrace her friend. "Karen! I'm so glad to be here!"

"I can see why," Karen replied with a grin. "If some hot hunk was kissing the stuffing out of me, I'd be glad to be here, too."

Chapter Two

As Becky prepared for the cocktail party on Friday evening, she mulled over the time since she'd left Joe standing in front of Karen's house. So much had happened in the past twenty-four hours that she was still breathless with the changes in her life. Early that morning Karen had offered her car for Becky's use since Joe had hers in his garage.

Her interview at the Heartwood Medical Center had gone very well. She smiled as she recalled the generous job offer she'd received, complete with medical benefits and her own office. The trick would be finding an apartment and moving before the new job started. Already, she'd called Aunt Mary with the good news. Becky laughed aloud at the memory of Aunt Mary's tart questions, "Wonderful news, no doubt, but have you found a hot man to take to bed?"

"Possibly. I'll let you know tomorrow."

"Hmph." Clearly Aunt Mary thought Becky was taking too long. "I'll let you tell the children the good news."

After talking to the kids, Becky put away her cell phone and headed for the local Wal-Mart, set on finding some sexy underpinnings for her very basic black dress that would blow Joe's mind—just in case they actually ended up in bed together. There was more than one way to distract the male mind from a poochy tummy with stretch marks. Not that she was ashamed of those silvery marks on her belly. Lizzie and Sean were ample compensation for a rounded tummy and less than perky breasts. Still, what woman wouldn't want to catch her man by surprise?

Joe had stated his goal like a bold challenge. Becky wasn't of a mind to back down if he really carried out his intentions, but she was determined that their coming together wouldn't be one sided. Now she stood naked next to the bed wearing just her wedding pearls, as she thoughtfully studied her new acquisitions. Many years had gone by since she'd deliberately dressed to entice a man. If anything would do the trick, the bits of lace on the bed would. She'd

bathed, shaved and slathered her favorite body cream on her newly smooth skin. It was time to put on the real armor.

First, the black, barely-there lace panties—not a thong, but an almost bikini that tied on each hip. She stood in front of the mirror, blushing at the expanse of skin left bare.

Unexpectedly, she trembled at the idea of Joe’s eyes touching her as she modeled the sexy panties. She felt the slow slick dampness as her body prepared for his touch.

With shaking fingers, she picked up the bra and slipped it on. It clipped in the front, plunging low to reveal plush curves. Her nipples tightened, poking at the sheer black lace that lightly abraded the sensitive tips. A shiver ran down her spine as she imagined Joe touching her, cradling her breasts in his big warm hands, brushing her nipples with his thumbs.

Plucking the sheer hosiery from the bed, she slipped the thigh high stockings on, one by one, smoothing the black lace tops in place. After one last glance at the erotic picture in the mirror, she covered the sexy surprise with her very plain, very ordinary black dress, shocked by the change in her feelings about it. Whenever she wore it she’d always felt frumpy and old. This time as she studied her reflection in the mirror, her body trembled with heat because of the sensual secrets the dress covered.

A quick tap on the door captured her attention. “Joe’s here!” Karen called.

“Coming!” With a smile, Becky shook her head. Oh yeah, if Joe had anything to do with it, she was definitely gonna come. Probably more than once. She slipped on her strappy high heels, checked her makeup one last time and then picked up the black lacy shawl and small purse from the bed. What would the other girls would think if they knew the purse was stuffed with condoms from the box she’d purchased today at Wal-Mart?

They were the first condoms she’d ever bought in her life. Somehow, that independent act affirmed the anticipation she felt about having sex with Joe. She opened the door, snapped off the light, and went out, ready to give Joe a run for his money.

As he waited at the foot of the stairs, Joe practiced deep breathing, trying to stave off the anticipation of what the evening might bring. Since he had been very clear about his intentions and Becky still agreed to go to the cocktail party with him, he’d spent the afternoon cleaning his house, especially the bedroom. The bed was made with clean sheets, the floors all vacuumed, and all the flat surfaces dusted. Fresh flowers and candles were ready on the dressers and goodies

waited in the kitchen. Most importantly, a nearly full box of condoms sat on the nightstand. He considered hiding them in the drawer, then changed his mind.

As an afterthought, he took some from the box and stashed them around the house—some in a kitchen drawer, a few in a fancy jar on a end table in the living room, a couple in the potpourri pot on the mantle in the dining room and one in his wallet. *Be prepared* wasn't just a Boy Scout motto.

He slipped his hands in his pockets so he wouldn't tug at his tie. At that moment, Becky started down the stairs and his lungs seized up. She always took his breath away, whether she was dressed in beat up jeans or a prim work skirt, but he had to admit that she'd outdone herself this evening with classy black dress and pearls. He wanted to grab her and drag her across the street to his house, but that probably wasn't the best way to go about things. Never had he been so close to allowing his inner cave man to come out to play.

She took her time, carefully setting each foot in place as she descended. Heat roared through him, pooling in his groin when her skirt flipped up and he caught a glimpse of black lace around her thigh.

Down boy! he silently muttered as his imagination took fire.

When she reached the last step, she looked up and smiled and his heart turned over. He bent his head, kissed her gently. They still had a party to get through before he would have her to himself. Lifting his head, he looked deep in her eyes. "You are so beautiful."

Pink color flushed her cheeks and her eyes sparkled. "Thank you!"

It was so obvious that compliments were rare for her, and he wanted to hold her close and tell her over and over again how pretty she was, but he merely offered his hand. "Are you ready to go?"

Smiling brightly she nodded. "Whenever you are."

He turned toward the kitchen. "Karen! We're leaving! In case we don't talk you later, expect her back when you see her!"

Karen appeared in the doorway, grinning at her neighbor as she shook her head in mock disapproval. "Behave, Joe. If you don't treat her right, I'll have to trim your hedges. And you know what a disaster that would be."

