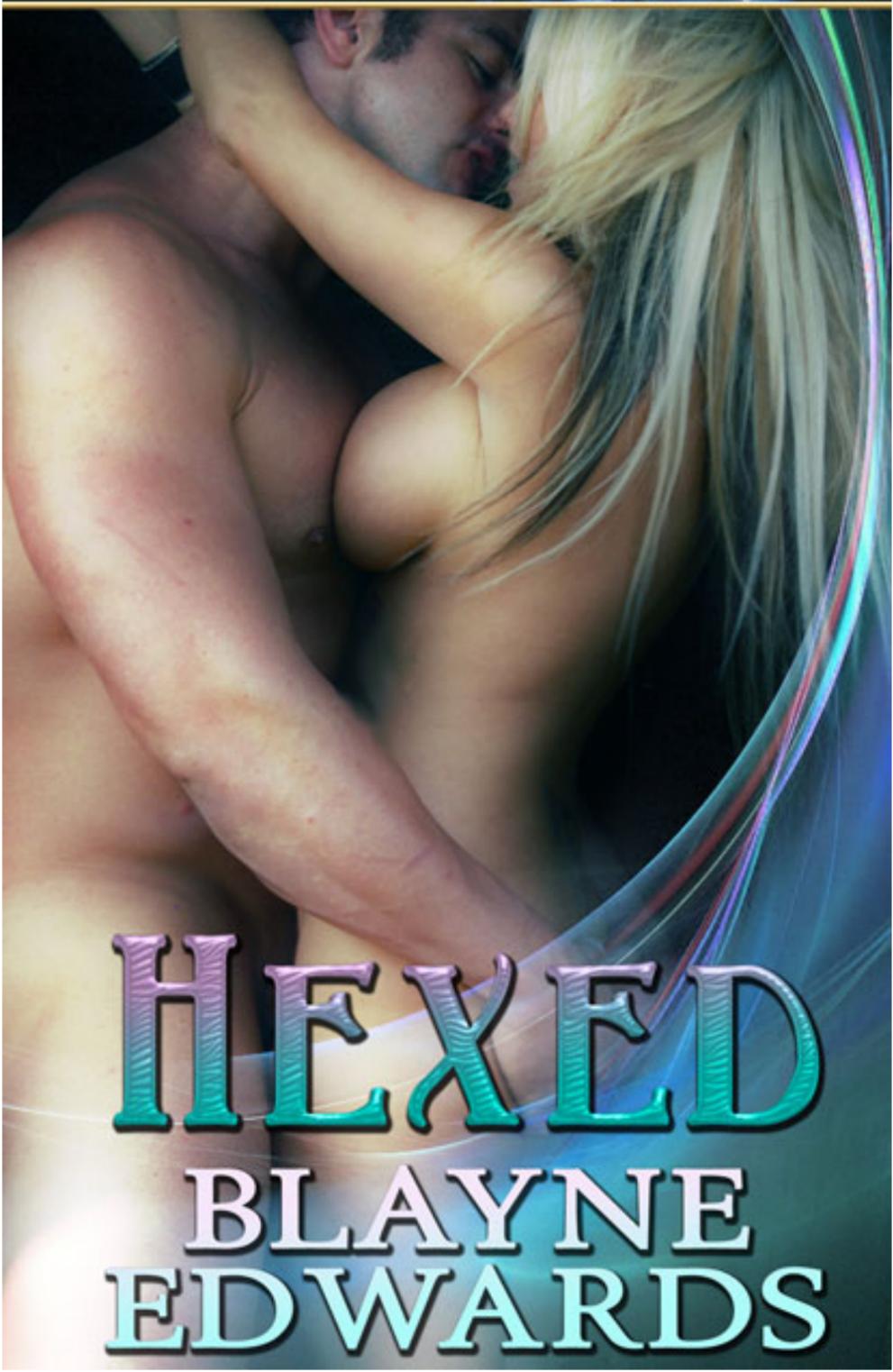


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



HEXED
BLAYNE
EDWARDS

Hexed

Blayne Edwards

Nikki sees dead people. She sees lots and lots of dead people. In fact, so many spirits have invaded Nikki's home that she's taken to naming them letters of the alphabet just so she can tell them apart. Ghosts are like cockroaches. You never have just one. So now they're everywhere and they're ruining Nikki's life. That is, until one disembodied spirit offers a ghastly proposal to help Nikki get things back on track.

Nikki calls him G and she thinks he's dead. And that's okay with Dan. Nikki can call him whatever she wants so long as she goes back to being the woman he fell in love with. The first time Dan astrally projected into Nikki's bedroom she was pleasuring herself. But that was dozens of letters ago. Now, Nikki doesn't seem to find much pleasure in anything. Not even sex. Lucky for her, Dan has exactly what it takes to bring a woman like Nikki back to life.

Publisher Note: Hexed was previously published elsewhere and has been extensively revised for Ellora's Cave.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Hexed

ISBN 9781419925924

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Edited by Sue-Ellen Gower

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication November 2009

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HEXED

Blayne Edwards

Dedication

*For T and Q.
Congratulations.
Seriously.*

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Chapter One

“Put. The vibrator. Down!”

The TV guide Nikki had just retrieved from the mailbox sailed across the living room, sliced right through where the spirit’s pancreas used to be, and hit with an open slap against the wall behind the couch. The ghost bent forward just slightly at the waist to watch the object pass through him and then waved the vibrator in his hand.

Nikki’s teeth ground together, her hands balled themselves into fists at her sides. “I said, put the vibrator down!” Her finger circumnavigated the room. “And I want every single one of you out of my house.” She waited. “Now!”

A few of them moved, albeit slowly and not very far. One ventured into the dining room. Another drifted down the hall. Still another pirouetted wildly around the room like a see-through ballerina on crack. Nikki clamped her bottom lip between her teeth and tried not to scream. “Oh yeah,” she mumbled. “I really scared ’em that time, didn’t I?”

Her vibrator was apparently now a light-saber, complete with the appropriate noises. The spirit who had obviously prowled through her nightstand while Nikki was at work was having a jolly time playing with it. “Use the force,” he croaked at Nikki and laughed between light-saber sounds.

Nikki waved one of the peskiest of her unwanted visitors off and scanned the supernatural disaster that was her house. They were everywhere. And they were getting worse. Spirits, wraiths, whatever you wanted to call them, they had the staying power of cockroaches. And they didn’t need mates to breed. Just one of the filthy creatures had followed Nikki home from an old house she was remodeling. Just one! But the “previously animated” in question had soon realized Nikki could hear him and within a matter of days she found herself fighting a full-blown paranormal infestation.

Apparently word spreads fast on the other side.

A lot of them were merely mischievous or a pain in Nikki's ass by accident. Nikki now understood that just like when they were living, even beyond the grave some people fail to recognize their own power and ability. Disembodied emotion and energy could be very destructive if it wasn't used properly, and very few of the spirits in her house knew how to use their energy in a way that didn't drive Nikki insane. One particularly naïve spirit had shorted out several of Nikki's appliances as well as the electrical systems in her house and her car within twenty-four hours of arriving at Chateau de Spiritual.

Thankfully the worst thing "Reilly" had done in a while was develop an obsession for smearing Vaseline all over Nikki's phone receiver, the handle on the refrigerator and door and every pen, pencil, fork and spoon in the house. Nikki suspected he did it just to gross her out. Which it did.

Other spirits had a perfect understanding of the form in which they now existed and were downright malicious with their power. These unwanted visitors broke things. They had purposely crashed her computer not once, not twice, but three times. They threw things against the walls and dragged furniture across the floors in the middle of the night and constantly harassed not just Nikki, but even her family and friends anytime they tried to come over.

This was how she lived now. In constant chaos. Nikki stood in the middle of her living room as dozens of transparent figures of all shapes and sizes floated and fluttered around, and she considered that what had started out as a rather fascinating haunting by one or two ghosts had turned into a nightmare.

"Hey, Nikki? You got any more of this?"

After the first dozen or so denied remembering who they were when they were alive, Nikki had named some of them letters of the alphabet so she could tell them apart. She made it up to W, but only because Q had refused to be Q due to "non-heterosexual implications" and F had insisted upon being called "Robb" – with two b's,

if Nikki didn't mind. Eventually she'd given up on tagging them at all when she had only three letters left and seven new spirits arrived in one day.

In the kitchen doorway L was waggling an empty peanut butter jar. He raised his eyebrows when she didn't immediately respond to his request. "It doesn't have to be crunchy," he offered.

Nikki rolled her eyes at his "compromise". The spirits were noisy. They were rude. They were obnoxious in a way only someone who doesn't have to worry about where they're going in the afterlife can be. Worst of all, they were ruining Nikki's still viable and unfinished life.

Especially her sex life.

"Hold this." She slung the rest of her mail against D's chest and stormed down the hall to her room. Her bedroom. Her sanctuary. Holy water, garlic, whatever it took, Nikki's bedroom was the one place she had defended so far, and when she wasn't at work or at the market she would continue to defend against the roaches at all costs.

She was already peeling off her top as she slammed the door behind her.

"Idiots!" One shoe flung off. "Assholes!" The other shoe shot across the room. "I hate those stupid," a bracelet landed on her dresser with a *clang*! "inconsiderate," her top was hurled through the open bathroom door, "annoying sons-of-bitches!"

With a final toss, her bra was launched across the room where it landed quite unceremoniously on a transparent head.

Nikki gasped, covered her bare breasts with her hands and glared at the spirit sitting in lotus position right smack in the middle of her bed.

"What the hell are you doing in here?" she demanded. "You know you're not allowed in my bedroom." Her tone grew more insistent and she fought the urge to stomp her feet. "None of you are allowed in my bedroom!"

The spirit reached for the brassiere that had landed so that one of the cups was hiding his face. "I thought you'd be happier to see me." The spirit paused to draw in

Nikki's scent on the garment. If indeed spirits could smell. "The last time I was in here you didn't seem to mind."

The time to which he was referring suddenly popped into Nikki's head. On the night in question he floated into her bedroom without announcing himself, even when it was clear that she was masturbating, and quietly watched until Nikki was almost finished. Then, when it was too late for her to care if anyone—living or not—was watching, G floated up between her legs.

It wasn't a penis he slipped into her pussy. It didn't have shape or form. It was more like a long cylinder of energy. A shaft of vibration and warmth. Ethereal descriptions aside, whatever G used to fuck her had forced Nikki's body to explode. Never before, and not since, had she ever come with such bone-crushing intensity. Even now her nipples hardened underneath her palms at the memory.

He hadn't been back to her bedroom or her house since.

"What are you doing here, G?" she asked. "Why are you back? I thought you'd moved on."

The spirit was savoring Nikki's bra as he spoke. "I had a few things I had to take care of elsewhere," he stated. "But I came back because I had some unfinished business here."

So that's all she was to him, huh? Unfinished business? Nikki tightened her arms across her breasts and raised her defiant but quivering chin as G neatly folded Nikki's bra and laid it on his lap.

"You saving that for later?" Nikki asked, grateful for the distraction.

G laughed, placed the undergarment on her nightstand and then moved to the foot of her bed. Nikki held her breath as she watched the way he maneuvered his rippling, vibrating, translucent body. But it wasn't his spiritual attributes that had her mesmerized.

His actions were too familiar. The way G twisted and raised himself up on his knees on her mattress spoke of a man who had been there before. A man who belonged there.

One who was comfortable lounging about where Nikki slept. A living man, of course, and one who had spent many hours tossing about between the sheets with her.

Not just one night.

"If you get ectoplasm on my Egyptian cotton..."

Her veiled and unfinished threat apparently amused the ghost. His eyes were twinkling and he chuckled when he noted, "It just chaps your ass to be civil to a spirit now, doesn't it?" He was making light of her annoyance. "I suppose it would take a miracle to get you to take a serious interest in them again, wouldn't it?"

Nikki cocked an eyebrow at his question. But he was right. She did her best to keep her distance from the roaches, especially since being left alone with them to fend for herself. Of course she'd tried to make nice with them for a while after G hightailed it for places unknown, but not anymore. There were just too many of them for her to deal with. Now Nikki was simply a woman with a gift for hearing and seeing those who had passed over, and the other beings in her house were the too numerous, obnoxious dead who had invaded her life.

"So this unfinished business you were talking about," Nikki prompted. "Did you come back because you forgot something?"

"No," G said. "I didn't forget a thing. Quite the opposite, in fact."

He was quiet then and Nikki detected a strange energy permeating the air around them. She watched his chest rise and fall, giving the impression his breathing was a little ragged, although that made no sense. Spirits didn't need to breathe.

They could, perhaps, be nervous, she considered.

"Can I ask you something, Nicole?"

Nikki took a ragged breath of her own. "Sure. Ask away."

He took another moment. Gathering his nerve, she wondered? "Let's say the circumstances under which we met were different." His words were slow and deliberate as he spoke. "Do you think you could have fallen in love with me?"

Nikki opened her mouth but then closed it. Could she have fallen into what? And with whom? Jeez, this was so not something she was willing to answer. Not today, not tomorrow. Not ever if she could help it.

"That's a stupid question," she snapped much more defensively than she wanted to sound. "You're dead, remember? Any feelings that might develop for you would be a waste of time."

"Why would they be a waste of time?" he asked. "How are feelings ever wasted? You know yourself that some of the things spirits do are merely to aggravate the living. They get pleasure out of it. It amuses them. So if spirits are still capable of feeling pleasure and amusement, then doesn't it stand to reason that they could still benefit from emotions like love?"

She fidgeted for a second. That was a pretty good question, wasn't it? And a very valid point.

G's warbling, fluid face took on an even more serious form. "I've missed you, Nik."

Nikki's gut clenched although it wasn't because of what he'd said. It was because of what he'd called her. As obvious as the even more abbreviated version of her name was, G was the only spirit who had ever referred to her as "Nik". It was as if the others somehow knew that G was the only one who was close enough to her to call her something so informal.

"Well, I didn't have time to miss you," she lied. "And I really don't want to talk about this. Not right now."

He was cautious when he pressed. "Why not?"

Her modesty momentarily forgotten, Nikki used her index finger to indicate the rest of her house. G's eyes immediately went to her breasts. She ignored his stare.

"At last count I was boarding seventy-six displaced souls in a one-bathroom house. I don't get all misty when one finally goes to the other side. I'm happy when another spirit leaves."

"As you should be."

Nikki thought his comment was odd, but continued. "I didn't have time to miss you and I don't have time to fall in love with you or anyone else right now. I have to deal with these spirits. I have to find some way of stopping this influx of dead and confused. I have to figure out how to get rid of the spirits who are already here."

"Even me?" G asked. "Do you want to find a way to get rid of me, Nik?"

Nikki was quiet now because she didn't know what to say. No, she didn't want to get rid of him. She wanted him to stay right there with her from now on. It had hurt like hell when G left the first time, so Nikki knew better than to care about him now. Like it or not, sooner or later he was going to leave again. G was dead and he would eventually do what the dead always do. He would make his way onto the next stage of "life".

And then Nikki would really be hurt.

He should know her reasons for not wanting to get close to him. She and G had spent several nights talking about how none of the other spirits who had gone into the light had ever come back to report what was out there. Together they had spent many nights in Nikki's bed, contemplating the possibility that the door between realms didn't swing both ways and that once a spirit crossed over to wherever spirits go next it wasn't able to come back.

"You're a spirit," Nikki stated. "I think even you would agree that explains it all. Spirits have disrupted my life in ways I could never have imagined and I don't want anything to do with any of you, or any of this," she motioned to a bookcase full of books on the paranormal and ESP, "after this is straightened out. All I want is my life back to the way it was."

"Before the cockroaches invaded it."

"Yes."

"Before I invaded it."

Nikki narrowed her eyes at the spirit. "You are dead." She ran both hands through her hair and tugged. "We dispose of dead things. We don't keep them around. There is somewhere you are supposed to be. Why can't you see there is somewhere you belong?"

The spirit floated closer to her. His voice was very close to a whisper when he said, "I don't know, Nik. Why can't you see there's somewhere I belong?"

What was he implying? And why was he addressing her as if they were much more intimate than they were? And was that a grin on his face? Why would he be grinning? What could possibly be so damned funny?

"Nik?" A warm, unmoving wind washed over Nikki. Like a breath long ago exhaled. "Why can't you see where I belong?"

"I do see where you belong! I see it very clearly. But you...you..."

That was it. She was going to gouge out his eyes. If only he had eyes for her to gouge. Or shins for her to kick. Or hair on his arms or chest so she could reach over and pluck just one and make him scream like a girl. But G didn't have any of those things so Nikki was forced to just stand there and stew.

Damn the disembodied pain in the ass!

"I get on your nerves, don't I, Nik?"

Why was he still grinning? Nikki tightened her arms and glared at the ghost. Why the hell was this so funny to him?

"As bad as you despise all the other uninvited guests in your house," G stated, "I irritate you like no other. Don't I?"

Nikki didn't want to agree, but it was true. G got under her skin like no one, living or dead, ever had.

"Why do you think that is?" he asked.

"Maybe because you think you can simply stroll right back into my life after disappearing on me without so much as a goodbye," she snapped. "Have you ever considered that?"

Her explanation affected him in a way she didn't expect. She'd meant it as an insult. He'd taken it as something else. Something he apparently thought gave him the upper hand in the situation.

When G put his hands in his "pockets" and leaned against the oversized post on her bed, Nikki rolled her eyes.

Leave it to her to find a man without a body intriguing.

"I don't like fighting with you, Nik."

"We're not fighting."

"We're not?"

"No."

He hummed. Crossed one ankle over the other and somehow managed to go from intriguing to seriously tempting. Nikki grumbled.

"So," he began slowly, "if we're not fighting, what is this?"

She did not want to continue with this conversation. "What is what?"

He motioned from him to her. "This. What we're doing right now."

"You mean standing here wasting our time?"

The smile that suddenly lit his face was the last straw. There was no way—no way!—a man whose physical presence didn't even exist could be this damned gorgeous.

Nikki was apparently losing her mind.

"I don't think we're wasting our time."

Nikki tried to appear smug. She suspected it didn't work. "You don't think this is a waste of time, huh?"

"Nope."

Nikki bit her tongue. There was no way she was going to ask him why not. She was not going to ask him why not. She knew the gorgeous bastard was up to no good and there was no way in hell she was going to ask him why not.

“Why not?”

Dammit!

Another motionless breeze came from his side of the room. Another enveloping warmth accompanied his words.

“Because foreplay is never a waste of time.”

Chapter Two

Foreplay? Foreplay?! Nikki fought the urge to scream. The spook had to be off his rocker if he thought this was foreplay!

Nikki closed her eyes and asked herself the most obvious questions. Why did she let G bother her so much? Why did he get under her skin more than any of the others? He hadn't cost her a fortune in peanut butter, he'd never put the cat in the dryer, and to her knowledge not once had he ever coated her mascara wand with hand lotion or petroleum jelly.

So why was she so flustered now?

"It's neither fighting nor foreplay," she finally asserted. "It's not fighting because I refuse to argue with a spirit. And as for any sexual implications you may have just made, we only did that the one time. And that wasn't really sex. On top of that, it wasn't even with my consent that it happened."

G smiled and rocked back on his heels. "I don't remember you trying to push me off of you."

"How could I push you off of me?" Nikki snapped back. "You don't have a body!"

He seemed unfazed by her all-inclusive logic. "You know something, Nik?"

Nikki raised her eyebrows and spat, "What?"