"Oh, no! Not the hedges!" he declared. "Anything but the hedges."

"Get out of here. We'll see you at the party!"

He led Becky out the front door and down the walk to a dark car parked at the curb. When she settled into the passenger seat, he went around to the driver's side, slid in and fastened his seat belt. "Damn. I feel like I'm sixteen again."

She giggled. "I'm glad. I thought I was the only one."

"Nope. Funny, isn't it?" He started the car and slowly pulled away. "Strange how some things remind you of your teen years. I have to say that I wouldn't go through that again for anything!"

"No," she agreed soberly. "I wouldn't either." When Joe offered her his hand, she unhesitatingly accepted the comfort and acceptance as they completed the drive in companionable silence.

As soon as they parked and got out of the car, he took her hand again, proudly walking into the party. Immediately, the wave of laughter, conversation and music washed over them. Placing his warm hand just below her waist, Joe led her to an empty table on the edge of the small dance floor. "What would you like to drink?"

Smiling ruefully, she asked for ginger ale. "I don't tolerate alcohol very well."

"Don't apologize for that. I prefer you to be sober when I take you home," he teased. "I want you to remember every single thing I do." He watched her delicate flush spread all the way down to the edge of her dress. "I love it when you blush. I'll be right back."

She laid her small bag on the table and looked around at the animated crowd, picking out the few people she recognized. There was Dakota Reese standing on the edge of the dance floor with Ace Banner. She knew they were planning to meet up with Lily and Chloe. She smiled when she remembered all the nervous Nellies back at Karen's house.

Boy, you would think we'd all matured past that stage by now, she thought even as she admitted to her own case of rioting butterflies.

Over in a dim corner, Bliss was sipping wine. With a grin, Becky watched Nick Santucci stalking in her direction with silent purpose. *Ooooh, Bliss! You go girl!*

Joe set a glass of sparkling ginger ale on the table in front of her. "See anyone you know?" he teased.

"Not as many as I thought I would. Who's that tall guy being mobbed near the bar?"

Glancing over his shoulder, Joe's brow wrinkled with a little frown. "Hmmm. Somebody in sports...ah, that's Jack Gerrard. Football."

“Oh. That explains the little huddle,” she observed brightly.

He snorted softly. “You have a wicked tongue, woman.”

“All the better to taste you.”

Suddenly, his slacks were uncomfortably snug and he wondered how soon they could leave this shindig. He stood and grabbed her hand. “Let’s dance.”

Becky handed her small bag to him. “Can you fit this in your jacket pocket?”

“No problem.” He slipped it out of sight, tucked her hand under his arm and led her on the dance floor, thanking the party gods when the band started a slow number. He desperately wanted an excuse to hold her in his arms, so the song was perfect. When she slipped into his embrace, her body fit with his as though they were puzzle pieces that finally matched. Her soft curves cushioned his cock as they swayed to the melody, lost in each other. Since they were near a dim alcove when the music stopped, Joe steered her away from the dance floor until a giant fern partially concealed them.

“I have to touch you,” he muttered as he bent his head to kiss her.

She moved up on her toes, pressing against his hardness with a whimper. “Can we go home now?”

“This is your party, sweetheart. Don’t you want to stay?”

“I want to party with you. Alone,” she whispered, nudging his aching cock with her hips.

“All right. We’ll grab your shawl and go.”

Wordlessly, they worked their way around the small dance floor until they reached the table where she’d left her shawl draped over one of the chairs. A chubby red-faced man sat in one of the chairs scowling at the people milling around in the room. Small beads of sweat covered his hairless head. Clutching his glass in his hand, he tossed down the last of his drink just as they arrived.

“Say, aren’t you the bitch that married that loser after he went to prison?? Belker, right? Tom Belker.”

Resolutely ignoring him, Joe snatched Becky’s shawl, nudging her ahead of him and away from the table. Punching the drunk out didn’t seem like something Becky would want him to do.

“Hey bitch! I’m talking to you!” the man yelled as he struggled to his feet. “Think you’re

too good to talk to me? Who the hell invited you anyway?"

Silence fell over the room as two men popped out of the crowd, hustling the drunk away, but the damage was done. After draping her shawl over her shoulders, Joe put his arm around her, leading her out to the lobby. Arnold Tipton, the class president, scurried after them, calling her name. "Becky?"

They paused and Becky turned to face him.

"Damn, I'm sorry, Becky! Don was a jerk when he was in college and he hasn't improved over time." His compassionate eyes studied her in the brightly lit lobby. "Won't you come back to the party?"

Abruptly, she patted his arm. "Arnold, it was a great party, but you know what? Joe and I want to spend some time alone. And somehow, I don't think we can do what we're really interested in at a public party," she confided with a little smile.

After a quick comprehensive survey of their expressions, Arnold backed away, smiling ruefully. "My mistake. Have a wonderful evening."

Joe laughed. "Oh, we will. Goodnight, Arnie!" Taking Becky's hand, he headed for the doors, anxious for them to be alone.

When he parked the car in the driveway and turned out the lights, he turned to her and asked, "You're sure you're good with this?"

She opened the door and got out. "I'll meet you on the porch when you make up your mind."

By the time her door slammed, he was out of the car so fast his door sounded like an echo of hers as he hustled to meet her in front of the car. "Sassy woman." He swept her up in his arms, carried her up the steps to the porch and paused, stymied as he fumbled with the screen door. "Have you noticed the men in the movies never have to deal with screen doors, keys or door knobs?" he observed with a huff. "Why is that?"

Giggling, Becky tugged the screen door open. "There now. Where's the key?"

"I have it." Joe stuffed the key in the lock and turned it while she pushed. Once they were inside, he allowed her legs to slide down as he backed her up against the wall. "I thought I would never get you alone," he murmured before capturing her mouth with his lips. Quiet murmurs and whimpers filled the dim hallway as they kissed, exploring with tongues, nipping with increasing abandon.