Had he possessed a body there would have been a swagger in his walk as he closed the gap between them. Thank God the man didn't have a body! It was bad enough that G practically purred when he leaned close to her ear and said, "You're even more gorgeous when you're mad."

Nikki groaned. Dammit, dammit, dammit! Why was she humoring him by allowing this conversation to continue? Why didn't she just tell him to get out, or simply ignore him until he got bored and went away?

The answer was simple. He was G and G had been this way from day one. He knew how to get to her. He knew how to soften her up when she was mad enough to commit ectoplasmic genocide. Given the chance G knew how to make Nikki laugh hard enough to wet herself. And he wasn't just funny and kind. He was also supportive and positive. He'd told her time and again to fight for control over her house. He'd even advised her to "get some" when she seemed to be getting extra cranky.

G would have been the perfect man in Nikki's eyes had she run into him before he bit the big one. He was funny, smart, gorgeous, kindhearted and he'd been sweet on her since he'd stepped into her house.

If only he hadn't up and died on her before she met him.

But wasn't it just like a man to do something so thoughtless? Of course it was. And as great as G could have been, Nikki knew better than to want for something that was never going to happen.

"Care if I make an observation?" His voice was very soft when he asked.

"Why not?" Nikki resituated one hand to cover both of her nipples and reached for her shirt. G made no effort to hide his desire to study her neck, shoulders and the very decided cleavage her arm was creating by pushing her breasts up.

"I've been back for a few days now. And I've watched you. Just to see how you were doing."

Nikki would be furious about this little revelation later. Right now she wanted to know where he was going with the conversation. "And?" she prompted. "What's your verdict?"

"You've let these spirits make a mess in your life," G stated. "Now you have to clean their mess up."

It was so inviting the way G's image had gone to lean against the doorframe. He seemed so casual and relaxed. Like he honestly believed he belonged in her room. Having G so close was pleasant, and yet unsettling. Nikki clutched the shirt to her chest, all the while wishing she had the nerve to simply drop it and let his eyes have their fill.

"Thank you, Captain Obvious. Don't you think I know what kind of mess I have?"

"Yes, of course you know." G motioned around the room. "Just like I suspect you know one of the biggest messes you have to clean up is right in here. In your bedroom."

Nikki's eyes traveled along three of the four walls of the bedroom. "Mess? What mess? If anything, this is the one non-messy room in the house."

G floated around behind her and kept speaking. "I remember what kind of woman you used to be. You could find something arousing and sexual in everything." The warm touch of what she imagined were ethereal fingertips dragged softly down the center of her back. "You were a walking, talking example of sensuality the last time I saw you. It was one of the things that attracted me to you, Nik. Everyday life turned you on."

Yep. He was right again. The arguing, the fighting, the spiritual "invasion" had sucked every ounce of kink and sass out of Nikki's boudoir. And G's departure had had nothing to do with it. Nope, not one single thing.

"I still like sex," she defended. Poorly. "I just don't..."

"You don't think about it anymore," G finished her thought. "You don't bother. You're too preoccupied with the dead to do the things you used to do. You're too wrapped up in their way of life to remember your own. And I hate seeing you so dead inside. I hate seeing what living with these spirits has done to you."

G paused, put his hand on his chin and squinted. What Nikki hated was that she knew exactly what this gesture meant.

It meant G was thinking hard about some elaborate plan he wanted to put into action. And it meant the eureka! moment would happen right about...

"You need something I can provide." G flashed the same shit-eating grin he always wore when eureka! struck.

"I need something you can provide," she repeated carefully. "And what exactly do I need that you can provide?"

"Sex," G stated. "You need sex. You need great sex. In other words, you need it with a man who knows what he's doing. That's where I come in." He didn't wait for her to voice her opposition to his plan. "I am absolutely certain a daily regimen of great sex would remind you."

There were so many things wrong with this, Nikki didn't know where to start. "It would remind me of what?"

This was the eye of his brainstorm. The eureka! moment was merely a stepping stone that led to his real discovery.

Nikki cursed her own thoughts. It was so annoying to know so much about the workings of a dead man's mind.

"Great sex with a man who knows what he's doing would remind you that you are still very much alive. Remembering you're still alive will help you detach from the situation and detaching emotionally is exactly what you need to do, Nik. You're relating to these beings too much. They're dead, you're not, and yet their way has become your way. If you can remember you're still alive you'll see things more objectively. Not to mention, being sexually satisfied helps you think more clearly in any situation. And if you're thinking with a clear mind..."

"I can figure out how to get my life back," she finished with a disgusted grunt.

"Exactly."

He was smiling. Nikki, not so much. Even more annoying than knowing how his mind worked was that he knew so much about hers.

She was only somewhat annoyed that her voice and demeanor veered toward the same "problem solving mode" he had taken, when she spoke again.

"Removing myself and seeing the situation objectively probably would help me find a solution," she said. "But what's with the 'great sex helps you think more clearly' theory? Where did you come up with that?"

G cocked a crooked smile. "You're a smart, beautiful woman. I'm a guy."

"So it wasn't a theory. It was a line. A way to try to get me into bed."

The smile became even more lopsided. "Did it work?"

"No," she snapped. "Not yet."

"But it's still a pretty darned solid hypothesis, isn't it?" He winked.

Nikki's tongue searched her top teeth. Why did she always have to draw a straight line from clever to sexy?

"Your theory isn't as solid as you want to think," she challenged. "Might I remind you, G, intelligent as you are, you aren't in possession of the one component necessary for the sex act."

It was a waft of wind. Not a touch. When G's hand brushed the side of her cheek on its way to her hair, all Nikki felt was a stirring in the air. If he'd had true fingers they would be combing through her hair right now. As it was, all he was doing was creating a tickling sensation on Nikki's skin.

"Don't be so sure about that. Yes, it takes a lot of energy to take on form of that density," he explained. One of his hands came away from her hair. G pushed it into the ether where his genitals would have been and swirled it around. It was like Jell-O wobbling inside him. "And having sex with you would probably require an hour or so of intense concentration just so I'd have something solid enough for you to ride."

"But?" Flushed by the notion of riding G, Nikki turned her back to him and focused on trying to put her shirt on. "Let me guess. You're willing to go to the trouble because you think I need a boyfriend?"

He was right behind her. Nikki couldn't feel him physically, but she knew he was there. As if he comforted her like this all the time, G's arms slowly wrapped around her chest. His mouth nuzzled her neck.

"No." After working his way under her hair he nipped at the tender flesh at her nape. "I'm willing to go to the trouble because I think you need me."

He couldn't see her face, so it was safe for her to smile. "Oh, so I need you, do I?"

His voice was low when he pressed his lips against her ear and spoke. "Yes. You need sex and you need it with me."

As far as Nikki was concerned the teasing, flirtatious banter could go on for days. She was first and foremost a brain sex kind of gal, and if anyone knew how to get her gray matter all hot and bothered, it was G. Still, as much fun as this opportunity sounded, Nikki couldn't afford to enjoy any of it. Brain sex aside, Nikki was also the kind of gal who wasn't good at separating sex and the one thing she did not want from anyone.

Love.

Nikki didn't do love. She never had. And if she had her way about it, she never would.

Not even with G.

Still, even if she didn't want a repeat of the night he left, it felt good being pressed against him right now. The energy of which G was comprised made him warm, just like he'd probably been when he was alive. There was also a barely discernible vibration Nikki both heard and felt. Like thousands of tiny bees all buzzing inside his see-through shell.

Nikki wondered if G could control the intensity of those vibrations. If he could make them stronger or if there were certain outside forces that affected them.

She let those thoughts simmer as she settled into G's vibration. She had to admit, there were times when she was tempted to let her old curiosity for all things spiritual

and metaphysical resurface. From time to time she was even tempted to remember how much she once enjoyed being psychic.

Maybe she had been a little quick to condemn her current situation. What would it hurt for her to learn a thing or two about the spirit realm? She did wonder where it was exactly. And that was understandable, wasn't it? It was almost impossible to live in a house with so many spirits and not want to know more about them. And who wouldn't want to know if this realm was the only stop on an afterlife trip, or merely something a spirit visited along the way?

And maybe G was right. And maybe she should take him up on his offer. Maybe all Nikki needed was a great big...

Dose of good common sense.

"G? What's going on?"

G didn't say anything, but the lulling sensation behind her got stronger.

"You sneaky son-of-a-bitch." She gasped when a decidedly penis-shaped form pressed against her bottom. "You were trying to hypnotize me so I'd sleep with you! You paranormal pervert!"

"I like to think of myself as a pioneer in metaphysical seduction methods." He chuckled and pulled her tighter. "But yeah, whatever the history books call me, the goal is still pretty much the same."

"Oh my God!" She laughed even as she tried to pull away. For arms that were vapor they were surprisingly strong. "I'm being held hostage in my own bedroom by a ghost with a hard-on."

He laughed heartily this time and tightened his hold on her. Nikki stiffened when a fully formed palm cupped one of her breasts.

"Mmmmm," he responded through the very real sting of his teeth taking her earlobe between them. He released the bit of flesh only to immediately nip and release

it again. "My vibratory arousal technique was getting to you," he teased. "If I had a dick it would be inside you right now."

Nikki's pussy flexed but she blew out in disgust. "You wish."

He was smiling. She could hear it in his voice. "It would."

"Would not."

She was glad he didn't press the argument because Nikki wasn't a proficient enough liar to win it. How many times had she imagined the very thing he'd just teased her about? How many times had she fingered and played with herself while seeing him in her mind? Arms solid enough for her to grasp bracing his real body above her. Thick, muscular thighs covered in a thin layer of coarse hair wedged between her smaller, smooth legs. Best of all, a nice long, veined, erect penis. No, not just a penis. A hard-on. A cock. G would have something much grittier and more masculine than a mere penis.

"What did you call it? When you were alive, I mean."

He was preoccupied with trying to get the dexterity of his nonexistent fingers fine-tuned enough to pinch a nipple. "What did I call what?"

She twisted her lobe out of his teeth when his next bite became too intense. Her cunt throbbed when she imagined what those teeth would feel like on her nipples. "Before you died, what did you call your..." she paused to grind back against him, "penis?"

"Hard or soft?"

Nikki almost snorted at his question. "There's a difference?"

"Of course there is." He'd figured out how to grip with just his "thumb" and "forefinger" and was using his new skill. As he spoke, G alternated between kneading both of her breasts in his hands and pinching teasingly at her nipples. "Soft, all men are pretty much equal, so it's just a penis."

Nikki grinned. "What about when it was hard?" she asked. "What was it then?"

G made a low, seductive sound – part laugh, part growl – and slipped the image of his fingers down past the waistband of Nikki's pants.

"It was good."

If the way he was fondling her pussy was any indication of what he could do with his other body parts, Nikki knew he wasn't lying. Determined to further test his methods of "metaphysical seduction", G pressed the vibrating tips of his fingers against her clit and slid them back and forth across the swollen, sensitive lips behind it. In a matter of seconds Nikki's pussy was wet and more than just a little anxious to let him perform any number of advanced and more in-depth "tests".

"Do you like when I put my fingers inside you?"

Nikki tried to grind her hips against his hand but there was nothing there. She whimpered in frustration. "Yes. But I wish there was more."

"More fingers?"

"No." Nikki reached down and pressed her own fingers through his warm, vibrating sleeves of energy. Her fingers slid easily into her slick, creamy cunt. "More form. More substance."

"Something firm for you to fuck," he purred.

"Yes," she admitted. "I'm a vibration-based psychic, G. Every cell in my body was born to detect energy and warmth and movement most people never know is there. I'd be the perfect fuck-mate for one of you if I wasn't so fond of cock."

"So you've fantasized about having sex with a spirit," he stated.

"No." Nikki wasn't sure if she should finish her thought. "I've fantasized about having sex with you."

"How about we bring that little fantasy to life?" he asked.

He'd snatched up the opportunity in a flash. Dead or not, G obviously still had the same sexual hunger as living men did. And while his eagerness to be with her was a turn-on, she couldn't have sex with him again.

"Being with you, even like this, would be wonderful," she admitted quietly. "But everything else about you would feel wrong."

She left it at that. There was so much more to it. So much she wasn't saying. It had hurt when she thought he'd gone on to the other side, but she'd convinced herself to make good use of the time away from him.

"If I hadn't left, you'd be in love with me by now."

Damn. He'd hit that fact dead-on. Nikki groaned at her internal pun. "I told you, you're one of them. And if you think I am ever going to want you, you are seriously mistaken."

Two of his fingers pressed farther back, dipping into her pussy. Nikki gasped at the vibrating sensation they sent up the entire length of her body.

"I'm not asking you to marry me." Not to be discouraged, G urged her thighs another inch or so apart. "I'm just offering you something you haven't had in a long time."

Luckily G's chest and torso had formed enough to give Nikki something warm and firm to lean on. The sensation of G's undulating fingers working in and out of her was causing her knees to go weak and Nikki had to fight for a modicum of control over her senses so she could continue to speak.

"Even if I did agree, what's in it for you?" she asked. "You don't have a body, not a real one, and I doubt an ectoplasm shell would allow you any sexual pleasure."

His fingers paused. Her logic had caught him off guard. Still, with his typical unwavering confidence G returned a question of his own. "Why can't a man just do something good for a woman?"

Excellent question. One Nikki had asked herself many, many times.

Why couldn't men and women simply be good to one another?

Nikki sighed and wrapped her own fingers around his firm but still somewhat transparent wrist. Slowly she slid his hand out of her pants.

"That's not how it works, G. You and I both know that."

Nikki turned around just in time to see him take his fingers into his mouth.

The spirit's eyes smiled at the taste of her body.

"Sometimes that's exactly how it works," he countered. "Some men actually get off on making women happy."

Nikki crossed her arms. "I'm psychic. Not stupid."

He wasn't a fully formed person. Not completely. Nikki could still see through his chest, his thighs and the upper parts of his arms. But she would never have guessed he wasn't as solid as any man when he took both of her hands into his and easily pulled her to him.

"There is something in it for me," he admitted. "I just can't tell you what that something is. Not right now."

"So you do have an agenda."

"Yes. But not one that would in any way disrupt your life."

Well, at least he was being honest. It was more than Nikki could say for the other pests roaming about the house.

But she'd been through this before. She'd warmed up to other spirits. Tried to make friends with them. Offered to help them contact loved ones, finish unsettled business... Her kindness has been "repaid" when ten new spirits began replacing each one she helped.

She pulled herself away from him. "I'm not going through this again, G. You sound sincere. And you seem downright compassionate and caring. You always have seemed compassionate and caring toward me..."

"Maybe because I am?"

As much as his words made her heart ache, Nikki waved his interruption off. "But your caring and compassion doesn't change the fact that you are one of them. And I am finished trying to make nice with disembodied souls, especially disembodied souls who

come and go as they please the way you do. I thought you were gone, G. I thought you had gone into the light."

She was quiet while her last statement sank in. How many times had they talked about what happened next? They'd spent countless hours together, lying side by side on her bed, asking the question, after the afterlife where does a soul go? G was well aware of why she wasn't willing to do this, even if he acted like he wasn't.

"If you don't mind, G," Nikki finally stated, "I'd like for you to let go of me and get out of my house."

He hesitated long enough for her to change her mind. Nikki spent the ten seconds or so staring into two of the warmest brown eyes she'd ever seen on any man, living or dead. Was she sure she wanted him to leave, they were asking? Was she absolutely positive she wanted him gone?

"Go on," she answered them. "Get out!"

G kissed her on the forehead, let her go, and disappeared.

Nikki groaned and fell facedown on her bed.

Chapter Three

Nicole slept naked. Dan had known that much about her for a long time. She slept naked or just in panties and with the covers half off the bed, tied up in knots. Before he left, Dan had always thought her disheveled sleeping habits were cute. Now her bed reminded him of the mess that was her life.

A mess for which he felt more than just a little responsible.

He was a single letter of the alphabet to her. A keystroke. To Nikki, Dan was just one of the many “cockroaches” who’d invaded her life. He was “G”.

To Dan, Nikki was everything.

How had he fallen so in love with this woman? When had it happened, he wondered? Dan was sure at one time during his life he hadn’t felt this way because he hadn’t known Nik his entire life. But damned if he could remember a moment of that mythological time period now.

Not only did he love her like no one he’d ever loved and want her with him in his life, but Dan also wanted her with him in the lab. Nik was a very powerful psychic. Her talent for detecting and communicating with spirits was unlike any Dan had ever witnessed. She was more sensitive than the most state-of-the-art equipment he’d purchased for their research facility. Best of all, she even seemed to act as a magnet for souls that had crossed over.

She was the perfect partner for Dan in every way.

Unfortunately, Nik was now a very unwilling psychic. The spirits roaming about her house had made her abilities a liability rather than a gift, and apparently she’d lost all desire to use her talents. As far as being his partner in any other way, Nik seemed even less enthusiastic.

Dan knew he was to blame for such a negative change of heart.

Being psychic was probably stressful enough. Dan couldn't imagine hearing and seeing a completely different reality than the reality everyone else hears and sees. It would no doubt be maddening. Add to the maddening mix the presence of a few dozen spirits, not all of whom were the kind of people you'd take home to Mom, and the stress level had to rise significantly.

Still, the last straw had most likely been when Nik thought Dan had gone into the light. Before he left she was beginning to fall in love with him. She hadn't said as much and probably never would now. But she had definitely entertained the idea of falling for him. Dan didn't have to be psychic to know Nik had seriously considered loving with him.

In hindsight he probably should have told her he wasn't dead. It probably would have been a good idea if prior to his leaving he had admitted he was still very much alive and that he had been performing paranormal research on astral projection the night she discovered him floating around her house.

He also should have let her know he was just leaving long enough to get their lab and equipment and research grant money in order. He should have told her he'd be back. But since he'd come into her life under somewhat fishy circumstances and hadn't exactly garnered the nerve to tell her the truth so far, the right time and place to break that news never came around.

As bad as the situation had gotten just in the past couple of months, Dan couldn't blame her for trying to shut out what she heard and saw and felt. But he was determined to find a way to make her want to use her gifts again, even if only because using them was what he wanted her to do.

His plan was a bit underhanded. He'd be the first one to admit the ploy was a bit manipulative. But, he reasoned, many men had used the power of seduction and love for much less noble causes. Besides, it wasn't as if falling in love with him would be an unpleasant result, nor would her affections be spurned. On the contrary. Dan had been in love with Nik for a long time. Yet another secret he hadn't yet divulged to her.

He'd divulge it tonight. Dan was going to tell Nik he loved her right after he told her he wasn't dead. The question was, where to start?

Dan slipped off his shoes, stripped out of his jeans and tugged his shirt over his head. Careful not to wake her, he then slid into bed beside her. He slowly inched over until his body was pressed against hers, and then stifled a moan. It was as if the curve of her back and ass had been carved just for him. Dan sighed as he melded his chest and pelvis and cock against her.

That very organ immediately sprang to life. Nik was warm. Warm like life. Warm like all spirits yearned to possess again. Yes, spirits could generate warmth because the soul is energy. But something about the fleeting, temporary heat of fixed, organic flesh made it attractive to beings that had crossed to the other side.

She would be even warmer on the inside. Her pussy would be snug and slick and hot. It would give just enough to take his dick when he plunged in, and then it would resist just enough to torture him when he withdrew and plunged again. He had yet to explore her pussy with his physical hands or cock or mouth, but judging from what even the primitive receptors in his ethereal body had detected, being inside Nik would be better than being inside Heaven itself.