Tugging his tie loose, she struggled to unbutton his shirt, desperately wanting to touch him. Without releasing her mouth, he shrugged his jacket off before pressing closer. Wriggling her hips until she could rub her mound against his cock, she sighed and yanked his shirt open. A button winged off into the shadows, pinging when it hit the wall. Shoving the fabric out of the way, she smoothed her palms over his hard chest, enjoying the way the springy curls felt under her hands and the heady scents of soap and man.

“Naked. We need to be naked,” he muttered as he nibbled the tender spot under her ear.

“Working on it.” She wrestled with his buckle, cursing under her breath as he flinched when her knuckles brushed his cock under the fabric. She abandoned the buckle going for the hard flesh instead.

Joe groaned, backed away long enough to undo his buckle and the zipper on his slacks and then he was pressing her up to the wall again. Becky shoved his pants and boxers aside, clutching his hard hot length in her warm hand. He groaned again and groped for her dress zipper, failing to locate it. Finally, he lifted his head, staring down at her in frustration. “How the heck do I get this dress off?”

Without a word, she caught the hem, tugging the dress up and over her head. Then she was standing in front of him, in pearls, sexy underwear and stockings with high heels.

Joe gasped and muttered a curse before bending to shove off his shoes, socks and pants. Then he lifted her in his arms and headed down the hall.

“Where are we going?” she asked impatiently.

“Hell if I know.” He paused in the living room doorway, and shook his head. “The sofa’s too small.”

“The floor...”

“Too rough.” He shifted her in his arms and headed for the recliner in the far corner. “Perfect.” Plopping down, he helped her turn until she was straddling his lap and then he grabbed the release handle, and the chair tilted back.

Becky sprawled across his chest, plucking the tiny nipples nestled in the soft curls covering his chest, frantically kissing his jaw, his neck, anything she could reach. Joe slipped her shoes off, tossing them away randomly, before settling her more securely, with the damp crotch of her silky panties rubbing the underside of his cock.

“Tell me this bra fastens in the front,” he demanded between nibbles as he cupped her breasts in his hands, holding them so he could alternately suck the tight nipples that poked at the wet lace.

She sat up, brushing his fingers out of the way. “Let me.” Unclipping the bra with shaking hands, she squirmed as his cock pulsed beneath her. “Joe,” she groaned. “I need you.”

With one arm wrapped around her to hold her in place, he sat up, reaching for the fancy jar on the little table next to the chair. “Condom,” he grunted.

“Good.” Relief flooded through her with his demonstration of advanced planning.

“Are you really crazy about the panties?” he asked, moving his hand to the narrow band on her hip.

She stripped off her bra before peering down at her panties. “They untie,” she confessed, finding the little bows and tugging them loose.

“Fuck,” he said reverently as he tugged them away, revealing her neatly trimmed pussy. Reclining the chair again, he tilted her back so her hips rested on his belly. Nudging her legs wide open he draped them securely over his forearms. He bent his knees up to provide support for her back and head. “Oh, that’s a gorgeous pussy. All pink and wet. I need a taste.”

She squeaked in alarm as he slid her hips closer. “I won’t let you fall,” he muttered before burying his face in her pussy.

Becky was so close to orgasm all it took was one long slow sweep with his tongue. He held her hips securely, plunging his tongue in her pussy, prolonging her release until she sprawled bonelessly across his body. Shifting her carefully until she straddled his hips again, he quickly sheathed his cock and lined it up.

Anxious to have the aching emptiness filled by him, she lifted her hips enough to take his thick cock inside. Slowly, they came together as she sank down on his lap until he was in balls deep. With a soft sigh, she laid down on his chest, content and complete in that moment for the first time in years.

“Damn, you feel wonderful. I could stay here the rest of my life.” He wrapped his arms around her, cuddling her close. “I knew you’d be a perfect fit.” Joe lifted his hips, shifting so he slid in a fraction deeper.

Sitting up, she braced her hands on the chair back above his shoulders and settled into a leisurely ride. He stroked her with long slow glides of liquid heat until only the fat tip of his cock

remained in her pussy, and then lured her into the unhurried flow as she took his cock back inside her tight grasp, whimpering as she ground her clit against the hard pubic bone at the base of his cock. Cupping his big hands around her breasts, Joe toyed with the hard little nipples, brushing his thumbs across the tips. She blossomed into a glorious Valkyrie who was willing to take what she needed, willing to show him the wild woman hidden inside.

Abruptly, the leisurely ride turned into an unbridled gallop toward the finish. She threw her head back, screaming his name. Fierce waves of contractions gripped his cock, tugging and milking him in an untamed orgasm. He shouted as he pulsed endlessly in her grasp.

Fighting for breath, waiting for their pounding hearts to slow down, they cuddled together on the recliner in the silence, shaken more profoundly than either had anticipated.

Chapter Three

Becky sighed. “I suppose we have to get up.”

“I have a very comfortable bed upstairs,” Joe pointed out with a yawn. “I vote that we go up there, maybe have a soak in my garden tub before we make love again.”

She raised her hand. “That has my vote.”

He pulled the lever to bring the chair upright and lifted her from his lap, setting her in front of him. Then, getting to his feet, he led her to the stairs, pausing briefly at the powder room to discard the condom. They slowly climbed the stairs, turning toward his bedroom when they reached the second floor. He pointed to the bathroom, “Your turn. I’ll get some towels from the linen closet and be right back. Oh, yeah. The stuff in the pink basket is for you.”