Dan snuggled closer to her, fitting the curve of her body into his side. She hummed in her sleep and rolled over without waking. One hand fell dreamily above her head.

She was exposed down past her bellybutton. The sheet wasn't even high enough to completely cover the dark patch of hair between her thighs.

And her nipples. He'd caught a glimpse of them in the daylight when she let her guard and her hands down, and he'd seen them many times in the dark as he sat across the room, dozing in a chair. But he'd never seen them this way. Not this close and not in this much detail.

Dan's cock jerked in anticipation at the sight of the dark pink tips. They looked sweet. Tempting. Like plump, ripe berries. Answering an urge sent out by good old-

fashioned male desire, Dan dragged his tongue up one of peaks, and then grew still to judge her reaction.

The moistened nipple stiffened. No other part of Nik moved. Dan licked the peak again and then teased the other one for a moment. Both nipples were now arching up and out.

Dan's cock throbbed.

She made a noise, a whimper, when Dan carefully slid his hand down her belly and underneath the sheet. When she didn't wake up and she didn't resist, he proceeded until the tips of his fingers located a swirl of damp, prickly curls.

His index finger slipped in easily. Her pussy was already wet. Already primed and waiting for his cock. Dan smiled because he'd managed to arouse her even while she was asleep. He dragged the finger up and over the tiny bump of her clit, pausing to stimulate it to its full extent before slipping his index and middle fingers inside her again.

In and out he worked the digits. Fingering her, testing the warm velvet of her cunt in between passes over her clit. All the while imagining how tight and hot the walls of her pussy were going to be around his shaft.

Nik was a sound sleeper. Or perhaps she was simply exhausted after her emotional outburst that evening. Either way, she didn't seem to rouse at all as Dan lay beside her, fingering her and kissing her neck and shoulders and breasts.

Part of him wanted her to wake. One corner of his brain reminded him it was wrong to feel her up while she was unable to defend herself or tell him to stop. But the man in him, the part of him that was pure male energy and sex drive and who hadn't even thought about fucking another woman since he'd met Nik nearly a year ago, wanted to fuck her regardless of whether she was awake and willing or not.

The old Nik, the one he'd met when he first stumbled upon this spiritual goldmine, would be aroused by the thought of such ungentlemanly advances. The woman Nik really was wanted a man who would toss her facedown on the bed and fuck her long

and hard and until they were both exhausted. Dan wondered if she would still admit she'd relayed the fantasy to him.

Probably not. This was not the old Nik. This was a woman who was fed up with all things spiritual and probably most things male. Still, against his better judgment, Dan slipped the sheet off the lower half of Nik's body and urged her legs apart.

She stirred when he positioned himself between her thighs, but she didn't seem to wake. Not even when he pressed the head of his dick against her pussy did she show signs of consciousness.

"Nik?" he whispered. Her breathing pattern changed slightly but she didn't open her eyes. The head of his dick was pressed against her warm moist opening. Dan knew one push, a single almost effortless thrust and he could be inside her.

But he also knew one effortless thrust could mean the difference in having her once and having her for a lifetime.

"Nik?" he tried again, this time kissing her ear and neck as he said it. "Nicole, sweetheart? Wake up."

This time she stirred, her eyes fluttering as she tried to focus on his face. "G?"

"Yes, it's me."

He felt her wiggle underneath him so he started to roll off her. "No!" she ordered sleepily. "I didn't want you to move." Her fingers began to explore his sides and forearms and back. "I just can't believe how heavy you are."

Dan wasn't sure how to respond to her statement. She didn't seem angry. And yet something about her tone wasn't quite right.

"How did you do this?" She was excited, no doubt about it. Dan would always remember how she sounded when something metaphysical or unusual excited her. "Your body. It's so firm and warm and..." She paused to run her hands down the backs of his thighs. Dan moaned and couldn't help but push the tip of his cock inside her. This

excited her even more. Nik wrapped her legs around his waist and pulled him in an inch or so deeper. "I want to feel it," she urged. "I want to know if it feels real."

Dan froze. This was so not good. Nik was reacting just the way he'd hoped she would react when she woke with him beside her. But she was apparently excited to have him in her bed because she thought he was a spirit who had manifested a physical body.

What a strange twist this was. Nik was happy because she thought he really was dead.

"I want it," she said yet again in a decidedly sleepy bedroom voice. Dan felt her dig her heels into his ass and pull him tighter. "I want all of it inside me."

Dan's mind was still evaluating the situation. Still weighing his options and trying to decide exactly how the problem could best be handled. His body, however, was singing a completely different tune. One that sounded a lot like, "Your wish is my command, madam."

Nik's sweet little cunt was hot and slick and wet, just as he'd expected it to be. Every inch of Dan's cock was engulfed by liquid fire as he pressed his entire shaft inside her. When she cooed and giggled at the same time she flexed her calves and urged his ass to push harder, Dan almost lost it. He'd wanted her to warm up to the idea of having him in her bed tonight. But this? Nik hadn't simply warmed up to him. She wasn't just willing to share her bed with him.

She was absolutely thrilled by the idea of fucking him. She was receptive to a fault. Happy beyond measure to have his cock inside her.

"Fuck me," she whispered into his ear. Dan felt her wiggle her butt again and he was suddenly able to thrust even deeper. "It seems so real. Will it come?" she asked.

Dan slowed his strokes and opened his mouth to answer. Unfortunately he had no idea what he should say.

No matter. Nik was already on it. "Fuck me harder," she ordered seductively. "Let's see if we can make it come."

Her referring to such a major player in Dan's personal game as "it" probably should have bothered him. But there were all those other words around "it". "Let's" and "we" told him she wanted them to do this together. "If" and "make" told him she knew he might be fucking her for a while. And he was fine with that. And then of course there was "come". How could Dan ever forget "come"?

Dan smiled down into Nik's endless blue eyes as he thrust and ground and stroked inside her. She met each stroke and ground in return and was evidently willing to work just as hard as he was in their quest.

But their quest for what?

For Dan, this was an emotional event. He'd even wondered if it would be wise of him if he told her he loved her while he was inside her. But for Nik, he suspected this was something else.

"Can I ride it?"

At her innocent, frankly worded question, Dan stopped moving altogether.

"I don't know why but this is making me hornier than anything ever has in my life," she explained. "Maybe because I'm having sex with a ghost or maybe because this is such a huge discovery or..."

"Or maybe because you're with me?" he asked.

Nik's face softened immediately but her eyes were still sparkling in excitement as she pushed herself up on her elbows. "Let me on top." Dan gathered her legs and ass in his arms and rolled them without leaving her body.

He moaned when Nik rocked back on his cock and the baby soft skin of her butt met the fronts of his thighs. She moved to and fro for a moment, changed directions and made circular motions on his shaft and then went back to to and fro. Everything she did felt good. Best of all, Dan was able to be deep inside her and not have to worry about hurting her when he went too deep.

This was exactly what he liked with a woman. His cock buried as far as it could go inside that warm, wet passage between her legs. The feel of her sliding back and forth on his shaft, and to watch her breasts jiggle and bounce as she rode him. Only one thing could possibly the experience any better.

"I want to come," she spoke in breathless spurts as she stroked. "This feels too good. I want to come while you're inside me."

Yes, that.

Chapter Four

He was one of them. A cockroach. A metaphysical thorn in her side. But he was intriguing and intelligent, he was warm and hard, and he was proving to be a damned good piece of ass.

Best of all, he was G. He'd been correct when he'd said the reason she was so horny was because it was him. Dead, cockroach or not, Nikki had always wanted to fuck G.

The cock he'd materialized was long and thick and it filled her completely. Not too big. It wasn't obscene or scary. But it wasn't small by any stretch of the imagination. There was nothing painful, uncomfortable or lacking about having him inside her.

He'd created a perfect fit between his body and hers.

She had to wonder if he'd had any control over such details. Had G been able to focus on the organ and determine its size, or had he merely focused on forming a body and taken what he got? She also wondered if his ethereal cock mirrored the one he'd had in real life. Had he been well endowed back then or was every man's vision of Heaven correct and they were all blessed in the afterlife?

These were all questions she'd ask him later. At a more opportune time. For now, she had other research she needed to do. Namely, she wanted to know if the surprisingly lifelike ghost cock inside her would come.

"If I come will it help you?" she asked. "Some men get off on seeing a woman climax."

His voice was strained when he returned, "I'm sure it wouldn't turn me off."

Nikki started to laugh but gasped instead when she rocked back a little far and the head of his cock ventured too deep. She closed her eyes and settled more comfortably on his shaft. "I love this," she hummed sleepily.

"You love what?"

"This penis," she quipped. "This erection. This..."

"This huge cock I made for you?"

Nik slowed her movements and opened her eyes. A grin was quickly spreading across her face. She knew it. He had had some control over the body he now had, and being a typical male he'd focused most of his energy on one particular body part.

"You made it for me, huh?" She smiled. "Because you knew how much I love big cocks?"

"I said 'huge'. Not just big." They both snickered at his lighthearted boast until G thrust a series of quick upward strokes that took Nikki's breath away. "No, I didn't know what kind of cock you'd like," he responded while she panted. "But I knew you'd love mine. It wouldn't have mattered how it turned out." He thrust upward again, only this time she was ready for him. Nikki braced herself and let him have his turn fucking her. "You'd have loved it no matter what."

She tried not to smile at his slightly awkward but no less adorable attempts at being romantic. "You think so?"

"Uh-hum."

"And what gave you the impression that I'd be so accepting of whatever you ended up with when all the ectoplasm was dry?" she asked.

"Because you love me," he said quietly. Carefully, she noticed. "And when you love someone you take them however they are."

His statement had fingers. Big, strong fingers that reached in and grabbed both Nikki's guts and her heart at the same time. They grabbed, and then they squeezed. Hard.

Nikki didn't recognize the voice that uttered, "I never said I loved you."

"But you do. You love me as much as I love you."

Nikki was shaking her head when he rolled them over and pressed her back on the bed. She didn't like where this was going. She didn't like it at all. Not even when he settled on top of her and began to move in and out of her in a painfully perfect rhythm did she like where this was headed.

He kissed her neck. Her left cheek and then her chin. But when he got to her mouth, he didn't kiss. Not yet. He simply used his lips to nuzzle her lips apart.

"I love you, Nik." Nikki hated how eager her mouth was to take the fleeting kiss he placed on her lips. "I've loved you for a long time."

It was right there. Right in front of her. The chance to tell G how she really felt about him, the chance to feel his lips against hers the way a man's lips are supposed to feel against those of the woman he loves. All the warmth and tenderness and intimacy only two people who do love one another can share was right where it should be. All she had to do was take it.

Or turn it down.

"I think it's odd how in a fully formed physical state a spirit breathes," she said quietly. "Doesn't that surprise you?"

He wasn't crushed by her refusal to take what he'd laid out for her, but it didn't feel good. Nikki's heart and guts squeezed themselves this time as she stared up into the eyes of a man whose heart she had just rejected.

No, she reminded herself, it wasn't his heart because he didn't have a heart. G wasn't alive. And this wasn't his body.

Nikki pushed all such thoughts from her mind and concentrated on the "data" at hand. G's ethereal penis was more than just lifelike. It had ridges. Veins. A rim around its head that Nikki detected as G's cock moved in and out of her. The shaft of his faux member slid as easily into her vagina as any real penis would have.

Well, of course it slid easily. Nikki's pussy was wetter than it had ever been. She suspected her pussy was wet within seconds of G entering her bedroom. Her body had always reacted to him even when he was nothing more than a misshaped cloud with a

head. But it was when G let his fingers explore her pussy that she realized how badly she wanted a bigger, more substantial part of him inside her.

And a bigger, more substantial part of him was exactly what she was getting. After she'd let the door slam on her chance to return his declaration of love, she'd almost expected him to get up and leave. He'd made no effort to go. Instead, he had shifted his position just slightly, changed the angle of his hips, and proceeded to fuck her even harder.

"I want you to come," he said between nips to her neck and shoulder. "You need to come. It will relieve some of the stress that's been building over the past few months."

At this point it surprised Nikki that he was even remotely concerned about her pleasure. Or her stress level for that matter.

"What else can I do?" he asked. "Is this angle working?"

How odd it was to be with a man who actually took an interest in the mechanics of what was going on at a time like this. Most men would only be interested in one thing right now. Thrusting, grunting, fucking. Sure, some of the more giving would make sure she had what she needed as soon as they were finished themselves. But G was making Nikki's needs a priority.

Even after what she hadn't said to him.

What G didn't know was how right he was about her needing some sexual release. It had been months since she'd even thought about sex, never mind taking the time to see to her own needs. In fact, if memory served, the last time she'd had an orgasm was probably...

"Suck my nipples," she suggested and pushed the thought out of her head. To admit she hadn't thought about sex or had sex or even masturbated since the last time she was with G smacked much too much of monogamy and longing for one man.

Correction, longing for one dead man.

"You could nibble on them if you want."

"If I want?" He was trying not to smile as he brought a breast to his mouth. "What I want is for you to come. Will you come if I bite your nipples?"

When his lips clamped down on the peak, Nikki closed her eyes. "I don't know. Maybe." She moaned when the pleasure of his mouth on her grew too intense. "Most likely."

He licked, teased it, wet it, and then drew the peak between his teeth. When a whimper escaped her lips, he released it.

"Do you like when I bite your nipples?"

Nikki wrapped the fingers of one hand into the back of his hair and moaned.

"Oh yes. I like it a lot."

When he repeated the action on the other side Nikki wove her fingers into the back of his hair.

"Are you afraid I'll hurt you?" He bit a little harder this time.

Nikki grinned and lifted her hips. She was very close to coming. So very, very close. She could literally feel her orgasm building around his dick. Nikki closed her eyes and savored the tingling in her fingers and toes and at the base of her spine.

"You're a cockroach," she breathlessly reminded him. "Left to your own devices there's no telling what you might do."

G chuckled and dragged his teeth across a peak, sucking just hard enough on her left nipple to trigger a sensation all the way down to her cunt. Nikki ground her clit against his pubic hair and bit down on her bottom lip.

"But I'm your favorite cockroach, am I not?"

He didn't press his question, and that was fine with her. Of course he was her favorite. He was her only, truth be told. But Nikki wasn't about to tell him that, and besides, her entire body was growing more and more tense. Anticipating release. Getting ready to let go and fall.

"Suck on this one." She pushed her other nipple into his mouth. He took it eagerly, biting down harder than she would have allowed him to if she hadn't already started to explode inside.

Nikki cried out and her back involuntarily arched, contorting her body and pulling her clit away from him. G reached under her, cupped her ass with both hands and forced her body back to his. When he ground against her this time, Nikki was sure her entire body would split in half.

He wouldn't let her pull away. Not even when the intensity was so strong Nikki thought she would lose her mind if forced to endure one more second would he let her go.

Was G coming too? She wasn't sure. Did spirits have semen? Were they supposed to have orgasms?

Right now the scientific details of his sexual experience didn't matter. Not while Nikki's cunt was flexing and releasing around his cock. This ethereal shaft he had managed was perfectly shaped and proportioned for her pussy to squeeze and release as his surprisingly realistic mouth, tongue, teeth and lips continued to suck and bite and lick at her nipples.

Nikki came for much longer than she expected. And even after the waves from her orgasm began to recede, her body continued to quiver and pulse for several minutes as she lay there with G's still erect cock still inside her.

Exhausted and more satisfied than she could ever remember being, Nikki went limp into the pillows behind her.

G's fingertips were gentle as they roamed up and down her arms and sides. "Now, isn't that better?" he asked. "Don't you feel much less angry and stressed out?"

"Yes." Nikki hadn't caught her breath yet. "I feel much better, in fact." The smile melted from her face as she realized G was still extremely hard. "You didn't come."

"I know."

She was shaking her head. "I really didn't think you would. It doesn't make sense for a spirit to have an orgasm. Orgasms are for the reproduction of life. So it would be silly for a ghost, who is obviously never going to reproduce life, to climax. Right?"

He was quiet. Nikki wasn't sure why.

"And it's not like you need to come. If you don't really have a body then you can't really get blue balls."

"Of course not."

Something was off. G was acting very peculiar. Nikki's brow furrowed. "Don't you think that makes sense?"

"What?" he asked. "That ghosts don't come?"

"Yes. Like I said, why would you? Semen is a building block of life. And spirits don't give rise to life."

G shrugged, his still erect but still not real penis resting inside her. "Maybe we just have muscle spasms."

"You don't have muscles," she reminded him.

"Maybe orgasms are stress relief for us too."

"Stress?" She thought his theory comical. "What stress? It's not like you can bounce a check, G. You're dead!"

The noise he emitted sounded strangely like a whimper. "I guess you're right," he admitted almost pitifully. "Apparently ghosts don't have orgasms."

"Maybe not," Nikki hummed while his erection slid out of her. When G rolled to his side and lay down beside her, she wasted no time in snuggling against him. He flinched when she grasped his sticky shaft in her hand. "How long do you think it will stay this way?"

The whimper was back again. "I have no idea."

Nikki ran her hand up and down it a couple of times. "I just can't believe how lifelike it is." Her slick palm rounded its head. "I never thought I'd want to know

another thing about the astral realm, but I have to tell you," she pumped his ethereal shaft three or four times, "this little mystery has me intrigued." She rounded its head again.

G jumped out of bed like something had bit him.

But of course that was insane, Nikki thought. Everybody knew astral bodies didn't have nerve endings.

"Where are you going?"

G stuck out his index finger and then spun until it was pointing to the other end of the house. "I have to go."

"Go where?"

He was still pointing. "Warcraft." He nodded. To himself, it seemed. "Huge Worlds of Warcraft thing going on tonight. Yes." He nodded yet again. "I have a Worlds of Warcraft thing tonight and I almost forgot about it."

"A Warcraft thing? Here?" Nikki indicated the bed. "In my house?"

G nodded yet again and then shook his head. "Not completely. Not really." When Nikki looked confused, he reached for his pants. "Warcraft isn't really anywhere, is it? It's just sorta..." He made a whistling sound and let his eyes scan the ceiling. "Out there somewhere. Like spirits are."

So the cockroaches were sitting up playing Warcrack all night, huh? Nikki grunted. That explained why her computer kept getting hacked. Knowing she was up against a force no real woman had ever defeated, she waved G towards the door.

"Well?" she prompted.

He was still standing with his jeans in his hands. "Well, what?"

Nikki sighed and settled into bed. His leaving was probably for the best, she decided. She was deliriously satisfied and liable to say anything if he stayed and cuddled her for more than a minute and a half.

She waved him away again. "Go on!" Nikki made a shooing noise. "Go play Warcrack with the rest of the vermin."

Ouch. One cockroach's feelings, thoroughly stomped.

G didn't pay for Nikki's remark alone. As she lay in bed watching G find his shoes and socks, she noticed those fingers were back. This time they were telling her she really wanted him to stay. That it didn't matter if he was alive or not. And when she didn't agree with what those fingers said, they reached into her chest. Felt around for a heart to grab and squeeze and rip out.

At least they waited until G closed the door on his way out before they found it.

Chapter Five

Dan had been back at his own house for almost three hours and he was still hard. Rock-hard. Not even the blast of a cold shower was working. He'd imagined every unappealing, nonsexual situation, person and object he could think of. And yet every time his erection seemed to be waning, she popped back into his head.

And he was instantly hard again.

It wasn't just being nuts about Nikki that was keeping him aroused. Sure, he was all kinds of crazy about her. And the closet romantic in Dan would love to believe only sweet, heartfelt emotions were perpetuating his erection.

As it is with most hard-ons, however, the truth was driven more by lust than love. The truth was, Dan suspected Nikki would be a great fuck. He hadn't lied when he'd told her he wanted her to come to relieve stress, and making her come had been his main objective tonight. But now that he knew her a little better, what she liked and what turned her on, it seemed to him if they were ever together under more honest circumstances they would definitely click sexually.

But was he ever going to find himself in the middle of such circumstances?

She wouldn't tell him she loved him. She wouldn't even talk about any feelings she might have for him. Worst of all she hadn't acted the least bit concerned when he got up and said he was leaving.

He'd really hoped she would put up a little bit of a fight and ask him to stay.

But she hadn't asked him anything. She'd even waved him off.

Dan stood in the spray of the shower, staring at his dick. It was still waving at full mast. Still aching to have Nikki's perfect, wet pussy wrapped around it. He gripped his shaft and imagined he was inside her again.

At least Nikki was more enthused about life now. She'd actually gotten excited over the idea that an astral body could materialize. But that was all she'd gotten excited over. The possibilities of materializing on the astral realm and how detailed and lifelike an astral cock could be.

It hadn't even been he who had aroused her sexually. She'd said it herself, it was the idea of fucking a ghost that made her horny. The notion that his dick wasn't real had made her wet. It wasn't Dan she was eager to fuck. Her pussy being so slick and hot when he was inside her had nothing to do with the man he was, and it definitely wasn't because she felt any love or affection for him that had made her want to ride him.

What had he done?

He'd fixed one problem by causing another. That's what. She was perked up now. Happier, cheerful, more enthusiastic about a subject that was a huge part of her life than she probably had been in a long time.

But at what cost to Dan?

He'd only thought he'd known frustration before. He'd wanted other women. His dick had been hard before because he wanted a woman.

This time was different. Never before had he had this much pent-up energy and need. It was a need that was threatening to become something else – something vile that comes out in a man if he isn't strong enough to back it down.

This was it, wasn't it? Dan had always wondered what would turn a sane, rational, good-hearted man into someone who would do the unspeakable. This was the kind of need that spawned crimes of passion, he suspected. He'd always wondered what gave rise to those acts, and now he knew.

The right woman. That's all it took. The most frightening thing he realized was that until a man finds the trigger for such extreme emotions, he doesn't really know they exist, and yet by the time he knows they exist, it's too late.

Dan would never let himself get that out of control though. He would never let his frustration turn to anger. It just wasn't in his nature the way it was in the nature of some men. He was logical. A man of science. He knew what he had to do in order to get rid of the frustration before it turned into something ugly.

He had to find some way to get through to Nikki. She loved him. He was sure of it. But if that love was ever going to matter, and if they were ever going to be together, he had to convince her to forgive him for leaving and to let go of her anger and resentment for her gift and for the beings who were drawn to her because of what she could do.

Most of all, he had to find a way to do all of that without having to pretend he was dead.

His cock would probably disagree with his claim that he wasn't like other men who let their passion overrule their minds. Especially given the rather vicious way Dan wrapped his fingers around its shaft and began to jerk off.

* * * * *

"What are you doing?"

Nikki didn't look up or answer. Dan read her silence as permission to enter her room. She was sitting crossed-legged in the middle of the bed. Dan stretched out across the pillows behind her.

"Are you working?"

"Yes."

Visible between the tail of her shirt and the waistband of her pants were the indentions at the small of her back. He leaned forward and kissed one of them.

"What are you doing?" She stopped shuffling the paperwork in her hands.

He let his lips trail from one dimple to the other. "I'm kissing you."

"Why?"

His fingers and lips were real this time as well. Dan wondered if she'd notice or even care when he used one hand to knead the flesh of her side. She didn't comment so he kissed the dimples again.

"Because I didn't kiss you very much the last time we did this."

"The last time we did what?"

Her voice was cold, still completely without emotion, but goose pimples were rising on her skin. Dan pressed his mouth against her and placed a teasing bite to her side. She used her elbow to nudge him away.

Not to be deterred, Dan nibbled at her again. "We didn't kiss very much the last time we made love."

"Made love?" she asked. Her papers were suddenly even more important. "Is that what you think that was?" she asked. "You thought we were making love?"

Dan used the pad of his thumb to trace the vertebrae visible above her waistband.

"We fucked." The words were vulgar when she said them. They made his dick even harder. "That's all we did. We didn't make love. We just fucked. You said it yourself, I needed sex. I needed good sex. And fucking you did make me feel a lot better."

Dan pushed the tail of her shirt up and kissed a higher spot on her back. "So you thought it was good?" he teased. "Was it the best you've ever had or just good?"

She raised a brow and if he wasn't mistaken, challenged, "I've had better."

Dan swung his legs off the bed and went around to face her. "Are you trying to pick a fight?" He grinned, shoved her paperwork onto the floor, and pushed her thighs apart with his own. He then pinned her back on the bed by her wrists. "Because I have a much better activity in mind if you feel like fighting."

"G, I am trying to wor—"

Her mouth was her most powerful weapon. The woman could cut a man to ribbons with that tongue of hers if allowed to say what was on her mind.

Dan was determined to put an end to that problem. At least for a few minutes.

Just as he expected, she did fight him. At first. Grunting, grinding, struggling to free her hands and push him away from her mouth. She resisted much longer than Dan would have thought she would, even for Nikki.

But he persisted longer. And whether she gave in or just got tired, Nikki finally relaxed, stopped squirming, and let him kiss her properly.

She tasted wonderful. Sweet and warm. Like fruit. Dan wondered if the velvet of her tongue wrapped around his cock would feel as exquisite as the velvet of her cunt had.

Possibly better, he decided.

"I miss you." He stopped kissing her long enough to divulge just a hint of the truth. "I miss the way you used to be. The way you really are."

Even after giving in and kissing him the way he'd wanted her to, Nikki's face was still somewhat hard. "What do you mean, the way I really am?"

He tasted her neck. Her earlobes. The hollow of her throat. "I mean the way you were back in the beginning. When I first came here."

"You mean before all this bullshit from the other side ruined my life."

He bit her bottom lip to punish her for her comment. She whimpered until he let it go but he felt her thighs tighten around his legs.

"Do you feel that way about me? Do you think I ruined your life?"

"Yes."

Dan wasn't at all happy with her answer. And even if she did feel this way, he was determined to make her change her mind. He released one wrist and undid a button on her blouse. He undid another. And then another. Finally he slipped his fingers inside her bra and caressed her nipple.

"I think maybe my guilt is circumstantial," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"If I were the only spirit in your house, do you think you'd still feel this way?"

Her eyes flashed in defiance. "Yes," she blurted. Her face never softened even as the peak in his fingers puckered. Her spine straightened as her nipple got harder. "No," she did admit. "Probably not."

Dan smiled at her change of heart and tugged her blouse down her arms. He unlatched the snap on the back of her bra and sat back.

Just what he wanted to see. Her breasts bounced when they tumbled out.

He wanted to taste them again. He wanted to lick them and bite them and even wrap them around his dick and fuck them. And he wanted to come on them. On her tits and in her mouth and up her pussy. He'd jacked off three times the night before and yet he'd still never wanted to come this bad in his life.

But ghosts don't have orgasms. Or so they had agreed the night before.

"I got this thing to come last night." This idea had suddenly occurred to him from out of nowhere. As for the urge to clutch his cock the way he just had, he hadn't a clue where the gesture came from. He wasn't usually a cock-clutching kind of guy. "Just like the real thing."

Her eyes immediately brightened. "You're kidding!" He shook his head. "So when you say it came, you mean..."

"Just like a real cock." He almost felt guilty for doing this. Almost. "Spasms, ejaculation, the works."

"And cum?" she asked. "There was actual cum?"

Where was this side of him coming from? It had to be that vile part of him he'd caught creeping up his spine the night before. Dan had never been the kind of man to imagine the things he was imagining now. He loved sex just as much as the next guy, and just like every other red-blooded man, he'd never met a blowjob he didn't like. But he'd never fantasized about literally fucking a woman in the mouth. Sure, he'd passively let a woman suck him off. What man didn't enjoy having his cock gobbled? Still, the image in his mind at the moment was of Nikki on her knees in front of him while he held her face in his hands and fucked her mouth.

Dan tried to shake it off. It had to be the innocent expression on Nikki's face and the way her surprised mouth was a small, pink "O," he decided. And it had nothing to do with the fact that he suspected she'd like it as much as he would.

"Yes, there was cum," he confirmed. She smiled and his cock twitched inside his jeans. "A thick, white stream of cum."

Where the hell had that unnecessary description come from, he wondered? Within seconds it didn't matter because it accomplished exactly what Dan suspected it was supposed to.

"I wonder if it tastes like cum," she smiled and said casually. "It's probably some sort of ectoplasm, but I wonder if it's salty or if it feels or smells like real semen."

If Dan didn't know better he'd say the little minx was baiting him. He resisted the urge to jump up and do a little dance. Instead he coolly shrugged and said, "One way to find out."

Her eyes very clearly showed how excited she was over this newest "discovery", and, he hoped, over the idea of fucking him again. One thing was sure, Nikki was suddenly alive again. She was passionate instead of just pissed off. In theory, Dan's plan was working. She was remembering the things that used to make her happy. The things she used to love to explore and learn about. Things like sex and the spirit realm and how parts of her personified both of those things. Yes, he was lying to her to get her to see what she'd been missing, but hopefully this deception was going to prove worth the risk in the long run.

He knew he should go ahead and tell her he wasn't dead. It was probably way past time to spill the beans about his research and how he'd been practicing astral projection the night he came across her house and all its paranormal activity. She was a smart woman. If Dan gave her that information she'd figure out on her own that his cock seemed lifelike because it was indeed a real cock.

Unfortunately for truth's sake, Nikki had unzipped his jeans and was holding that very organ in her hand. She was examining it, as one would a dinosaur bone or some prehistoric artifact.

"Take off your jeans."

The order hadn't come from Dan. It had come from the part of him that had imagined fucking her mouth. Even so, Nikki only hesitated briefly before releasing his penis and reaching for the snap on her pants.

He considered that he should probably give Nikki a little time. He should help her warm up or, even more appropriately, warm her up himself. Besides, he'd never been an impatient lover and it really wasn't his style to rush.

But this raging hard-on had tortured him for two long days. So as soon as Nikki could wriggle out of her clothes, Dan pressed the head of his dick against her pussy, and then pushed every inch of it inside her. Deep inside her. All the way down to his balls.

Nikki's cunt was a temperature a man only dreams of finding. Hot and slick and tight. He stroked slowly, in and out, quite sure he had never had pussy this divine.

"God, you feel good, woman."

Dan moaned when his compliment was rewarded by Nikki skillfully gripping his cock with her vagina. The sensation was odd at first. But when the inside of Nikki's pussy rippled up and down Dan's shaft, he realized what she was doing was going to push him over the edge. Quickly.

Which was probably exactly what she was trying to do.

"That's a nice little trick." He barely managed to speak. "Something they only teach psychics?"

"It's called *pompoir*." She flexed again, threatening to milk the cum right out of his balls with her actions. Dan was forced to pull out. Nikki seemed pleased to have

manipulated his body so easily. "It's a sexual art." She grinned. "Never thought I'd use it for something like this though."

Something like this? It was true she was more enthusiastic, but Nikki's tone was still a bit cold.

"I've never been a minute man." Dan took a deep breath, trying to regain some self-control. "I mean, when I was alive I was always able to hold out until the woman I was with got what she needed."

"I noticed that last night." She wrapped her legs around his waist and urged part of his cock back inside her. "But this isn't about my orgasm. Today, I want to make you come. I want to see it happen." A shuddering sensation gripped Dan's cock and pulled it the rest of the way inside her.

He grunted and his entire body tightened. "How the hell did you do that?"

Nikki grinned. "My pussy muscles are trained to a level of precision and skill most people don't even know is possible."

"Like the mind can be trained." Dan grunted again when a sucking motion inside her cunt drew him in even deeper. He tried to ignore her rather lewd and arousing description of her intimate parts. "Or like your mind is trained."

His observation obviously pleased her. "Yes. Exactly like the mind can be trained."

This was too much. Dan had never come this fast and he wasn't about to let a woman, even this woman, control his climax this easily. Hoping to diffuse some of the intensity, Dan thrust once. Twice. It took three times before Nikki made the tiny mewling sound he wanted to hear.

Unfortunately the noise had the opposite effect he desired. It made Nikki sound helpless, like a small animal Dan had caught and was about to consume. It made him want to fuck her even harder.

Apparently it had the same effect on Nikki. With an affection he hadn't yet seen in her, she leaned up and took several gentle bites of his upper chest and throat before

traveling north and pressing her lips against his mouth. It shocked Dan at first. That she would willingly kiss him, especially like this. The kiss was tender and soft. It was a loving, passionate act. Like one that would have come from the woman Dan had always suspected Nikki was.

When they mutually broke the kiss, Dan grinned at her. "Is it really so bad having me around?" He stroked long and slow inside her. "Be honest. You do seem to be a little happier since I'm back."

"I never said that," she quipped playfully.

True, Dan thought to himself. *But you never said you loved me either.*

And yet, you do.

Chapter Six

You love me, Nik. You know you do.

Dan wanted to confront her with those exact words, but he didn't want to push his luck. Not right now. Maybe later, but not while there were so many things that could go wrong.

Thankfully his thrusts had slowed both of them down. Minutes earlier, Dan's sole objective had been to come. Now that he was inside her, he wanted his erection to last. Her pussy felt too good to abandon.

"I could stay inside you forever."

She didn't vocally return his sentiment, but she smiled and Dan noticed her body growing taut. This time the muscles inside her pussy were beginning to involuntarily flex and relax around his cock.

Nikki liked what he was doing. She liked having him fuck her slowly. Deliberately. She liked that he was allowing her to feel every ridge and detail of his cock as it slid in and out of her. Most of all, she seemed to like that he was giving her every inch he had to give. Encouraged by the quickened pace of her breathing and the way her fingers couldn't seem to find enough of his skin fast enough, Dan moved his hips back and forth, urging her legs further apart. Eventually he was able to go another inch or so deeper into her cunt.

"Oh yes," she sighed. Her nails were all but embedded in the flesh of his ass. She pulled him even tighter. "Just like that."

She was mewling, lifting her hips and grinding her clit against him, causing the sticky juices from her pussy to seep out around Dan's cock and into his pubic hair. Whatever he was doing, he was doing it right. He'd never made a woman this wet before, but he sure as hell hoped he could repeat the performance.

Curious as to what he was doing to bring Nikki so much pleasure, Dan stroked deep inside her again. When the head of his dick hit the top of her womb and she cried out, he immediately pulled back.

“No!” she tightened her legs around him. “Don’t stop.”

Dan hummed. So that was it. The little minx liked to be throttled. All sorts of new images began to flash through Dan’s mind. Positions and acts he’d never even tried to perform with other women.

“I want you with me,” he grumbled as he took another stroke that was much deeper than any he would have taken with a woman who hadn’t asked for it. “I don’t just love you, Nik. I need you.”

She was looking at him now. Both of her eyes were open and fixed on his face. She was also listening to every word he was saying.

But she wasn’t saying anything in return.

Her silence was driving him crazy. Why wouldn’t this woman say what they both knew she wanted to say, he wondered? Both frustration and anger were partially to blame when Dan ground unbelievably deep. The stroke he took had to hurt her somewhat. It had to. But instead of pulling away or pushing him back so he couldn’t do it again, Nikki drew one of her legs up, draped it over his shoulder and whispered a single word.

“Deeper.”

That was all he could take. Dan’s final thrust was exactly what she’d asked for. Deeper than any stroke he’d taken so far. Deeper than any he’d ever taken with any woman. He buried himself inside Nikki. So deep that she reached for the headboard and braced herself in case he decided to take another.

He didn’t need another. Dan came in long, violent spurts. Long, violent, emptying spurts. And only seconds after his first spasm, Nikki followed with her own.

He didn't know what it was about this woman. She was irritatingly hard to understand. And yet at the same time, Dan couldn't help but want to figure her out.

Why did she like what she liked? And why did he get the strangest feeling her sexual tastes were directly linked to her being psychic and knowing truths and depths of emotions other people couldn't know?

It was several minutes before Dan had the energy or the desire to speak. He used those minutes to gather both his strength and his nerve. He needed to tell her the truth. Nikki needed to know he was still alive and that he had only done what he'd done to try to get her out of her funk.

Even more irritating than trying to understand her, was trying to understand himself. Dan was normally a blunt, to-the-point kind of man. He'd never had trouble being honest with anyone before. But this woman had done something to him. She'd made him weak and dishonest.

And a sadist too, it would seem.

Worst of all, Dan didn't care. He didn't care what she had made him. And he hated that he didn't care.

He was sure of one thing now. This was what drove men crazy. Love for a woman like Nikki was what made normally intelligent, rational men go completely bat-shit insane.

They rolled, together, on the bed. She was in front. He was as close as he could be behind her. She still hadn't spoken. Hadn't told him anything that would lead him to believe things were better than they were the day before.

When she lightly dragged her fingernails up and down his forearm Dan tightened his arm around her.

"I love you."

Unbelievably, Nikki responded this time. Unfortunately, it was not the response Dan had hoped for.

"I know you do."

Dan rolled away from her. And he stood up next to the bed. For once he sincerely wished he could just drift back to his body and forget this whole thing had ever happened. She was impossible! She was absolutely fucking impossible! And on top of being impossible she was turning him into something he didn't want to be.

His name was not "G" for fuck's sake!

But he was G to her. He probably always would be. So he didn't mind. He answered to G when she called him that because he was too fucking in love with her for being reduced to a single letter to matter.

At this point Dan was also too heartbroken to worry about whether his getting dressed would give away his flesh physical state. He reached for his pants and shirt.

As if she hadn't said a single cruel word to him, Nikki rolled to the edge of the bed and touched his thigh with her fingertips. "Where are you going?"

"Home."

His answer was out before he could censor it. Dan waited for Nikki to question the slip. For some reason, she didn't.

"Why are you leaving?" she asked instead.

"Because I just realized how much you mean to me," he snapped.

And how little I mean to you.

Dan buttoned his jeans and fixed his eyes on a spot at the foot of the bed. Of all the times for him to lack the ability to simply fade out of sight. He was shocked by Nikki's refusal to warm up to him emotionally and crushed that she wasn't willing to bend or compromise at all. The woman was killing him. She was literally killing him. So for the moment all Dan wanted was to disappear.

"And my meaning a lot to you is a bad thing?" she asked quietly.

Dan's ears didn't register her much softer, accepting tone until it was too late.

"Yes, it's a bad thing!" he barked. "I'd do anything for you! Absolutely anything! Can't you see that? Nik, I've done more for you in the past few months than I've done for every other woman I've ever dated combined!"

She was puzzled. "Like what?"

Dan started clicking off tasks. "While I was gone I bought multi-field meters and gaussmeters and EVP detectors and radiation monitors. I had to write three different proposals before I actually got the money to finance this thing." He held up three fingers. "Three! And do you know how long it takes to write one grant proposal, Nik? Do you have any idea how long that takes?" She was slowly shaking her head while Dan ranted. "I got us a lab, a van, a photographer. Hell, I already have our website up!"

Her mouth was open and her eyes wide. "A website for what?"