Becky nodded, went into the bathroom and closed the door. She stood in front of the full-length mirror on the back of the door and studied her reflection. The woman in the mirror was a decadent looking hussy, she decided. Her hair was disheveled, her eyes smoldered, and the stockings—her only apparel—were decidedly the worse for the wear. Wow. She looked like she’d spent the night...doing exactly what she’d done with Joe. Truth in advertising.

After peeling off the ruined stockings, she turned to the counter, poking through the pink basket—brush, toothbrush, comb, a short silky robe and toiletries. With a small grin, she brushed her hair and twisted it up in a loose knot, fastening it with one of the elastics from the basket. She couldn’t believe that she was that uninhibited woman downstairs.

When Joe knocked on the door, she opened it with a small flourish, gaily motioning for him to join her. “Come in, come in. Boy, am I looking forward to a hot bath.”

He dumped the towels on the closed toilet seat and brushed past her to start the water flowing. “We can have bubbles or we can use the jets. Which would you prefer?”

“Are you kidding? Jets, of course.” She frowned as she noticed the nasty scar on his back. Touching it lightly, she asked, “What happened?”

“That? A souvenir from my time in jail.” He straightened up with a grunt. “One of the inmates didn’t take it well when I rejected his advances.”

A rush of choppy images flooded her mind. The midnight visits from Tom’s parole officers. The calls from jail in the pre-dawn hours. The struggles to keep toddlers Lizzie and Sean quiet in the visiting rooms at the prison—the terrible humiliation of facing her parents and neighbors every time Tom was arrested and the out of control anger and abuse when Tom got out on parole.

Jail, jail, jail...

The word reverberated in her mind, blocking out everything around her. She backed away, fumbling for the doorknob.

Jail, jail, jail...

How could she have made such a terrible error in judgment? Wasn’t once enough? She jerked the door open, raced through the bedroom to the stairs and pounded down the steps to the main hall.

“Becky!” Joe shouted. “What the hell?” He turned off the water and ran after her. “Becky?”

Frantically she searched in the hallway until she found her dress, yanked it over her head, groped in his jacket pocket for her handbag and pulled the door open just as he reached the hall. “Becky? What the hell is going on?”

Shaking her head, she rushed barefoot out on the porch and down to the sidewalk. “I can’t do it. Not again, Joe. Sorry!”

He snatched up his trousers and pulled them on, zipping them as he ran out into the night after her. Stubbing his toe on the curb, he cursed and hopped twice before he caught her shoulder, twirling her so that she faced him under the streetlight. Stunned, he saw her face was wet with tears. “What the hell is wrong?”

“I can’t do it, Joe. I made one mistake with Tom. I just can’t deal with another convict!” she sobbed. “Never knowing when the cops are going to knock on the door. Never knowing when I’ll get a call in the middle of the night.” She shook her head. “I won’t do that to my kids again.”

Suddenly realizing the damage and insecurity her years with Tom had inflicted, he jerked

her close, tucking her head under his chin and rocking her as he worked to clear the misunderstanding from his careless words. “War prisoner, Becky. I was a prisoner of war in Iraq. Not for very long. They rescued me before the enemy could execute me, but I have some scars.” Joe wasn’t even sure she was listening, but he held her tightly as he repeated his story over and over until she shook her head and pushed away. Reluctantly, he released her, watching her face closely in the uncertain light.

Trembling, she rubbed the goose bumps spreading like a rash up bare her arms. “What did you say?”

“I was a prisoner of war, Becky. Overseas.”

“Overseas.” She repeated it carefully as though that would give the word meaning.

“I was in Iraq. Taken prisoner by one of the splinter groups.”

“You were a *soldier*?”

“Yeah. When the extraction team found me, I wasn’t in very good shape. I lost a kidney.”

She took a deep shuddering breath. “Oh, God, Joe. How can you stand to look at me? I-It never occurred to me that you were in the military.”

He shoved his hands in his pockets and ducked his head while he tried to decide the best way to handle her. Finally, he shot her a considering look from the corner of his eye. “You didn’t show very much faith in me,” he admitted. “But considering your past, I suppose I can understand. It seems to me that the best way to handle this is for us to go back across the street, climb those stairs and soak in the tub while we get to know each other. Ten years is a long time, Bec. We need to catch up.”

“Truly?”

“Seriously. Any objections?” he asked cautiously.

She scrubbed at the tears drying on her face, struggling to muster a smile. “No. I suppose not. But we should leave the lights off, ‘cause I’m not a pretty crier.”

“I’m tough,” he assured her. “I can take it.” He offered her his hand. After a moment, she took it and together they walked back to his house. “You know, it’s a good thing I didn’t shut the door. I think my keys are in the house on the hall table.”

“Well, if you had, you would just have to spend the night in my room at Karen’s.”

“Yeah, but you only have a twin bed at Karen’s.”

She shrugged, trying really hard for a lighter touch. “So we’d have to sleep very, very

close together.”

“That goes without saying, sweetheart. I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

When they walked back through the front door, Joe halted her with a touch on her shoulder. “I want to apologize to you before we go any further.” He felt the muscles under his hand go rigid. “No, not for making love with you. Never. That was wonderful. Amazing.”

“Then what?” she whispered in the shadows.

“I know about trauma and stress. I was in counseling for months when I came back from Iraq. I should have talked to you.”

Abruptly, she doubled her fist and punched him in the belly.

Joe grunted and rubbed his sore stomach. “What the hell was that for?”

“*That* was for thinking I’m a fragile little flower! So I broke down a bit. So I freaked out! I’m *not* some blithering ninny that you have to wrap in cotton wool. I’m strong and I can handle it!”

Fighting back a laugh, he watched her straighten her spine, standing tall and indomitable while she glared at him militantly. “I believe you,” he assured her gravely. “Absolutely.”

She turned, marched down the hallway and up the stairs. When she reached the top, she leaned over the banister and inquired, “Well? Am I taking a bath alone? Or do you plan to join me?”