Dan balled his hands into fists and glared across the room. Her bookshelves stared back at him. "Look," he pointed as he walked. "Do you see all of those books?"

Her voice was quiet again. "Yes."

He pulled one from the shelf. "What do they all have in common, Nicole? What is the one thing you care about more than anything else in this world?"

"You."

The next point he was going to make got lodged in his throat. Dan tried to put the book back on a shelf. It landed on the floor instead.

"What did you say?"

He watched her take a breath as she gathered the sheet around her. It seemed to take an hour and a half for her to pad across the bedroom carpet to where he stood. When she got there she stood on her tiptoes and gazed into his eyes.

"I said, 'you'. I care more about you than anything else in this world." Her own eyes were watering when she guffawed and added, "Or the next world either for that matter."

Dan didn't know whether to hug her or knock her out. In light of his indecision, he opted for standing still.

"I love you too."

Dan's heart stopped. Had she really just said it? Could it be? Had all his hard work and patience and jacking off three and four times a day been worth it after all?

"I love you too," she said it again. "And I know you love me. I can feel it." Dan grinned. "And you didn't have to buy all that stuff or hire a ghost photographer or get a van to make me happy." She put her palm against his cheek. "Just promise me you won't go anywhere near the light."

Dan's grin got even bigger.

"What?" His amusement was making her smile. "What are you grinning about, you old ghost."

"I'm not a ghost," Dan confessed.

Nikki's eyes told him she was completely confused. "You're not a ghost?"

"No."

"Then what are you?" Her attention went to the books behind them. She was obviously looking to them for an explanation. "Spirits are the same thing as ghosts. Apparitions, also the same. There are supposedly angels and demons floating around out there but you don't strike me as either of those."

"How about, a man?"

Now she was really lost. "A man."

Dan's head bobbed up and down.

"You mean a man, as in, you're willing to do what's noble and watch over your woman and all that, right? You're a man in a romance novel, philosophical sense of the word."

He smiled sheepishly. "No. Not a lot of philosophy in what I am. Hopefully some romance though."

She was not so smiley. In fact, Nikki was not smiley at all.

Had he not been afraid of losing a testicle, Dan would have chortled at the way she took the time to wrap the sheet around her and do the boob-tuck thing before crossing her arms and narrowing her eyes.

“What the hell are you saying, G?”

This was not good. It was really, seriously not good. Dan could almost hear the sirens in his head.

Mayday! Mayday! Pull out! For the luvagod! Pull out!

He swallowed hard. It didn't look good, but this was it. The moment of truth. He was either going to be a happy, slightly sadistic man in the bedroom for the rest of his life, or he was going home old-school vanilla and empty-handed.

“G?” she pressed. “What are you saying to me?”

The moment of truth. This was for the trip to Vegas, the Buick and the brand new, matching washer and dryer. Dan took a deep breath and crossed his fingers.

“What I'm saying, Nicole, is that I'm still alive.”

Chapter Seven

"Popcorn?"

"Check."

"Twizzlers?"

"Check, check."

"Junior Mints?"

"Junior Mints give me the runs."

Reilly rolled his eyes. "You don't have a colon and you don't shit. How can you get the runs?"

"We don't even eat," L informed the latest newbie after tossing him a new jar of Peter Pan crunchy. "But that's not the point."

Z Version 2.0 was perplexed. "Then what is the point?"

Yet again, Reilly did what Reilly had always done best. One could almost smell the condescension in the air. "The point is to irritate the chick."

"The chick."

Reilly nodded at Z Version 2.0. "Yes, the chick. The psychic phenom. The unsuspecting freak who..."

The sound of a door being slammed open against the wall cut Reilly's speech short.

"And I can't believe I was stupid enough to fall in love with you!"

A trail of popcorn followed the three spirits when they floated warp speed into the living room.

"*You?* You can't believe you were stupid enough to fall in love with me?!"

"That would be the dude," Reilly informed the newbie. "The freak geek. He's one of those people who runs around with a tape recorder going, 'Are you there, spirit? If you're there, make a sound. EwwWWWwwwWWw.'"

Both Reilly and L snorted.

"Weirdo."

"Loser."

They snorted again.

"She calls the dude, 'G'." L licked a Junior Mint and threw it down the hall. It landed on the cat. "Score!"

Reilly high-fived him. "Don't ever say anything for one of those tape-recorder geeks." He gave Z Version 2.0 a serious shake of the head. "You start talking and then K starts talking and R starts talking and before you know it, everybody knows our business and what we are and then the mystery's gone and we can't irritate the living anymore."

Z Version 2.0's eyes went back and forth from Reilly to L before he finally turned his attention back to the drama. "Why do you want to irritate the living?" he asked.

Both Reilly's and L's mouths were open. "Why do we want to..." Reilly was too flabbergasted to speak. He adjusted in his seat before he was able to finish. "Z? You're not on that side anymore."

Z Version 2.0 was confused. "So?"

"So you can't eat, you can't sleep, you can't fuck, hell, you can't even have a bowel movement." Reilly was quiet until L was finished reminiscing. "What the fuck else is there to do but irritate the living?"

Z Version 2.0 glanced at L. "He's got a point."

L agreed.

"Did it ever occur to you that this information might be something you needed to share with me, G?"

"I did share it with you!"

"Yes! But not until you'd banged me twice!"

"Oh, so now I *banged* you? You thought we fucked, I thought it was making love, but it was really just me banging you!?"

"No! It was not just you banging me!" Nikki shot back. "It was also me banging you!"

Three Twizzlers hovered in midair above the couch.

"Dude, that sounded kinda hot coming from a girl."

Both Reilly and L mumbled their agreement with the newb.

"You lied to me, G. You've been lying to me ever since you came here."

G stood silently in the hallway.

"I can't build a relationship with a liar."

"But you could have built one with a dead man?" G challenged. "You got past me being dead, Nik. Why can't you get past this? I was going to tell you. I did tell you. I just had to wait until the right time."

"You didn't have a choice about dying," she reasoned. "I was okay with you being dead because if you were dead you didn't have a choice. You could have chosen to be honest with me."

"What if he committed suicide?" Z Version 2.0 piped up and asked.

It only took three steps for Nikki to close the gap between her and the newest cockroach to invade her house. She leaned over until she was nose-to-nose with the spirit. "Who the hell are you?"

The ghost swallowed. "Z?" he asked. "Version 2.0?"

Beside him on the couch, Reilly was smiling.

Nikki quickly scanned the room. "What happened to the first Z?" Not a single spirit would look her in the eye. "Reilly?" Reilly had suddenly gone deaf. "L?" L could

apparently neither hear nor see. Nikki picked up a can of air freshener and pointed it at Z Version 2.0.

“Do you know what this is?”

The spirit nervously examined the can. “Country Meadow?”

“Wrong, roach boy!” Nikki lifted the can and expelled a large cloud of Tropical Breeze around the room. Reilly and L began coughing, writhing and convulsing. Z Version 2.0 sat trembling on the couch. “Where is he?” Nikki demanded over the screams and howls of the other two spirits. “Where did the old Z go?!”

Z Version 2.0 wasn’t coughing, writhing or convulsing. He was, however, crying. “He went to into the dark!” he sobbed. “Okay? He was a bad, bad man and he went into the dark! But that’s not gonna happen to me! I promise! I’m not bad like he was! I’m the good Z! I promise, I’m the good Zeeeeeee!!”

Satisfied with his answer, Nikki sat the air freshener on the coffee table and crossed her arms. Miraculously, both Reilly and L were immediately cured of their coughing and convulsing. Z Version 2.0 snubbed until he realized he was the only one still upset.

“Fuck you guys,” he snapped and floated into the kitchen.

Nikki, Reilly and L all roared with laughter. G was still standing in the hallway, leaning against the bathroom door when Reilly and L followed their wounded comrade into the kitchen. Even from the living room Nikki and G could hear the teasing.

G was smiling when Nikki looked at him again. “You’re getting along with them better than I thought.”

“No,” Nikki corrected. “I’ve just learned how to cope in a difficult situation. That’s all.”

G uncrossed his arms. “Sometimes learning to cope is all you can do.”

“Yes, sometimes it is all you can do,” she retorted. “Especially when the person who should have your back isn’t around.”

G closed his eyes and let his head fall forward. "I was coming back," he offered. "Nik, I did come back. I came back as soon as I could."

Nikki took the three steps back to where she'd been standing earlier. "You should have told me you were leaving."

G threw his hands up in defeat. "But if I had told you I was leaving..."

"You would have had to tell me you were still alive."

He had no response.

"I waited for you." She smiled to keep from crying. "Every night I sat up waiting for you to come back." G took her hands in his and stared at her fingers. "I was so afraid you'd gone into the light."

"But I didn't go into the light," he whispered. "I was nowhere near the light."

"I didn't know that. And I didn't know you were coming back."

G ran the pads of his thumbs up and down each one of her fingers until she pulled her hands away.

"I want you to leave, G."

"Nik—"

"G." She wanted to say hers before he could change her mind by saying his. "I want you out of my house. And I don't want you to ever come back."

* * * * *

"It's not so bad."

"It's really not so bad."

"It just seems really bad right now."

"But it's not that bad. And it'll get better as time goes by."

"What are you, Humphrey Bogart or something?"

L responded to Reilly's question with an extended translucent middle finger.

"You told him to leave." Reilly poured a shot of Jäger into the cup and popped the top on a Red Bull. "Why are you so upset if he did exactly what you wanted him to do?"

Nikki wiped the back of her hand across her cheek and reached for the "bomb". "He didn't do exactly what I wanted him to do."

"He didn't?"

"No."

Reilly cocked a brow at L. L shrugged, shook his head and looked away. "Women don't make any more sense to me now than they did when I was alive."

"Amen to that."

"I didn't want him to leave," she explained between sniffs and sobs. "I wanted him to be honest with me and not jerk me around."

"But he was honest with you," L noted. "And you threw him out."

Reilly was nodding. "L-man's got a point. G tried to be honest with you and you see what it got him. Now he's out on the street. All alone. Probably freezing to death on some cruel and lonely sidewalk."

Nikki slapped her hand against her forehead. "Reilly, it's the middle of August. And we live in the suburbs, for God's sake. And even if he didn't have a house of his own, which I suspect he does, there's a YMCA not two blocks down the street."

Reilly's face took on the most serious expression possible considering he was vapor. "What about the cruel and lonely sidewalk?"

A growl of irritation rattled Nikki's throat. "The county sheriff is the head of my Neighborhood Watch program."

"Ha!" L cackled. "She's got you there."

The one-fingered salute was returned.

"He should have been honest with me from the beginning." Nikki took another Jäger-bomb from L. "He should have told me who he was and what he was doing when he first came into my house."

Reilly crossed his see-through arms and sat back in the chair. "So if G had told you he was some seriously dedicated freak geek who was well trained in all things astral and projection and who had a hard-on for voyeuristic opportunities in which aware and only slightly reluctant participants were involved, and that he was going to camp out in your bedroom for a while to see if he could catch a glimpse of the black and curly Bermuda Triangle and your pink-tipped islands, you'd feel better right now?"

Nikki blinked and mechanically took a sip of the drink in her hand. "I don't think I understood a word you just said."

"Neither did I," L confirmed.

Reilly rolled his eyes and poured another shot of Jäger. "All I'm saying is, life is short. You don't get as many do-overs as you might think. You have to think about the consequences of what you're doing before you act. Or before you don't act," he amended. "Something most living people don't understand is that there's only one thing that has the same staying power as love."

Nikki blinked again. "And what's that one thing?"

"Regret."

Nikki sat the drink down.

"When it's over, it's over," Reilly said. "And all those things you didn't do and didn't say but wish you had, they all join forces and become one big ball and chain."

Nikki had never heard a spirit make so much sense. Nor had she ever heard one sound so sincere. She thought for a minute she might have misjudged the trespassers in her house.

"Is that why you're still here?" she asked Reilly. "Are you having to deal with your regrets before you can go into the light?"

"Naw," Reilly said with a spoiled-rotten tone. "I'm here to score a trip to the Bermuda Triangle."

Both cockroaches roared with laughter. Disgusted with herself for even thinking one of the vermin in her house might still be somewhat human, Nikki downed the rest of her drink and stood to leave.

"Don't go away mad, Nikki!" L sang out behind her. Reilly joined in for the second line. "Just go away!!"

Cockroaches. God, she hated them. And yet her hatred for them was now second on the list of troublesome issues in her life.

Getting over G was number one.

Like the mother of a toddler, Nikki picked up stray objects that had been flung around the house as she made her way into the living room. Potholders, plastic cups, spoons—some coated with peanut butter, some not—candle holders, a flashlight, the mess was unbelievable and unbelievably, it would be right back tomorrow. It didn't do her any good to clean up. The spirits never slept, they didn't go out, they didn't really watch TV except on Friday nights when they were allowed to order their one soft-core porn movie from satellite. So there was nothing for them to do but make messes and noise and misery for her.

She stopped in the middle of the living room when she realized three of them were acting like children playing in a big pile of leaves in the middle of the hall. Only the spirits weren't children. They were all three grown men when they died. And there were no leaves in her house.

She did, however, have two drawers of underwear.

Nikki tossed the flashlight and an empty Red Bull can onto the end table and closed her eyes. This was it. She was officially going to snap. She couldn't live like this anymore. Not with the mess and the noise and the insane paranormal activity in her house. It was too much. Too much for one woman to bear.

Especially one woman with a broken heart.

Nikki put her hands over her eyes and willed herself not to cry anymore. She had to pull herself together. She didn't have a choice. She didn't get to pretend she was some spirit and just float in and out of this disaster whenever she wanted. She didn't have the luxury of escaping whenever she wanted to like G had.

"What if he had committed suicide?"

And this guy. This guy. Oh my God, what was with this guy?!

Nikki ground her teeth together and turned to face Z Version 2.0. "Why do you keep asking me that?" she demanded.

The spirit was sitting parrot-style on the back of her couch. On the cushions below he'd arranged an entire bag of Twizzlers into something. Nikki stared at it as she crossed the living room floor.

At a loss as to what he'd done with the candy, she repeated, "Why do you keep asking me about G and suicide?"

Z Version 2.0 wrapped his arms around his knees and looked up from the candy. "If G had committed suicide he'd still be dead, right?"

Nikki nodded slowly. "Yes."

"But you were willing to accept him if he was dead, right?"

She hummed. "Okay."

"Did you ever ask him how he died?"

"He wasn't dead!"

"That's not the point."

"Then what is the point?" she insisted.

"The point is, you were willing to accept him if he was dead because he supposedly didn't have a choice in the matter, but you aren't willing to accept him now because he had a choice about being honest with you, but made the wrong choice."

Nikki tightened her arms across her chest. "And?"

"And I'm asking you, what if he had committed suicide? What if he had made the wrong decision and chosen to die?"

"Okay," Nikki allowed. "What if he had?"

Z Version 2.0 hugged his knees tighter. "Would you still love him?"

Nikki looked back down to the Twizzlers. "Yes," she said quietly. "Of course I would."

"So what does it matter if he made the wrong decision about being honest with you this one time?" he asked. "If you were willing to let it go over something as serious as suicide, don't you think you're being a little harsh now?"

Roach Boy had a point. A very valid point. One Nikki hadn't even considered.

"Do you think he loves you?"

"Yes."

"Then that's all you need to know," Z Version 2.0 said. "You love him and he loves you. Trust me, Nikki, when it's all over, love really is the only thing that matters."

Nikki had to admit, for a bug, he was pretty smart. She wondered if she dared ask how he'd come to be so wise.

"What is all that?" She wagged her finger over the couch cushions. "It looks like a bunch of ones and zeroes."

"It's binary code," he said.

Nikki hummed. "Like computer language."

"Uh-hum."

Odd, she thought. Probably a cheat for one of their Warcraft games or something. "What does it mean?"

As if reading a sentence written in plain English, Z Version 2.0 let his eyes scan the candy from one end to the other. He took his time reading it, not as if he was having trouble remembering the words, but rather as if the words were forcing him to see them slowly.

"It means what Reilly was talking about in there."

Nikki's expression and a shake of her head indicated her lack of understanding. "You mean, love?" she asked.

"No, not love," Z Version 2.0 replied. "This is what happens when you let the other one run your life."

"The other one," Nikki murmured.

"Uh-hum. The other force. The one that isn't love."

He was apparently "reading" the code again. Nikki was silent as she thought about what Z Version 2.0 had just said.

"What runs your life?" Z Version 2.0 didn't look at her when he asked. "What has always run your life?"

It was an odd way for him to ask a question. The question itself was odder still. And yet his question made Nikki wonder. What did run her life? What motivated her to do the things she did and be the way she was?

It damned sure wasn't love.

They had talked about so many things and yet there were many, many things G didn't know. Things he couldn't know. Things like how she hadn't always been passionate or wildly sexual like she was shortly after they met. G assumed he'd stumbled upon a woman who had always sucked every ounce of life out of every day and who had loved being psychic and who had taken pride in being different from everyone around her.

Unbeknownst to him, the truth was somewhat different. Nikki had always wanted to be the woman G believed her to be. She'd always known the passionate and self-assured person he adored existed inside her. But until a very particular force wandered into her life, Nikki had never had the nerve to be the woman G had fallen in love with.

Nikki had become the woman G loved because she'd known he loved her. She'd known it for a long time. His love was the only thing that had given her the courage to be who she'd always wanted to be before he left.

"I have to find him," she said almost silently.

"Uh-hum."

"I have to find G."

Z Version 2.0 didn't look up. He just kept staring at the code. Reading it over and over. It didn't matter that it was going to say the exact same thing every single time. What it said no longer mattered. The message itself was preventing him from finding the light.

"That's a list of all the things you wish you'd done. Isn't it?"

Z Version 2.0 still didn't look up. "Uh-hum."

"And all the things you regret."

"Yep."

Oh my God. This was big. No, this was bigger than that. It was like his cock. It was huge! Nikki knew why the spirits were still here. Every single one of them. Nikki knew why certain souls took a detour on their trip between this world and the light.

Nikki started down the hall to her study. She had to figure a way to find G and tell him the truth. She had to tell him the truth about her, about the way she felt about him. About everything, including this discovery. Especially this discovery!

Reilly was right when he said regret had the same staying power as love. Regret was a powerful, powerful emotion. Powerful enough to prevent souls from moving from this world to the next. What Nikki had just realized, and what she had to tell G, was how easy it would be for them to use this information. She understood the source of regret. She understood it perfectly. And she knew exactly how they could keep more spirits from invading her house. He'd been right when he told her she needed to detach

from them so she could be objective. She had detached and now she could see the difference.

The spirits' time was up. Their regrets were eternal. Their mistakes couldn't be undone and their fears were forever a part of their former lives. They could still apologize to themselves and let go of their regrets and fears and move into the light, but as far as actually doing all the things fear prevented them from doing or truly making amends to anyone they may have wronged, it was too late.

Nikki was different. She was still alive. She still had a chance to do all the things fear had kept her from doing and she could say the things she truly wanted say. Best of all, she could still love all the people she wanted to love.

It wasn't too late for her to love G.

Nikki's heart skipped a beat at the thought of admitting she loved him. She did love him and she could still be happy because she didn't have any regrets. Not yet.

At least she hoped not.

Chapter Eight

Now what, Brainiac?

Nikki discarded the book in her hand and reached for another. She quickly flipped through the pages before laying it to the side as well and reaching for yet another text.