“Start the water! I’ll be right up!” When she went into the bedroom, Joe made a quick pass through the hall and living room, collecting their discarded clothing. After checking the locks and turning off the lights, he headed upstairs to join Becky determined that this time things would end differently.

By the time he made it to the bedroom and dumped the clothing on a chair, Becky was in the tub, with a blissful expression on her face. Thoughtfully, he lit the candles on the dressers and turned back the covers. Grinning with relief, he stripped off his slacks as he watched her relax against the back of the tub, her head resting on a small towel and a folded washcloth covering her eyes. Then a vague memory came to him of his sister’s remedy for what she called ‘crybaby eyes.’ His sister, Emmie swore that cucumbers were the best for the swelling. She fell in and out of love so often she sure had the experience to prove it.

He went back downstairs to the kitchen, dug out a cucumber from the veggie drawer in the fridge and whacked off a few thin slices, tossing them on a paper towel. With his peace

offering cradled in his hand, he went back upstairs.

Becky removed the washcloth and sat up when he returned to the bathroom. “What’s in the paper towel?” she asked.

“Cucumbers.” Joe held out his hand so she could see the damp slices on the paper.

“No dressing?”

“They’re for your eyes. Scoot up.” He set his present on the side of the tub and climbed in behind her, then tugged her back against his chest. “Now put your head on my shoulder and relax,” he directed. As soon as she was in place, he plucked two slices from the pile and placed them over her eyes.

“Ohhh. That feels so good.” Becky fought off tears as she rested her head on his shoulder. Other men might be uncomfortable with a woman going through a meltdown, but Joe... Joe brought her cucumber slices. From the time he kissed her on his porch the day she arrived, he’d been determinedly worming his way into her lonely heart, making a place for himself in her life. But with his homely gift of cucumber slices for her sore eyes, the last of her resistance disappeared and for the first time in her life, she really fell in love. Soul deep, abiding love.

The tension bled away as she relaxed in his arms and they shared bits of their pasts. Joe told her about some of his time in Iraq and the difficult recovery. She hesitantly talked about her marriage and divorce from Tom, revealing more than she realized while she basked in the comfort of Joe’s embrace. When the words finally dried up, Joe switched off the jets in the tub.

“Feel better?” he asked as he slipped his hands under her arms and cupped her breasts. Her nipples tightened to hard little nubs that poked his palms.

Becky arched into his embrace and moaned.

“I take it that’s a yes?” He gently pinched the enticing tips and tugged rhythmically while nibbling the soft spot on her neck just below her earlobe.

“Joe?”

“Um-hmm?”

She twisted in his arms until she was on her knees facing him. “Take me to bed.”

A slow smile spread across his face. “That’s the plan.”

He stood and helped her to her feet before stepping out of the tub. Kissing between

strokes and pats, they made a sketchy business of drying off before moving into the bedroom. She halted next to the bed, taking in the lit candles and flowers. "It's beautiful."

"*You're* beautiful. The candles are just background."

"You're a romantic," she said in pleased discovery.

Lifting her in his arms, he settled her on the bed, following her down with sudden urgency. "I'll be whatever you want if you'll stay, if you'll give me a chance."

Cupping his face in her hands, she looked deep in his dark eyes, searching for the truth. He didn't pull away. Instead, he met her eyes straight on, allowing her to see the love he felt for her. After a moment, she lifted her head and kissed him. "I'll stay."

"I'll never let you down," he promised. He turned his head at the dull thud of a slamming door. "Sounds like someone's home at Karen's."

"They'll have to get their own men." When she pushed at his shoulder, he rolled to the side, allowing her to take the lead. She propped herself on her elbow, trailing her fingers across his chest, idly sifting through the curls, nudging at his tiny erect nipples. "I want to look at you."

"Be my guest. I like it when you look at me."

Drawing one finger down to his navel, she paused to investigate the little indentation before following the trail of dark curls until she reached his penis. His belly rippled as his hips tilted. Her fingers curled around his cock as she lifted it, assessing its strength and thickness. "You're big," she observed breathlessly. "No wonder you gave me so much pleasure."

Joe inhaled sharply as she ran her fingers down the heavy vein from the tip to his base before delving down to heft his testicles in her soft hand. "Uh, you might get more than you bargained for if you keep playing around down there."

"I hope so," she teased. "I want to taste you." Moving back to his heavy pulsing staff, she ran a questing finger around the ridge near the flared tip, gently rubbing the soft skin.

"Oh, yeah."

Shifting her position until she was kneeling between his legs, she bent until her mouth was a mere breath away from his cock. Warm, moist air engulfed him as she hesitated. "I don't have much experience with this," she warned him.

With a helpless laugh he replied, "No experience required. Just touch me."

"How? What do you like?" she whispered. As her lips brushed the fluid welling from the tip, her tongue flicked out for a taste.

Joe gripped the sheet with his fists and breathed deep. “Sweetheart, I like anything you do. Anything.”

With a slight smile, she opened her mouth, slowly sliding the flared head inside. He was a big man and his cock was correspondingly thick, more than filling the limited space inside her mouth. She paused, tonguing his hot flesh, adjusting to the way it felt to hold him like this while her hand gripped and stroked the rest of his shaft. His cock pulsed, leaking more salty fluid on her tongue. Convulsively, she swallowed and he groaned. Fascinated with his response, she sucked, startled when he lifted his hips in response.

None of her previous experience prepared her for the powerful feeling that flowed over her. She—a pudgy divorcé with two children—could give Joe this wonderful gift of pleasure! Always before it had been a mechanical act demanded by her partner as a right.

Then Joe came along, demanding nothing except her heart. His response lured her to explore other territory. Her nails lightly scored the soft skin of his inner thighs while one hand drifted down to cuddle his tight testicles. She gently rubbed the wrinkled skin with her thumb before seeking out new territory behind them. When her questing fingers glanced across his puckered anus, he flinched before sitting up like a jack in the box.

Before she knew it, Becky found herself flat on her back with Joe looming over her, frantically scrabbling for one of the condoms on the bedside table. “Joe?”

“Now, Becky.”

Her eyes widened in amazement at his guttural demand. She snatched the condom from him and dressed him with trembling haste, finding his obvious need incredibly exciting. Moments later, as he thrust his cock deep in her slick pussy, her body tightened in a shocking climax. Totally unprepared, she clung to him blindly, lost to everything but the waves of pleasure that washed over her as he plunged out of control...two, three, a fourth time before pressing deep with a loud groan. His cock pulsed in her tight grasp so powerfully she could feel the semen spurting in the condom. Just for a moment, she mourned the fact that they were not skin-to-skin.

Finally, with a gasping breath Joe rolled them to the side. His arms tightened around her as he held her close to his bellowing chest. Her ear rested against his pounding heart. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?” she asked before nipping him sharply just below his nipple.

“I was going to take longer...”

Pressing an inquisitive finger in his navel, she said, “Joe, you’re gonna have to get over this, if we’re going to see each other after tonight.”

He lifted his head and frowned down at her. “Get over what?”

“This tendency to blame yourself for every little thing.” Unable to resist, she found his tight little nipple and nibbled on it, enjoying the salty taste and scent of him. “I’m a grown woman. And I find your love-making very much to my liking. I can’t tell you how incredibly exciting it is for me when you want me like that.” She slid him a naughty look barely shielded by her lashes. “Up against the wall, on the floor, in the kitchen...it’s all good with me.”

“In the kitchen, huh?”

“Wherever the mood strikes you—as long as we’re alone.”

“Oh, woman! You have no idea of what you’re inviting! I’ve had a long time to fantasize about what I want to do with you.” Reluctantly, he withdrew and sat up on the side of the bed. “Wow. It could take years to carry out everything I want.”

Joe heard her belly growl when she yawned and stretched before sitting up. Immediately, he hopped up and went into the bathroom, reappearing in a few moments with their robes in hand. He laid hers on the bed before shrugging his on, tying the belt with a quick knot. Then, leaning down, he brushed a quick tender kiss on her lips. “I’m going down to the kitchen to raid the refrigerator. Come on down when you’re ready and we’ll have a midnight supper.”

Leaving her some privacy, he went down to the kitchen, flicked on the bright overhead light and headed directly for the refrigerator. Earlier in the day, he’d picked up a Feast for Two from First and Ten. Now he set the cartons on the counter, sorting them in hot and cold batches. Retrieving a stack of serving plates, he transferred the contents from the cartons that required heating in the microwave.

Whistling while he worked, he pondered how to approach Becky about moving in with him. If he had his way, they would get married and that would be that, but he already knew her well enough to realize that she was a package deal. Their lives wouldn’t mesh unless her children and Aunt Mary were happy, too. Finally, he decided to offer her the apartment over the three-car garage as a temporary solution. At least that way, she and her family would be close enough for them to spend some time together.

Becky walked into the kitchen just as the first dish finished heating. “What can I do?” she

inquired after observing his setup.

He handed her plates and silverware. “If you don’t mind, set the table. The wine’s in the refrigerator.”

They worked well together, complementing each other, anticipating each other’s needs. When the food was finally prepared, Joe pulled out her chair with a flourish. “Your table is ready, madam.” Once she settled into her seat, he lit the candles and took his seat.

She took his hand, smiling at him through sudden tears. In two days, he’d given her more romance than she’d had during her entire marriage. Taking her dwindling courage in her hands she asked, “What do you see in our future, Joe?”

Very deliberately, he plucked a tiny box from his robe pocket and opened it. Inside was an adjustable ring with a gaudy purple glass stone. “I won this at the summer carnival the year I was sixteen. I thought it was the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen, and I had very unrealistic plans to give it to you when I asked you to marry me.”

Becky gazed down at the ring through a watery blur. “What happened?”

He sighed. “That September I saw you making out with Tom in his car. It just broke my poor young heart. I ran away and my dad found me sitting in the swing on the back porch.” He bit back a smile. “Dad asked me what was wrong. I sat there pouring out my heart to him and then he gave me some wonderful advice. He said to keep that ring as a reminder of my first love so I would never forget what it felt like. And I did.”

Tears trickled down her face, and he handed her a napkin.

“The way I see it, you’re still my first love. I want to marry you. I want to be a dad for your kids. Maybe we’ll even have a couple more. And I’m pretty sure I’m already in love with your Aunt Mary. But I know you want to be sure. So I’m going to give you this ring. And when you’re ready to marry me, you can let me know by putting it on your finger.”

Her hands shook as she plucked the ring from the box, but there was no hesitation as she slipped it on her finger. “I fell in love with you over a pile of cucumbers,” she announced firmly. “I’m giving you your answer now before you change your mind.”

“Becky?”

“Yes, love.”

“How do you feel about sex on the kitchen table?”

About the Author

After working in various occupations, rearing four children, and moving over forty times, Anny has finally retired and settled in one place long enough to do the one thing she's longed to do—write. She happens to be fortunate enough to have a supportive spouse who encourages her to write, write, write! Or it could be that he's simply anxious for her to support him in the manner to which he's accustomed when *he* retires.

Are you in the mood for another Carnal Reunion?

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IOU by Paris Brandon

The morning after her final exams, Bliss Harper woke up in her own bed wearing only her underwear. She's never remembered how she got there or why she found an I.O.U. tucked into her panties for one night of "Bad Boy Sex," signed by her favorite pizza delivery guy, Nick Santucci. But she had a ten-year plan that didn't include any more bad decisions and handsome men. But all work and no play make for a dull life and she's headed to her ten-year college reunion with every intention of collecting on a debt that's long overdue.