The only man who's ever loved you the way you really are just handed you his heart.

And what did you do?

She'd smashed it into a million little pieces before she bothered to get his e-mail address.

Another book was examined and subsequently tossed onto the stack.

Nikki mumbled to herself, nervously chewing her thumbnail around her words as she scanned the shelves before her. Over the time she'd known G, dozens of the books she now cherished had simply "appeared" on her shelves. She'd always known they were little tokens of his affection but she'd never given much thought to where they really came from. Nikki had always assumed G was a disembodied kleptomaniac who spent his free time floating around in antique books stores and brought the spoils of his escapades here. To her house.

She'd never imagined the books had come from his personal "real" library.

Hoping a credit card slip or a book club card or even a stray piece of mail would fall out, Nikki picked up another book and flipped through its pages. When the book fell open to reveal a small scrap of paper, Nikki's heart almost stopped.

It was useless. A generic receipt for God knew what. Nothing that could help her find him. Nikki fought back her discouragement as she scanned the page where the book had opened. Astral projection. That was how G had done it. He'd meditated his soul right out of his body and straight into Nikki's life, bed and heart. Astral projection was how he had blended in with the other spirits. Nikki had always thought he was just

like all the others. But G was nothing like the other beings in her house. All the others had passed over. They were already dead. Their souls had nowhere to go except for into the light. Or into the dark.

G's soul wasn't going anywhere anytime soon. His soul was still attached to his living, breathing body. He was still very much alive.

Actually G was more than just alive. G was warm, smart, funny and sexy and he had something Nikki had gone without for too damned long.

A great cock. A great real cock.

Still, as enamored with his male attributes as Nikki was, she couldn't get around the fact that G also possessed the most important ingredient when one is building a man worth having.

A kind and loving heart.

Make that possessed in the past tense, Nikki reminded herself as she tucked the slip of paper back where it was and put the book back on the shelf. G didn't have the one thing that had made him worth having anymore because she'd ripped it out. And then she'd really screwed herself to a pole by not bothering to find out who he was or where he lived or worked.

Way to go, girlfriend.

She sighed and admired the pile of books. Nikki owned dozens of them on almost every subject surrounding psychic ability. A lot of them she'd actually read because at one time honing her talent had been the most important goal of her life.

Why hadn't she put more effort into perfecting her skills? Why had she let the spirits in her house make her lose interest in her gifts?

Why hadn't she taken G's advice?

Just one more mistake she'd have to live down, Nikki suspected. For now, however, the more pressing issue wasn't that she'd screwed up royally, nor was it the ache she felt in her heart over possibly losing the love of her life.

Nikki needed to find G and tell him she was sorry. She had to tell him she understood he hadn't been completely honest with her because he was trying to give her what she wanted. He'd known it fascinated her that he lived on the other side. In the beginning she was constantly asking him questions about what it was like over there, what spirits did in their free time when they weren't shoplifting or jonesing for peanut butter and if he thought anyone had ever come back from the light. She'd thought he was one of "them" when she actually liked them.

Nikki had to tell G she knew he'd stayed a spirit because a spirit was what he thought she wanted him to be. He was willing to be whatever made her most passionate. And he didn't immediately tell her the truth when he came back because he was trying to spark that passion again.

What he'd done was warped and convoluted and it had made a mess. But it was also very sweet and he'd done it out of love. Nikki knew that now.

She also knew she loved the idea of being his research partner. Nikki had never taken her gifts that seriously, but G had. Most people who knew what she could do saw her as either the perfect party guest or a circus freak. Never were her talents seen as something dignified or something that could ever be respected or useful to the world.

Once again, G had been different. He'd immediately seen something valuable and useful in what Nikki could do. And he'd gone to great lengths to secure them a laboratory and funding and even a company vehicle so they could put her talents to good use and learn something about spirits and psychic ability and the astral realm. G had fallen in love with parts of Nikki no one else had ever valued. Not even her, sometimes.

Nikki wondered how a woman who could see so many things others couldn't see could, at the same time, be so blind.

Nikki moaned and closed her eyes. Reilly and L had been wrong about one thing. This was bad. This was really, really bad. If Nikki didn't find G and say what she should have said to him, if she let him go on thinking she didn't appreciate everything

he'd tried to do for her and that she wasn't just as crazy about him as he had been about her, this was it. The regret Reilly had warned her about. The one that would become her ball and chain.

Nikki sat back and thought about how unlikely her current predicament was. It hadn't exactly been an ideal situation in which to find a romantic relationship. But it was the situation they'd been handed. And even without an ideal situation, even amidst the noise and confusion, and even though Nikki thought he was dead and he had constantly worried about when and how he should tell her the truth about who and what he was, they'd still managed to fall in love.

Someday she'd think back on the confusing, chaotic, noisy situation that had brought her and G together and see it for what it really was.

Romantic. Screwball romantic, but given that she was a psychic and G was the resident "freak geek", what else could she expect? And really, what else could she want?

"How about his real name?" Nikki said out loud. "Or better yet, his address? I need some way to find him," she whined. She hated to whine but it was the only thing she knew to do right now. She needed something to help her. His name, his social security number, his driver's license number. If she was going to find G she had to have something to tell her where to start.

Nikki scanned the books yet again. Searching for something. Anything. Anything at all.

It wasn't a spine that caught her attention. It probably hadn't been a spine for many, many years. Centuries, perhaps. Now it was more a place where several pages had once been forced to coexist and for some reason, long after the binding and glue were gone, they were still together.

As she reached for the text, she thought about the day she bought it. Nikki had shelled out half her car payment to bring it home from a tiny bookstore in Atlanta, all the while wondering why she'd done something so irresponsible.

To this day she wasn't sure why. Despite it being the oldest book on her shelves, Nikki hadn't bought it because of its age, which was usually the reason she knew a book was one she "had" to have. No, there had been something else about it. Something that spoke to her. Something she simply understood but couldn't explain. It was very similar to the way she simply understood why she had been born psychic.

With a gentleness few things could spark in her, Nikki began leafing through pages that had been collectively telling their tale for almost four hundred years. It was a story, oddly enough, about a man who was psychic. Only in this man's time there was no such thing as psychics. Another word had been used instead.

"Daniel" was a prophet.

Nikki's hands stopped. Even as it was happening she was wondering how she would ever be able to tell G. Where had she located the information that was about to help her find him? What words would she use to explain concepts not yet discovered by science or technology?

She closed the book, put it back on the shelf, and smiled. When the time came for her to tell him, she'd call it what she'd always called it.

Nikki reached back for the book where she'd uncovered the "useless" slip of paper. She didn't know G's name. She didn't know his address or if he had a Facebook account. What she did know was how he felt. She knew his vibrations. His energy. She knew "him".

Yet again the book fell open to the page marked by the generic receipt. The chapter about astral projection. Only a person's soul existed on the astral realm. No body. Nothing to distract from who a person really was deep down. If she had any chance of finding a man without knowing his name or address or anything else about him, it was there. On the astral plane.

Now, all she had to do was get there.

Nikki's search suddenly took on a whole new fire. It was around here somewhere. It had to be. The chapter she'd located gave a nice description, but no how-to. That was

okay though. She was an education junkie and bibliophile and she knew damned good and well the information she needed was in her house. She just had to find it.

Astral Projection on a Shoestring Budget. The Astral Realm For Dummies. I'm Ok, You're an Astral Projector. She was sure she had something that could help her get to G. Something. And no matter what it was or where she spotted that help, she was going to use it.

Outside the study, Nikki caught a glimpse of movement. Transparent and giggling, L was floating at the open study door. His fingers were covered in something blue and greasy and he was holding an open jar of peanut butter. Nikki didn't ask.

"We can help you find him," he offered politely. How had he known? "You just need to know how to get to the astral realm, right?"

Nikki narrowed her eyes. He was one of them. A spirit. A cockroach.

But he was a cockroach who somehow knew what she needed and was offering to help her get to the other side.

Nikki straightened her spine. "I think so, yes. I think if I could get to the astral realm I could pick up his vibrations and find him."

"You're probably right."

Nikki was almost afraid he would agree. She swallowed hard and took a deep breath. "I need a crash course in astral projection," she admitted against her better judgment. "I need to get where you are. And I need to do it fast." Her next words came out slowly. Like a woman headed for the guillotine.

"Can you help me get to where you are?"

Chapter Nine

The researcher's own preconceptions and skewed sense of reality are often the largest stumbling blocks he or she encounters when searching for the truth surrounding paranormal activity. Dan's fingers were angry against the keyboard as he typed.

He or she? he wondered. Or simply he?

His fingers went back to the keys. He deleted his last entry and retyped, *All scheduled experiments and tests on hold until a new candidate for research partner is located.*

Dan harrumphed. A new candidate. Nikki was now merely a candidate. Dehumanizing her was the only way the researcher in him knew how to deal with the pain in his heart.

He clicked the laptop shut, laid back on his bed and stared at his penis. Still standing at attention, his penis stared back.

"The dick that ate Manhattan," he grumbled to his crotch. "The hard-on to end all hard-ons."

The other part of me I'll never convince to forget about her.

"Goddammit."

How had this happened, he wondered? He knew the other spirits in the house called him a "freak geek", and he knew in their eyes his books smarts combined with his obsession with the paranormal meant he couldn't possibly have a social life. Never mind being someone who could attract members of the opposite sex.

What the spirits didn't know was when Dan wasn't floating around the astral realm he was an intelligent, educated, perceptive and socially savvy man. He'd had plenty of women because he was intelligent, perceptive and able to charm the panties off anything female and on two legs.

Dan was also a scientist. A man of rational thought. Always on top of the situation. His entire life had been one long ongoing experiment he had conducted in a controlled environment. Even in matters of the heart he used reason and logic to keep things from going haywire.

So how had he been so wrong about this one? How had he become so taken by Nikki? How had he gotten so wrapped up in making her happy that he'd forgotten to maintain some control over the situation? And by "the situation", he meant his heart.

It was her psychic ability. That had to be it. Dan had devoted his entire life to the very gifts Nikki possessed, and finding her had been like unearthing some paranormal researcher's Holy Grail. Discovering a woman like Nikki had unbalanced his normally calm, rational nature.

Frustrated beyond reason, Dan took his erection into his hand and berated his body for still wanting her. He'd come, but just the one time. Dan estimated it would have taken at least another three or four years of hard-core banging with Nikki before the mere sight or scent or thought of her didn't make him instantly hard. And even after a few years with her he suspected his cock would continue to come alive the moment she walked into the room. For a man like Dan who actually valued things like devotion between a husband and wife, it had been the perfect situation. He both loved and wanted her. And he could see himself loving and wanting her for the rest of their lives.

If only he hadn't lost his head and fucked things up.

Cursing his head for its miscalculation and his dick with its insatiable appetite for something it couldn't have, Dan stood up and made his way to the shower. One thing was sure, he may have forgotten to use his head and screwed things up with Nikki, but he didn't have to feel the misery over losing her from now on. Without her in his life, his work was all that mattered to him. And his work required concentration and focus. Logic and rational thought. Dan had to think himself out of this funk and he had to do it now.

Before another part of his anatomy fully realized what had just happened and broke completely in half.

Dan kept repeating logical explanations to himself. His feelings for Nikki were based strictly on what she could have helped him do as a researcher. His feelings of loss and the sting of this rejection had nothing to do whatsoever with her as a person. His feelings couldn't be the result of anything else because his work researching and documenting the paranormal was the most important thing in Dan's life. He could believe this, he told himself. He could easily convince himself of this logic because at one time Dan's work had been the most important thing in his life.

"At one time," he mumbled as he stepped into the shower. "Before I met her."

Now his work was going to remind him of the one thing he didn't want to think about. As clear thinking as he was at the moment, Dan had to accept that his day-to-day life was going to be hell now because his life's work was devoted to finding and studying and understanding creatures like her.

In one fell swoop the woman had sucked the life out of two of his biggest sources of pleasure.

Make that three of his biggest sources of pleasure, Dan groaned. In seconds the shower stall was warm. Warm like Nikki's body and wet like her pussy or her mouth. Dan closed his eyes and wondered how long it would be before he could jerk off without seeing Nikki. He wondered how many months it would take before he could grip his cock and his mind not automatically go to the idea of Nikki on her knees before him, her eyes wide and her mouth begging for his dick.

Obviously that milestone in his recovery wasn't today. As Dan began to stroke his cock, Nikki was with him. She was there in the shower and she was naked, wet and eager to please. It was her tongue lapping skillfully up and down his shaft. Her fingers playing gently against his balls. Her lips kissing and sucking the head of his dick before taking his entire length deep into her throat.

Dan let his imagination wander back to the fantasy he'd had before Nikki knew his body was real. In his mind he saw her sitting in front of him in the shower stall, her legs spread and her lips forming that tight little "O" he'd admired so. If Nikki did have a submissive or masochistic streak, he couldn't be sure. Certain things she'd said, certain phrases she'd used had led him to believe she liked to be controlled in the bedroom. He also suspected she liked a little pain, or at least some discomfort when she was being fucked. Her penchant for pain and kink possibly went further than that, and he suspected they did. Unfortunately Dan hadn't had a chance to test his suspicions. And now he never would.

But now it didn't matter if Nikki enjoyed being spanked or having her nipples pinched because now he didn't have to worry about what she wanted or liked. The only one Dan had to please was Dan. And what pleased Dan at the present time was the idea of Nikki fingering herself while he fucked her in the mouth.

On one of his trips to find equipment for their lab, Dan had stumbled upon a large sex toy store. He'd ventured in merely out of curiosity but had taken note of several possibilities just in case his theories on Nikki's sexual tastes were correct. One of those possibilities was the fellatio collar he imagined Nikki was wearing now.

Dan's hand clamped down around his shaft as he imagined her sitting there on the floor in front of him, the small chain on the collar holding her head up and where he wanted it. She wouldn't be able to back away or slow him down as he held the chain taut and slid the head of his cock past her lips. Inch by inch she'd be forced to take him. All of him. All the way down to his balls.

Dan stopped in midstroke. As delicious as the thought of having some mindless fuck-toy was in theory, the idea of fucking any part of any woman who wasn't also enjoying the act wasn't particularly arousing to Dan. He liked his women horny. He liked watching his women get off. And even more than watching a horny woman get off, he liked helping a horny woman get off.

He thought back to the sex toys he'd seen at the adult store. Something for her, he considered. Something she could use to play with herself while he fucked her mouth.

His grip tightened once again as he imagined wrapping the fingers of one hand into Nikki's hair and holding the chain with the other. With the collar around her neck once his cock was in her mouth, it wouldn't be easy for her to spit it out. Not until he said so. Dan could take his time. Fuck her mouth deep and slow.

Meanwhile, if she truly was the cock-lover he suspected she was, Nikki could make good use of the "gift" he'd purchased for her.

At first the thought of fucking her while she was in this position and of coming in her mouth was driving Dan's strokes. But gradually, the more he imagined Nikki's desperate hands and fingers working a vibrator in and out of her snug little cunt and up and across her clit, the more that image began to drive him.

What if Nikki was the kind of woman who was aroused by the thought of pleasing a man, Dan thought? What if she was the kind of woman who could share their pleasure—all of it—rather than seeing it as his or hers?

His mind quickly rebelled against such arousing possibilities. Did it matter what kind of woman Nikki was? Were her sexual preferences any of his concern?

No. They weren't now. Nothing about her mattered now because he'd gotten too wrapped up in his emotions and the buzz of being "in love" with her and he'd screwed things up.

Now all that mattered to Dan was getting off and getting over her, and doing both as quickly as possible. So in his mind Nikki began sucking his cock in earnest. Using her tongue to lick and circle and orally stroke his dick every time he pulled the chain tight and pushed deeper into her mouth. Her hands were between her legs working the vibrator in and out of her cunt. She obviously liked sucking his cock. It made her insanely horny being used this way, and she needed something fucking her pussy the way he was fucking her mouth.

He would forbid her to come. She could not come no matter how close to orgasm she was. Dan would tell her the only way she could have what she needed was when he told her she could have it.

Dan would take the vibrator away from her when she was close to coming. He would pull his dick from her mouth, let the chain go slack, and take the vibrator away.

Next he'd bring out yet another toy he'd purchased for her. A dildo that could only be described as obscenely large. Dan would tell her she could come as soon as she got the dildo inside her. So she would try. Nikki would work the head of the enormous object back and forth against her wet, swollen lips. She'd try to get it inside her and fill the need and void he would be all too happy to make worse with every thrust of his cock into her mouth.

It would never work. The dildo would never fit inside her. Not with her in a sitting position and especially not without some time and assistance to stretch her vaginal walls to accommodate it. It might have been the biggest mistake he'd ever made, but Dan had been inside her. He knew how tight she was.

She would whimper pitifully around his cock. Dan would feel the vibration of her pleas against his dick but he wouldn't stop to give her what she needed. Finally, she would no doubt give up on getting the dildo inside her and do exactly as he had forbidden her to do. She'd grind the object against her clit until she came.

"I told you not to come," he would say. And he would stiffen when her lips and tongue apologized for the infraction. Dan would reach around and unsnap the collar. He'd pull it off her neck. And then he would find out just how sorry she really was.

If Nikki were the woman Dan suspected she was, it would only be a matter of seconds before he exploded. If she were the kind of woman who received pleasure from seeing her man pleased she would focus all of her attention on his cock. With the collar gone she'd use both hands. One to stroke his shaft and the other to fondle and caress his balls. She'd use her mouth. Her tongue and lips. She would nibble and kiss and lick and suck his shaft, his balls and the head of his cock.

If Dan really had lost what he was afraid he had, Nikki would want him to come. And she would work tirelessly until he did come.

Then again, if Dan really had lost something as wonderful as he knew Nikki was, he would stop her before he came.

Dan's balls tightened even more as he imagined drawing Nikki's legs around his waist, first one and then the other, and pressing her against the shower wall. Her nipples would be pert little pebbles against his chest, her body wet and slick and hard to hold onto. But he would hold onto her. With both hands on her ass and her back against the wall, Dan would hold onto her and use his cock to give them both what they needed.

As close as he would be to his own climax, Dan knew he would wait on her. And not just for her sake. There was nothing he loved more than to have a woman's body pulse and throb around his cock while they both came. To have Nikki's body collapse and shudder and milk his shaft would be so exquisite that when he did come it would well worth the wait.

Dan groaned and steadied himself as he came in hot, quick bursts against the shower wall. Over and over his cock jerked as it emptied the contents of his balls. It then waned slightly, but refused to go down.

The awful truth was that Dan couldn't get rid of her. He couldn't get this woman out of his head like he had every other woman in his past. It was going to be a while—possibly a long while—before he managed to banish Nikki from his thoughts.

Why had he done this to himself? Why hadn't he used his head? Dan wished he knew. Because even after his orgasm was over, and for a long time after Dan had regained his balance and fallen into bed, he felt like he was still inside her. Like she was closer than he thought. Like he was still with her, somehow.

Chapter Ten

She had no form. No weight. No matter or mass. Vapor, air, energy and one endless, unbroken silver cord connecting her soul to her physical being. After hours and hours of meditating herself out of her body, that's all she was now.

Nikki had made it to the other side.

Her body was still at home, still aching for G and sitting in the middle of her bed where she had left it. But her mind, her consciousness, everything that made her who and what she was—everything about her that mattered—was out here. In the astral realm.

How silly she had once been to believe if G didn't have a body he couldn't feel love.

She was right about finding him. Out here she didn't need his name, address or telephone number. On this plane of existence Nikki could feel him. The traces of his soul were around her. Just like all of those who had passed on, G was with her.

But she still had to find his body so they could talk.

It didn't take long for her to find it. Nikki simply cleared her mind, reached out with her heart, and there he was.

He was sleeping when Nikki landed softly his bed.

"G?" She spoke quietly, her disembodied voice foreign to her ears. "G? Wake up." She snuggled closer to his side. "G? Honey, it's me."

His eyes opened slowly and he blinked. Then, with a start, G reached for the bedside table and clicked on the lamp.

Nikki had never seen him this angry before. In fact, she'd never seen him angry at all. G was an annoyingly patient, laid-back man who took everything in stride. He just didn't do pissed off, especially with her.

He was definitely pissed off now.

"Nikki, what the hell are you doing here?"

If she had a throat she would have swallowed. As it was, she let her essence float away from him a few inches.

"I needed to find you," she explained. "I had to tell you I was sorry. And I didn't really want you to leave."

G sat up straight in bed and looked hard at her even though his face was sleepy and soft and sexy.

"Nikki, where did you leave your body?"

She opened her mouth to speak but then closed it.

Why was he asking her this?

"Nikki?" he demanded this time. "Where did you leave your body?"

With a waft of wind, Nikki indicated behind her. "I left it at my house, G. On the bed. Why?"

G was already up and pulling on his pants. "You shouldn't have done this," he said. "Nikki, sweetheart, you should never have come here like this."

Nikki's face drew tight. "But I had to find you, G. And this was the only way I could find you." She chuckled gently. "I'm in love with you and I don't even know your name."

At her heartfelt declaration, G paused. "You're in love with me," he stated rather than asked. "Even though I'm not dead. And even though I'm a liar."

She laughed easily this time. "You just left a few details out. And I'm very, very glad you're not dead. Even if you are a liar."

His face softened and the anger began to dissipate. In its place Nikki now recognized concern.

Grave concern.

"You've never projected before, have you?"

"No," Nikki confirmed. "I wanted to learn how when I first realized I was psychic. But when so many spirits moved in, I lost interest in everything to do with my powers and never got around to it." She turned away from G as she admitted, "Reilly and L helped me do it tonight so I could find you."

G ran both hands down his face. "Shit." He grabbed his shoes and sat down to put them on. "Nikki, can you find your way back?" he asked. "Do you know how to get back to your body?"

"I think so."

"Good. What I want you to do is go back to your body. Go as quickly as you can and wait for me there at your house."

Nikki squinted as she watched him reach for his car keys. "You're driving?" she asked. "Why can't you just go with me in this realm?"

"There's no time!" G took a breath and gathered his composure. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to yell but one of us has to get back to your body as soon as possible. It would take me at least two hours to meditate into the astral realm if nothing breaks my concentration. So you have to go back and you have to go back right now." He started for the door. "I'll be there in about twenty minutes."

Nikki was confused by his reaction. Confused and yet delighted that he cared this much.

As for why he was so worried about her body, Nikki wasn't sure.

He paused at the open door. "I'd kiss you if I could." He smiled.

She returned his smile. "First thing to do when we're on the same side."

G nodded and closed the door behind him.

Nikki heard him start the car. She listened to him back out of the drive. She then closed her eyes, considered the path she needed to take back to her physical self and let her spirit lift off.

As for why she bounced right back into G's bed?

Nikki did not know.

* * * * *

“Stupid, stupid, stupid.”

As he drove, Dan cursed himself with every ugly word possible.

I shouldn't have left her alone. I should have stood my ground and told her that even if she didn't want to be with me, I wasn't leaving her alone again with them.

What was normally less than a half-hour drive was taking forever. Of all the nights for it to be raining and foggy. More than once Dan felt his car skid and slide, and each time he reminded himself to slow down.

That would be his luck. To finally connect with Nikki, for her to accept that he was alive and admit she was in love with him, and then for him to lose his life trying to save her.

Of course, there was always the chance she had already lost hers.

Nikki didn't know what could happen to her. There was no way she understood the risks. She was too calm when he'd asked her where her body was. Too trusting of L and the other spirits she'd left in charge of her physical being.

But Dan did understand the risks of projecting. He knew the only difference in his astral self and the other souls in Nikki's house was that the astral cord attaching his soul to his body was intact.

The “roaches” cords were not.

One snip. A single cut was all it would take to sever Nikki from the living world. One nasty, rude spirit with a grudge or one soul in a foul mood and Nikki would be trapped on the other side.

Surely they wouldn't kill her! Surely to God none of them were that evil.

Dan's guts churned. He wanted to believe none of the spirits inhabiting Nikki's house would go so far as to kill her. But he just couldn't be sure. He'd spent so much time studying Nikki that he hadn't paid much attention to some of her houseguests. He

knew Reilly was a harmless pain in the butt. L was too addicted to peanut butter to do any harm. And Dan had a pretty good read on most of the others.

But as for some of them, especially the newest ones, Dan didn't know who they had been when they were alive. Didn't know if they were good men or bad. And he should have found out before now.

He hadn't.

Dan would never forgive himself if something had happened to Nikki. He'd known better than to be so careless. The man, the scientist, every part of Dan had known better than to leave such variables unconsidered.

The car skidded again and Dan slowed down. He took a deep breath and tried to calm down.

Everything was okay, he told himself. He wasn't sure how long she had been out of her body, didn't know how long it had taken her to find him, but she was back in it. She had to be.

He'd only just found this woman. There was just no way the universe was going to let him lose her now.

* * * * *

"Woo-hoo! Episode one of Astral Gal got twenty-five thousand hits in the first half hour!" L plopped down on the bed beside Nikki and wrapped his arm around her motionless, trance-frozen body. Jokingly, he offered her a lick of peanut butter. She didn't take it. "Think that's a record?"

Reilly was adjusting the settings on the webcam. "A record? Hell, all we did was make her up in episode one. When we start using props and taking requests we'll be YouTube gods."

L smiled and glanced at the laptop screen. "Dude. Skeezer786 from Dallas wants to see us pierce her tongue." He wiggled his eyebrows and palmed one of Nikki's breasts. "Should we do one better and go for a tit?"

Reilly checked the knot he'd tied in the silver cord extending out of Nikki's head, into the ceiling and beyond. "No, let's save clit and nipple piercing for when we drop out of the top ten."

"I thought we were gonna shave her head to put us back in the top ten."

"No," Reilly said. "We're gonna shave her head when T gets back with the kittens."

L licked his fingers. "Kittens? What's T going to do with kittens?"

Reilly grinned and went back to the camera. "Don't ask."

Finally happy with the angle and the knot, Reilly stood back and examined his handiwork. "Nikki would freak the fuck out if she knew what we're doing to her."

L shrieked in excitement and added a permanent marker mole to Nikki's left cheek. "Too bad she won't see it until it's too late, huh?"

Reilly opened his mouth to agree with him, but the words never made it out. Before he could speak, the bedroom door flung open and another spirit stepped in. Only it wasn't really a spirit. It was G.

Reilly had always known a few things about G. He knew G was the resident freak geek and he knew G was the only one of them who was still alive. He knew G had a hard-on not just for Nikki, but also for all things dead and freaky. But the minute G walked into the room and saw what they'd done to his girlfriend, Reilly learned something new about him.

G could get extremely pissed off.

* * * * *

"What the fuck have you done to her?!"

L bolted from the bed the minute the only living spiritual invader in Nikki's house burst into the bedroom. The spook went to stand by his partner in crime as Dan examined the knot Reilly had tied in Nikki's astral cord. She looked like shit, but for the moment Dan couldn't care less about Nikki's disturbing physical state. All he cared about was her being alive.

“What did you do? Were you trying to tie it back together?” He was furiously working at the knot. “You know it doesn’t work that way! Once it’s cut, it’s cut!”

“It’s not cut,” Reilly said. He and L swapped glances as Dan tried to loosen the knot without damaging the cord. “We just blocked her out.”

Dan narrowed his eyes at the two spirits. Reilly and L. Dan could *see* Reilly and L. But that was impossible! Dan wasn’t on the astral plane. He was in his physical body so he shouldn’t be able to see the spirits in front of him.

And yet there they stood. Two hovering, transparent figures—ghosts—complete with peanut butter stains on their fingers. But how was this possible? Was it because he’d spent so much the time on the astral plane? Had the months he’d spent as a spirit taught him how to do what Nik could do?

Dan didn’t know why he could see the spirits. He did know that Nik was going to freak out with happiness when he revealed this discovery to her. Provided he managed to get her back into her body and to this side.

“Why did you tie a knot in her cord?”

Reilly shrugged. “We didn’t want her to get back into her body for a while. We were just having some fun.” He indicated the laptop and camera. “Voyeurism isn’t just for the living, you know?”

Only then did Dan notice the permanent marker on her face. She looked like some kind of raccoon/nerd cross-pollination experiment gone terribly wrong with the glasses drawn around her eyes. What really made Dan chuckle inside, however, wasn’t the glasses, nor was it the mustache, the big “L” on her forehead or the Wite-Out on her fingernails.

“Were these clothes in her closet?” Dan asked, noting the plaid mini skirt, white blouse over a push-up bra and white knee socks.

Her long blonde hair was in pigtails.

"No, they came from my closet," Reilly snapped sarcastically. "Of course we found them in her closet. Where the hell else would we have gotten them?"

Point made, Dan considered as he imagined flipping that skirt up onto her back and fucking her from behind. It did bother him that one of the spirits had stripped and redressed Nikki, but she appeared to be okay. He sat back on his heels and examined the rest of her. "You didn't do anything to her."

L blew out in disgust. "No, man. Nothing serious."

"Nothing that won't wear off," Reilly cackled.

Dan was straightening her clothes, covering her cleavage for the moment. "Nothing vulgar?"

"You mean did anyone spend four hours conjuring up a body so they could fuck her?" Reilly asked. "No, freak geek. That's your job."

Dan breathed a sigh of relief. They hadn't hurt her. Yes, she looked like the first twelve-year-old to fall asleep at a slumber party, but she was unharmed.

Best of all, even the cockroaches knew she was his girl.

"One of you lube up this knot and get it untied," he ordered and stood up beside the bed. "I'm going to let her know why she can't get into her body yet. I'll be back in about an hour." Dan pointed first at Reilly and then at L. "Not another spirit comes into this bedroom while I'm gone. Do you two understand?"

The spirits nodded, reluctantly.

"And neither one of you touches her again." He added on his way out the door.

This time only L nodded.

No matter. Dan wasn't going to stand there arguing with the other one. He'd much rather get back to Nikki. No doubt she was going nuts trying to figure out a way to get back to her body, and the sooner Dan could get to her and let her know everything was okay, the better.

* * * * *

G's psychic library was even bigger than her own. The man had every book ever written on the subject of astral projection, ESP, remote viewing, clairvoyance, you name it he had it.

And yet nothing was telling her why she kept bouncing back into his bed every time she tried to get back into her body.

He was going to be furious when he got to her house and she wasn't there. No, he wouldn't be mad at her. But he would be worried.

Nikki smiled at how that notion warmed her heart.

At a loss as to why she was stuck in this realm, Nikki slid his books back on the shelves and drifted back to the bedroom.

That's when she spotted it. The laptop. It was sitting on G's nightstand. The world wide web. Of course! Surely someone else had projected and run into this problem. And most likely, if it had happened, someone had blogged about it.

This was her answer. She'd simply Google her problem and see if she could figure out what was going wrong.

"Astral projection," she typed, reconsidered, and then added, "blocked from body".

The first few hits were porn. No big surprise there. The next page was mostly scientific opinion, a few skeptics' articles and a forum for displaced souls.

How amusing, Nikki thought, and almost clicked on the site. But then the next link on the page caught her eye.

Watch Astral Gal Live!

She stared at the text, not wanting to read the description but unable to stop herself.

Girl on astral plane blocked from physical body. Episode one: The Initiation Of Nikki.

"No." Even Nikki's nonexistent mouth went dry. "They wouldn't dare..."

But they would. She knew they would.

They were, after all, cockroaches.

No wonder G had freaked out. Nikki had been in such a hurry to find him that she hadn't even thought about the dangers of leaving her body alone with them.

Unfortunately it would seem his warning was a little too late. At least one episode too late. Nikki gritted her teeth and clicked on the link. The clip immediately began to play.

It was funny. Somewhat. She wasn't seated at her best angle and the lighting could have been better. Her ass looked fat and she was never going to get the marker off her face. But at least they weren't doing anything obscene or sexual to her.

Best of all, she figured out her problem.

She silently cursed Reilly as soon as she spotted the knot in her cord.

Nikki let the clip finish, clicked out of the site and tried to go back to her body. She bounced right back again.

She was confused. Why hadn't G untied it yet? Surely he'd made it to her house by now. Was he still working on it? Was there a problem and he was coming back to get her in this realm?

Nikki clicked on the next page of her search, now hoping to find a way to get past the knot and back into her body. Once again she was forced to stop and stare at the results.

Astral Gal: Episode Two had just been posted. *Pierced, Poked and Prodded*.

She clicked on the link and waited for the clip to start. It was nerve-racking, the waiting. Wondering what the roaches had done to her this time.

It was bad. It was really, really bad. Bad enough that before the clip was a third of the way over, Nikki discovered a disembodied spirit could emit a scream that could be heard for miles.

Chapter Eleven

"They pierthed my tongue."

As Dan listened to Nikki he was silent, but his eyes were glistening and an almost palpable tension filled in the air. As good as she was at reading people, right now Nikki couldn't read Dan and it was driving her nuts.

What was he thinking?

"Did you hear what I thaid?" Nikki insisted. "They pierthed my tongue!"

He sniffed and a half snort slipped out. Nikki's eyes grew large as laughter all but crippled him.

She pointed at the gold ball in her mouth. "You think thith ith funny?"

Dan pulled her close to his side. "I think ith's hilariouth," he mocked.

Nikki squealed in irritation when Dan tightened his hold on her. But her struggle didn't last for long.

"You're an athhole." She smiled.

"First you're mad because I'm not dead," he teased. "Now you're mad because I have a sense of humor. Dammit, woman, what does a man have to do to make you happy?"

Nikki laughed until Dan dipped his fingers into one cup of her bra. Then she hummed contentedly and settled deeper into his arms.

"They're lucky they didn't go after these." He sampled one peak and then the other. "Or this." One hand patted the front of her skirt.

"They would have," Nikki warned. "If you hadn't thopped them."

Dan grinned but didn't laugh this time. Instead, he was quiet while his eyes and hands examined her. He touched her hair, ran his fingers down her neck, squeezed

gently to test the resistance of the feminine muscles in her arms. His slow, careful attention made Nikki feel like a doll. Like some beautiful, breakable, priceless doll he was checking for cracks in case he needed to kill someone for damaging her.

"I want you again." He tone was serious but his hands soft when he cupped her face in them. "I haven't had enough of you. I probably never will."

What a sexy thing to say. Nikki relaxed when he pulled her tighter and let her body melt into the shape and contour of his. When they were touching at every possible point, Dan sighed. "You didn't want to love me."

Behind his shirt and skin and breastbone Nikki could hear his heart beating. She closed her eyes and concentrated on the sound instead of confirming what he'd just said.

"Why didn't you want to love me?" he insisted, gently. "Were you afraid I'd hurt you?"

"No," Nikki pressed her ear tighter against his chest. "I knew you'd hurt me. Eventually."

"How?"

Nikki didn't say anything.

Dan put his hands on her shoulders and pushed her back until she could see him. His voice was tender but stern this time. "Nik, you have to talk to me if this is going to work." Nikki blinked. Stupid tears. "You have to tell me what's wrong. Tell me what you're afraid of."

So many words flooded into Nikki's head. What was she afraid of? Everything. But there was a reason she felt that way—a perfectly good reason—in spite of what Dan would probably think and ultimately say to her to try to make her feel better.

And yet, he was right. She did have to talk to him if this was going to work. Her feelings for him aside, they couldn't even be research partners if Nikki wasn't willing to share with him what she already knew about the spirit realm and her "gift".

Nikki examined the bedroom until her eyes settled on the door leading to the rest of the house. "I feel what they feel."

Dan hesitated. "The spirits."

Nikki nodded.

"Okay."

She took a deep breath. She could do this. "What happens to me when I feel empathy isn't like on this side where you know someone is upset or hurt or sad because you see them crying or hear them screaming and you simply feel bad because they're hurting."

It was Dan's turn to breathe deep. "Okay," he said again.

How could she tell him what she needed him to know? How could she make him understand a feeling or a state of being or a situation without a name and that had never been described?

"You feel what other people feel—what they really feel, down in their souls," he said for her. "And you knew if you ever really loved someone—especially if you loved the way someone like you can love—whenever the person you really loved was hurting..."

Yes. Nikki nodded until she had to hear his heart beating again. She pressed her ear against his shirt and let out a breath. He understood. Somehow Dan knew it wasn't that she hadn't wanted to love him. That hadn't been it at all.

Nikki had never had the nerve to love anyone.

"You don't hate the cockroaches."

He couldn't see it, but Nikki smiled.

"You don't hate them because you know a truth most people have never considered." He waited. "Am I right, Nik?"

Finally, she looked at him. She let him see her smile. "I don't hate the roaches. There's no such thing as hate. There is only love and fear. Everything a human being

does is because they're acting on behalf of one of those two feelings." She ran her finger along his jaw. Examined the sharp, handsome line. "I'm afraid to care about spirits enough to help them find the light for the same reason I was afraid to love you. Because I knew if I did love you, whenever you hurt, it wouldn't just be painful for me."

"It would be agony." Now he was nodding. Slowly, because he was beginning to understand. More importantly, she believed, because he wanted to understand. "Which one is stronger?" he asked. "Love? Or fear?"

"It's always been fear for me," she admitted. "Only because I've always let fear be the strongest force in my life."

"Why?"

Nikki smiled as she studied the curve of his mouth. He'd fired the single-word question off with amazing speed. He was listening to her. Truly listening. Almost as if he truly wanted to hear what she was saying. But he did have a good question.

Why?

Was he really that passionate about the astral realm and ESP and communicating with spirits?

Or was there something else driving his attention and interest in her?

"If you'd floated in here and I'd been an aeronautic engineer instead of an empath, what would you have done?" She put his research-related question on the back burner for the time being. Right now there were more important things for them to discuss. "Would you have come back the next night?"

Dan tilted his head to the side and let his eyes wander to the ceiling. "Depends, I guess."

"On what?"

She lost all physical contact with Dan when he moved away from her and lay down on the bed. Nikki bit down on her bottom lip when he fully extended his long frame, crossed his ankles and propped up with both hands behind his head. She had told

herself she didn't love him for a long time. And for a while she'd believed she didn't love him. But Nikki had never even tried to convince herself that Dan wasn't exactly what he looked like when he stretched out on her bed this way.

A damned sexy bastard.

Nikki tried to remain composed but the nervous pitch of her voice when she repeated her question gave her away. "It depends on what?" she asked.

He didn't respond verbally. He only smiled, adjusted to make himself more at home in her bed, and spun his index finger in the air in front of him. "Turn around."

Incredibly, Nikki felt her face flush red at his request. "What?"

Both eyebrows arched. The rest of his face was still. "Turn. Around."

She slowly did as she was told. She wasn't really sure why she did as she was told. Nor was she sure why being told what to do seemed to turn her on. Still, she spun around and put her back to him.

"Now, bend over."