Ten years ago, bad boy Nick hadn't usually looked twice at shy, thrift-store fashion reject Bliss Harper. He just hadn't been able to avoid it when she'd started doing a tabletop, drunken striptease at a frat party the police were raiding. These days Nick's not delivering pizza, he's delivering deals and he's headed to his ten-year college reunion determined to negotiate one night into many with the woman who holds the marker on his heart.

G-Spot by Taylor Tryst

Lily Sutherland. No, Detective Lily Sutherland, a title she worked her ass off to earn, has returned to Heartwood Indiana for her ten-year college reunion. An ex-Lady Hawk, and a star athlete on the volleyball team, Lily used her competitive edge to win on the court. She dove into the male dominated world of law enforcement where she once again rocked the foundation and shot up the ranks to homicide detective in record time. As far as Lily is concerned, she's just one of the boys until she reunites with Dakota Reese, the love of her life.

Special Agent Dakota Reese has always been too smart for his own damn good. Specializing in serial cases, Dakota attends his college reunion at Western Indiana University for what he believes will be a reprieve, only to discover that his life just became much harder...literally, when he sees Lily Sutherland at the grand old Victorian down the street. Dakota and Lily had split amicably ten years prior, each of them marrying for all of the right reasons. Unfortunately, they married someone else, and were now both divorced. There's a natural animosity between the cops and the feeps, but can Lily put their differences aside long enough for her 'G Man' to find her g spot and rock her world, forever?

Nailed by Cindy Spencer Pape

When shy scientist Karen Sikorski meets up with her college crush, Warner Beckett, sparks fly, but she knows the handsome contractor would never fall for a plain nerd like her. Warner, though, has other ideas. Smart, voluptuous Karen is everything he's ever wanted in a woman, and this time around, he's enough of a grown up to appreciate it. Now all he has to do is convince the lady he really does want her--in every way possible.

First and Ten by Fran Lee

What Fran Jamison and Jack Gerrard have in common, you could balance on the head of a pin. And to make things worse, Jack blew his chances to hell back in High School with the BBW.

Neither goes to their 10th college reunion expecting sparks to fly, but when they collide in the airport, painful old memories quickly evaporate to make way for two people desperately needing to scratch 12-year-old itches.

Jack royally blew it when he let other people's opinions stop him from pursuing the 5'11" bombshell so many years back, and by the time he realized he was a jackass and tried to apologize, a traumatized and hurt Fran had shredded his ego in public, leaving him to lick his wounds and move on.

She thought she would hate him on sight. She didn't. She thought she could walk away. She couldn't. She certainly didn't expect to find herself making out like a madwoman on the hood of a borrowed car in the airport parking ramp. But she did expect one thing...she was not going to walk away again. Not when he was so damn good at scratching those itches...

Training Randi by Tessie Bradford

Miranda Ellson graduated from college with a degree in design in one hand and a ticket to London in the other. Ten years, five job changes and three boring, unfulfilling relationships later she's back at WIU to re-connect with old friends, enjoy the campus activities and take a break from...oh who the hell is she kidding?

Jeff Briggs, former college neighbor and best bud, now successful gym owner, lives in town. He's the only guy she has ever known who could set her panties on fire by simply walking into a room and Randi is sick and tired of only hooking up with him in her dreams. This may be her only chance to discover exactly what kind of personal training he has to offer.

Smokin' Ace by Regina Carlisle

A college reunion and seeing her best 'gal pals' is just the thing widow and single mom, Chloe Wells needs to put a little oomph back into her boring, routine life. For her, those carefree years and the friendships she made with six other women in the old Victorian were unforgettable and, hey, what's wrong with revisiting a past that was fun and full of laughter? But when she bumps into Michael "Ace" Banner other memories surface. Memories of hot nights and rumpled bed sheets. Memories of the loss of the one man who burned her to ash.

Former college tennis star, Ace Banner, now a renowned sports photographer, has just one chance to regain the love of pretty, sweet, very sexy Chloe. Yeah, he blew it years ago by walking away but he's a man now and not about to let her get away again. Ace is prepared to pull out all the stops in reclaiming what he lost all those years ago. It'll take a slow hand and an easy touch but he's up for the challenge.

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Handcuffs and Lace

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***What the Cuff?* By Celia Kyle**

God really should have reconsidered making werewolves. That, or Lyssa needed to get better taste in men and stay away from those with wandering eyes—and other things. Drunk as a wolf, she stumbles to her best friend's house to sleep off her whiskey induced haze and wakes to...*cuffs?*

Caleb sees his chance and takes it. His buddies on the force ribbed him but good for buying silver plated cuffs. But with a werewolf in his bed, the woman he's yearned for since they were teens, he wasn't taking any chances. Lyssa was his. She just didn't know it yet.

***Ticket Me More* by Tia Fanning**

Hailed by the bridal flower world as an artistic genius, Meli works long nights making bouquets for women lucky enough to find love, while she herself lives a life of solitude. She yearns to share her heart and body with someone other than Bob, her *Battery Operated Boyfriend*, but acute shyness keeps her from engaging the "living" world.

However, Meli's quiet and predictable existence takes an unexpected turn when she is pulled over and ticketed by the most gorgeous cop she has ever encountered—Officer Michael Johnson.

Though he doesn't seem to notice her as anything more than a traffic violation, Meli makes plans to overcome her timid nature and seize the police officer's attention...using any speed necessary.

***Handcuffs and Lies* by Bronwyn Green**

Sometimes promises to friends are the hardest to keep. Undercover police officer, Michael Tanner, promised his dying partner that he'd take care of the man's little sister. Trouble is, after her brother's death, Doctor Tori Spinelli wants nothing to do with Michael—or any other cop for that matter.

Tori has always fought against overprotective men and deception. Forced into protective custody with Michael, she's now faced with both in the same package. Despite their differences, Tori falls in love with him, but how can she trust a man who lies for a living?

***Search Me Baby, One More Time* by Melinda Barron**

Wren Thornberry's life isn't going according to plan. She let her father talk her out of marrying Bryan Stockard, the man she loves, and moved halfway around the world. Now she's back home in Texas, babysitting her grandmother while grandma and her boy-toy work through their list of sexual exploits, making themselves the talk of the town.

But what Wren doesn't know is that things in her hometown are about to heat up even more, and it will have nothing to do with her grandmother. It seems that Bryan Stockard is still around, he wants to get back into Wren's life—by any means necessary, and now he has just the tools to do it: A police uniform, handcuffs, and the authority to make Wren *assume the position*.

***Cuff Me Lacy* by Demi Alex**

Three months is way too long to wait for some simple, low-down, straight forward sex. It's not like Officer Chrissie Hansen is asking for prince charming to offer her

the love of a lifetime. All she wants is a good orgasm that she doesn't have to work for alone.

At least with "The Bull" she knows what to expect. But when Patrick MacKlick returns to her life and tempts her with new options, she discovers that lace can imprison a heart better than handcuffs can.

***Going Commando* by Catherine Chernow**

Bounty hunter Shyra Lawrence listens to her favorite radio station one morning where the DJ's are discussing "going commando" —*a.k.a* wearing no undies. Captivated by their conversation, she decides to shed her panties in favor of the freedom that wearing no underwear brings.

Enthusiastic, Shyra sends an email to her best friend, Donna, detailing the delights of panty-freedom, but unbeknownst to Shyra, she's hit the send key...to the wrong email addy!

When Derek Grayson opens his emails that morning, he discovers that his #1 employee and top bounty hunter has sent him an erotic, enticing message about going commando. Derek has always been polite, professional, and so damned attracted to Shyra that it's almost painful. Working day in and day out with voluptuous woman has sent Derek's hormones into overdrive on more than one occasion.

Now, Shyra's shed her panties and Derek's got all he can do to contain his lust when she announces that she's... GOING COMMANDO.

Also available from Resplendence Publishing

***Scorcher* by Celia Kyle**

Phoebe's a salamander with a problem. Fire is her element, her very best friend, and the core of her nature. But she can't control it worth a darn. One decent temper tantrum and *poof!* Fire galore. Good thing she lives in the desert with nary a tree in sight. Well, there are a few bushes and such. And her house. And a few cacti...sorta. At least until she'd gotten mad over getting stuck by one of the darned things...

Brant lives by fire and dies by fire. Literally. As Fire Chief, it's his job to stamp out fires in Winthrop, making sure residents of the small town in the back woods of Arizona don't have to worry about fire taking their businesses and homes. As a phoenix, he has the ability to sense fires the moment they start. It's a handy talent that keeps the residents safe. Except for his girlfriend, who seems to be able to blow up just about everything, including the stove.

***Red: A Seduction Tale* by Maddie James**

Garnet Boudreaux is going home. Not back to her nice little apartment in New York City, but to her childhood home in the bayou. She doesn't want to go, and isn't certain what will be waiting for her when she arrives. But standing there in the voodoo shop on Bourbon Street, in the middle of one helluva party, she's told by Madame Madeleine Dupuis that she has no choice. She presses two pouches into Garnet's hands, wraps a red cape around her, and tells her she must go—and go now—to see to her grandmother.

Max LeBlanc spies the lovely redhead across the street and knows in a heartbeat that she is the one. A rougarou always knows when he's met his mate. Some may call him a lycanthrope, a werewolf if you will, but in Cajun bayou lands, he's known simply as *The Rougarou*. He'd

waited several hundred years for this moment, and for her. There is nothing left for him to do but mark her and claim her as his mate. Soon.

***Oriana and the Three Werebears* by Tia Fanning**

Oriana Ricci has taken over the family business—flying cargo and rich tourists around Alaska’s barely inhabited Kodiak Archipelago. When her plane malfunctions and she’s forced to make an emergency landing, she finds herself stranded in the middle of a National Wildlife Refuge. With no civilization for miles and no hope of rescue, she thinks all is lost...

Until she stumbles upon the entrance to an underground bunker.

Jack, Jordan, and Jonathan McMathan own and operate a secret intelligence firm contracted by the US Government. Hidden away in an old Cold War spy station located the middle of the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge, the brothers are not only able to do their top secret jobs safely without fear of discovery, but are better to protect their other, more personal secret: they have the ability to shift into Kodiak bears.

Like a fairy tale gone bad, the brothers return home to find their lunch tasted—or eaten, their computer chairs adjusted—or broken, and a beautiful blonde sleeping in one of their beds. This situation poses a big problem for the brothers...

Their location is now compromised. But more importantly, what are they to do with the lady?

***Extinction* by Carol Lynne**

Professor of Environmental Science/Wildlife studies at UNLV, Jack McBain has spent his adult life trying to track a legend overheard during his youth. Born and raised in the Canadian Province of Newfoundland, Jack remembers his grandparents telling stories of a race of people eradicated by European settlers in 1829. According to the legend, the Beothuk people didn’t die out as first thought, but were transformed into wolf shifters.

When Newfoundland wolves began to appear in great numbers, the European settlers began killing them under the guise of population control. In 1910, the last of the Newfoundland wolves was shot, making them one of the few extinct species of wolves in the world.

Following spotty leads, Jack begins to track what he believes are Beothuk/Newfoundland shifter wolves. His search leads him to the Lake Mead National Recreational Area outside of Las Vegas. There, on Spirit Mountain, he finally comes face to face with not only the shifter he's been looking for, but the man of his dreams he didn't know he needed.

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