Nikki's reflection in the full-length mirror on her closet door showed a face that had recently been scrubbed to within an inch of its life. Her cheeks were baby's-bottom pink from where she'd been "decorated" with magic marker. She suspected in a man's eyes her rosy cheeks only made the pigtails and schoolgirl outfit more potent.

"Nicole." His voice was gruff this time. "I told you to bend over."

She almost smiled. She almost laughed, in fact. He was being so serious and domineering and the thought of Dan ever being mean to her or getting rough with her was almost more than she could take and not burst into a fit of giggles.

But he was doing such a convincing job. Nikki glanced at him in the mirror and didn't see the first sign he might break character anytime soon. And that was fine.

Two could play this game.

Nikki crossed her arms, widened her stance and turned to stare at something on the other side of the room.

The bed squeaked. There was rustling. Pillows, comforter, sheets all being trampled as he got off the bed. Nikki stood her ground even as he stepped up behind her.

"I told you to bend over," he whispered.

"No."

Nikki wanted to look in the mirror. She wanted so badly to see the expression on his face. But the stubborn little girl routine really seemed to be getting to him and she didn't want to ruin his fun by acting like she cared about what he thought.

His palm covered one entire side of her ass when he reached down and slid it under her skirt. As he spoke, one cheek was being grasped and fondled and kneaded in his hand.

"I'm giving you one last chance, Nicole," he offered, gripping her ass a bit tighter. "Bend over. Or else."

She let him see her smirk in the mirror. "Or else what?"

Even if the lick to her bottom hadn't stung like a mother, the loud *slap!* of his open palm against her bare flesh would have made Nikki jump and squeal.

"I told you to bend over."

Nikki didn't know what to say. He'd done it much faster and a hell of a lot harder than she'd expected him to. He'd spanked her. Her eyes were huge as they stared at him in the mirror. She could not believe it. The "sexy bastard" had just spanked her ass.

Even more shocking than his spanking her was how much she'd liked it. Through the bra and blouse she wore, Nikki could see her nipples beginning to harden into tight little points and there was no mistaking the wet, wanting reaction currently transpiring underneath that skirt.

"Nicole." This time his only warning was her name before he issued another slap. The delicious sting forced Nikki to whimper inside but her face and demeanor remained stoic. "Bend over so I can see your ass in that skirt."

Nikki couldn't help but grin as she considered his request. Should she bend over and torture him with the sight of her now red and swollen ass, or did she want one more lick? A quick glance in the mirror helped her make up her mind.

Dan's cock wasn't just erect. Their game wasn't simply arousing him. Judging from the size of the bulge in his jeans, Nikki suspected his dick was literally throbbing in anticipation.

Nikki figured it was her job to make that anticipation worse.

With a defiant huff she stepped closer to the mirror. Dan crossed his arms and backed away slowly until he was leaning against the foot of the bed.

She wasn't sure how the view from the back was when she bent over, but Nikki thought the reflection of her from the front looked pretty damned good. The bra the spirits had squished her tits into worked wonders when she was standing up. When she bent forward and gravity did its part, the resulting cleavage was impressive as hell.

Nikki turned her attention to Dan's reflection just in time to see him wipe a grin from his face. He literally cleared his throat before ordering, "Take off your panties." Nikki straightened slightly but stopped when Dan barked, "I didn't tell you to stand up."

"Details, details, details." She was giggling when she hooked her thumbs into the lace at the sides of her panties and painstakingly peeled them down her legs. "Now who's never happy?" she teased.

Dan didn't respond. Nikki gave him a few seconds to decide what he wanted her to do next before giving up and finding his reflection in the mirror.

"Come here."

He wasn't in character anymore. Dan's voice, his face, everything about the man was soft now. Almost everything, that was. Nikki immediately went to stand in front of him.

As soon as she was close enough for him to touch, Dan reached for her with a single finger. The finger found her clit and lingered there, circling until Nikki's body began to squirm and undulate. Dan's finger then ventured another inch or so farther until it slipped into the warm, wet opening between her thighs.

The fingers of his left hand were only allowed to argue with the buttons on her blouse for a moment. As soon it became clear that Dan was right-handed and that he was more than just a little impatient to have her breasts fully at his disposal, Nikki quickly undid the buttons for him and shrugged out of her shirt and bra.

"Teamwork." He winked and drew a peak into his mouth. Nikki returned his smile until a jolt of electricity aimed straight for her pussy made her gasp. Obviously pleased with her reaction, Dan raked his teeth across the sensitive flesh of her nipples until Nikki begged him to stop.

"I want to ride you," she pleaded as she gripped the erection in his jeans. "I want you inside me."

Dan chuckled and pushed another finger inside her. "Oh, you're going to ride me. And then I'm going to ride you. Hard."

His "threat" made every muscle inside her pussy tighten. Aching to have him carry out his threat, Nikki ground her sex against his hand and pressed her lips to his mouth.

At first the kiss was anxious. Impatient, like his fingers had been with her blouse. There was too much to taste and feel and too many new parts of one another they each wanted to explore at the same time for either of them to slow down and enjoy what was going on.

As wonderfully clumsy and passionate as the kiss would be in their memory, Nikki was the one who got them on the right track. She pulled back and smiled at G. Touched his cheekbone with the tip of her nose. She breathed long and slow into the side of his neck and one ear before biting a gentle trail from his jugular to his chin. Finally, she kissed one corner of his mouth—just the edge. Just enough to get them lined up. All it took from there was Dan tilting his head and everything fell into place.

Nikki forgot all about his fingers. She didn't remember anything about any spirits, and she couldn't recall—nor did she care—how many beings lived in her house. All she knew—all she wanted to know from now on—was Dan's taste. She wanted to remember the spicy, male flavor of his mouth and the way his tongue moved and felt when it was dancing with hers.

Even before the kiss ended, Nikki was limp. The only thing holding her up was Dan's hands on her hips. For a kiss that had started out so hurried and disastrous, it had turned into something she would never have expected.

Dan obviously agreed with Nikki's assessment. The second her lips left his, he groaned and slid down her body. As if he'd just given in to some force he'd been resisting for years, he landed with a soft thump on the floor between her legs, his mouth aligned perfectly with her sex.

Nikki had never had a man perform oral sex on her while she was standing up. That was about to change. With one hand knotted in the skirt to hold it out of the way, Dan's other hand reached around and gripped her ass. When he pulled her to him, Nikki fell forward and placed her hands on either side of his head.

At first the unfamiliar position made her nervous. She was almost sitting on his mouth. But as the seconds wore on it became clear this was exactly the position Dan was aiming for.

He wasn't trying to eat her pussy. As wet as she was it wasn't his intention to lap up her juices or fuck her with his tongue. There was only one part that interested Dan.

Nikki's clit was exactly where Dan wanted it to be. Awkward as the position had seemed at first, straddling Dan's face had placed her clit right where his teeth could nip it and drag it into his mouth. It was exactly where it needed to be for him to suckle it and tease it with his tongue.

"Do you like that?"

Nikki's eyes were closed as she clung to fistfuls of the comforter. She looked down just in time to watch Dan reach out with his tongue and stroke the tiny nub with its tip.

She nodded breathlessly. "Yes. A lot."

His hand on her ass tugged her closer as he continued to suck and lick and nip. Nikki felt wanton with him beneath her this way. She felt strangely sexual and not in a way to which she was accustomed. It was the position, she decided. There was something different about it. Different for her, at least.

He teased her almost to the point of orgasm, but not quite. Nikki suspected he was taking her only so far on purpose.

"Take off the skirt."

Nikki backed up a step, unzipped the miniskirt and let it fall to the floor. While she was undressing, Dan settled more comfortably against the side of the bed. When she was naked he motioned for her to come back to where she'd just been, tilted his head back and smiled.

"You first."

Her first? Her first at what? Nikki considered what she really, seriously wanted to do to Dan while he was in that position, and then she considered what Dan could possibly be asking her to do.

God, she hoped they were the same thing.

"You first," he repeated and motioned her closer. "But you're not allowed to come."

"You want me to ride you."

"Yes. Ride me. But don't come."

Nikki was flushed from head to toe from excitement, arousal and possibly even a bit of embarrassment over the somewhat unladylike act he was telling her to perform.

The naughty, self-satisfying act she wanted to perform.

This is how a man feels when he's about to fuck. Nikki forgot all about the second part of Dan's order as soon as she planted one foot on either side of his body, pressed her pussy against his lips and started doing the first thing he'd told her to do.

She rode him.

Could he breathe? Was he comfortable underneath her like this? Nikki's concerns were real, but fleeting. Yes, Nikki decided as she ground her pussy against his mouth, this was definitely what drove men to do some of the selfish things she'd known them to do in bed.

It felt too exquisite for her to worry about anything else at the time. His hands gripping her ass, encouraging her to ride him harder and faster and the way her clit was getting the perfect amount of pressure from his tongue and lips since she was the one on top. It felt good to fuck this way. It especially felt good to fuck Dan this way because she knew he had just handed her more power in bed than any other man ever had. And there was only one reason why a man would do such a thing.

Dan loved her. As much as he'd enjoyed spanking her ass—and he had enjoyed spanking her ass—Dan was showing her he didn't have to be the one in control all the time. His actions were telling her he could be vulnerable. And if he could be vulnerable, Nikki realized, he could get hurt.

Trust had never been one of Nikki's strong points. She hurt long before other people even knew anything was wrong, so to open up and let someone get close enough to inflict pain wasn't something she'd ever really wanted to do.

Until Dan. Nikki wanted to be that close to Dan. She wanted to let him in.

She also wanted him as satisfied as she was about to be. She wanted him to come as hard and be as happy as she was mere moments away from being.

But she'd worry about his needs later. After she'd fucked him like this for a while and after she had come in his mouth and on his face.

Oh yeah. No doubt about it. She was going to break the second rule.

And come.

Chapter Twelve

Oh yeah. No doubt about it.

Nikki was going to come.

And her coming was fine with Dan. It was exactly what he wanted her to do. He wanted her to come and he wanted her to enjoy fucking him this way. To be honest, he was enjoying this just as much as she was. What man didn't love seeing a woman drunk with passion? And what man didn't dream of being fucked into next year by a woman too horny to think about how she "should" behave in bed or the way her ass looks or what she's going to cook for dinner?

She was delicious. She smelled like sex and woman and lust and tasted the same way. Dan had always loved the salty decadence of pussy, but Nikki's pussy was especially sweet. He could drink every drop that came from her body and still not get enough of her.

She was also horny. Jeez, she was horny. Dan gripped the soft mounds of her ass in his hands and urged her to thrust and grind as much as it would take for her to get off. She could use his mouth, his tongue. Hell, for all he cared she could use his entire face. He'd sensed some hesitation in her at first and Dan had silently marveled. He wondered if she knew there wasn't a man alive who wouldn't agree there were much worse fates he could suffer than being used as a sex object. Fuck his face, his mouth, his hands, his dick. As long as there was fucking involved, a man was happy. And as intelligent and civilized and well read as Dan was sure he came across, he was still a man.

Just one of the little things they'd come to understand about one another, he supposed. He'd come to understand why she'd finally chosen to open up to him—a decision that could not have made him happier—and she'd hopefully come to

understand that when it came to being too horny or aggressive or twisted when she was fucking him, she needn't worry. There was no such thing.

She could fuck him like this from now on and he wouldn't mind. So long as she understood when she'd had her fill, he would have his turn.

It would seem this time his turn would be sooner than he thought. Nikki's body was rigid but trembling, her eyes closed and her hands in tiny fists at either side of his head as she dragged her clit back and forth across his mouth. It had only taken a stroke or two before they both knew the key to making her come was Dan catching her small female member between his teeth, sucking, and then releasing it with each pass.

That's how she was fucking him now. With small, feminine thrusts of her hips and soft mewling noises. It had never occurred to Dan to let another woman do this to him, but after the fantasy he'd had about fucking Nikki's mouth, the thought of having the same thing done to him had seemed intriguing.

In reality, having her pussy pressed against his mouth and feeling her body grind and circle and thrust against his lips was more than intriguing. Much more than just intriguing.

She cried out and bucked against him when her orgasm finally came. As her body began to shiver and convulse, Dan held her steady and took her clit between his teeth. He suckled it. Nipped and tugged and suckled again. Even when it was clear the sensation was too intense, too much for her to bear, he wouldn't release the little button of flesh. Dan had given her all the control, all the power up to this point. But now it was his turn to run things.

They were partners. And this was how it had to be if their partnership was going to work.

Dan wanted Nikki to come longer and harder and with more intensity than she had ever come before. He wanted her limp. Helpless. Completely unable and unwilling to defend herself when she was done. And he wanted her that way for a reason.

Finally, her body began to relax. The shivering and trembling gradually subsided. Dan released her clit and her ass and kissed the inside of her thigh before scooping her up and depositing her on the bed behind him.

Even as she panted and tried to catch her breath Nikki accepted his kiss. This one needed no help from either of them. This kiss was warm and slow and deep. A “thank you” and “well done!” to and from them both. When the initial kiss was through, Dan placed several more on Nikki’s cheeks and neck and even her eyelids.

“I’m assuming you enjoyed that?” He grinned.

She nodded. The red flush that had covered her entire body before she came had grown even darker and her nipples were even smaller than they had been—downright tiny, Dan thought—puckered and also a much richer shade of red than they had been.

She was beautiful. Beautiful and satisfied. And Dan had helped make her that way.

There was only one thing left to do, Dan decided. Only one thing a man could do when faced with a beautiful and completely satisfied woman.

Dan pushed himself up to his hands and knees and looked down at her. One of her tiny, crimson nipples called out to him so he gave it a tweak. Nikki grunted a small, offended sound but offered little in the way of real protest or resistance.

“I told you not to come.”

Her eyes were big and dark as she stared back at him.

“Did I not tell you, you were not allowed to come?”

Her white, slender throat moved when she swallowed. “Yes.”

Dan pulled his shirt over his head, unbuckled his belt and unzipped his pants. “I was very specific when I told you what you could and could not do.”

Nikki nodded. She was weak as a kitten now and obviously nowhere near feisty enough to give him lip like she had when he’d told her to bend over in the skirt.

“Do you know what I do to naughty little girls who disobey me?”

When he said, “naughty little girls” Nikki almost cracked. Her eyes began to laugh hysterically but luckily she didn’t have the energy to let it out. Instead, she went with the helpless, frightened, about to be punished act he’d set up for her. Nikki was no more afraid of him than she was the pillow behind her head, but because it was what he wanted, she was willing to act like she was terrified.

Her willingness made Dan’s cock throb.

She watched, wide-eyed and playing the part perfectly as Dan stripped off his jeans and underwear and took his dick into his hand. “First, I’m going to make you suck my cock.”

She hadn’t expected him to be so blunt. Dan could tell by the way she wiggled her ass on the bed that his vulgarity had shocked her, but she’d liked it.

“And when I’m done making you suck my cock, I’m going to fuck you.”

She wiggled again.

“Hard.”

Nikki was struggling desperately to stay in character. She was supposed to be the innocent, untouched Little Red Riding Hood to Dan’s Big, Bad pussy-ravaging Wolf. That was the role he’d wanted her to play. Smaller, submissive, reluctant. But with the hunger in Nikki’s black, eager eyes and the way she was squirming on the bed, she was telling Dan a different tale. One he liked even more than his own.

Nikki’s “Little Red” was a cock-loving whore.

“You want to suck my dick,” he challenged. “Don’t you?”

Nikki fought to keep her cool. “No.”

Dan crawled back onto the bed. His dick was hard as steel now and it bobbed up and down as he moved. “Oh yes you do. You love to suck cock. And you can’t wait to suck mine.”

“That’s not true.” She eyed his erection with fake terror. “I’ve never sucked a man’s penis before. And I don’t want to suck yours.”

Dan's sides hurt from the effort it took to hold back his laughter. Nikki had nailed that one all the way from the slow, sleepy blink of her eyes to the way her fingers were absently playing with a curl.

She was actually pretty good at this whole innocent act.

"You're going to suck it anyway," he informed her as he lay back on the bed. "You're going to suck my dick until I either come or I tell you you can stop."

Nikki's demeanor never changed as she got up on all fours and started across the bed. Even as hard as it already was, Dan's cock twitched and his balls tightened even more at the sight of her on her hands and knees with her plump, red-tipped breasts jiggling with every move.

"But I don't know how to suck a man's penis," she offered. Dan drew in a quick, sharp breath when she took his shaft into her hand. "Should I start by licking it here?" A long, agonizing pass of her tongue traveled across Dan's head. "Or here?" She applied an even slower, more excruciating lick up the entire bottom side of his shaft. "Is that the way to do it? Is that a good way to start sucking a man's cock?"

Dan managed to nod. Barely.

"So then what should I do?"

She had stopped. She was actually waiting on him to tell her what to do. Damn the woman to hell! And damn him for starting this game! Dan growled in frustration and cleared his throat. "You could..." He cleared his throat again. "You could put the head inside your mouth."

"I see." She considered his penis and used the wetness from her mouth to help her slide her hand—just once—up and down its shaft. "Just the head?"

Dan would have laughed if it wouldn't have led to him crying. "Well, for starters."

For a split second the first two inches of Dan's cock were in the warmest, tightest, most fuckable place they had ever known.

"Like that?"

God, did she know what she was doing to him? Of course she did! Nikki was female and smart and therefore one of the most lethal creatures on the planet. She knew what every intelligent female somehow knows from the day they're born.

Nikki was going to get exactly what she wanted.

Luckily Dan, being the equally intelligent man he was, knew there was no sense in fighting the inevitable. He might as well give it to her. And the sooner he gave her what he knew she wanted, the better it was for his sake.

It took very little effort to flip Nikki onto her back, but the speed and force of his tossing her caused her to grunt when she bounced. "You okay?" Dan paused long enough to ask.

"Yes! Dammit, Dan, I'm tougher than that. Now come here!" She was reaching for him—all of him—and laughing. Dan let her pull him in, between her legs. Right where she wanted him. And right where he wanted to be.

Her thighs were warm and smooth against the sides of his. Her body was soft and smelled like pretty things men never think to like or want until they find them.

Like the way Dan had found and now liked and wanted her.

"Do you want me to fuck you or make love to you?" he asked with a sly smile.

Nikki was quiet as she considered her options. "How about we bang each other really hard and profess our undying love for one another when we're through?"

Dan roared. "Like a compromise," he noted between chortles.

Nikki tightened her legs around him as she giggled. "Yeah. Or like teamwork. Only with wet, squishy sounds and the munchies afterwards."

Dan was chuckling yet again. "I don't think I've ever actually laughed while having sex," he admitted. Nikki was admiring him with a kind of adoration he'd never seen in any other woman's eyes. "But I also don't think I've ever had this much fun having sex."

"Isn't sex supposed to be fun?" she asked. "Isn't that why we have it?"

"I would think so." When Dan settled more snugly between her legs Nikki sighed.

"I love you."

She'd said it first this time. In and around the happiness something big and scary and painful suddenly came alive in Dan's chest. "I love you, too."

Nikki let him know she approved of his response with a series of "warm up" kisses meant to lure Dan's mouth into hers. Dan chased the brief, fluttering kisses down until her head was once again resting on the pillow.

Her lips were cooler than his, and no doubt softer. Her mouth was also smaller than Dan's, so for every one of his kisses she returned two. Dan caught himself laughing gently yet again over her attempts to keep up with his affections.

"Are we having a contest?" he teased. "Because if we are, I win."

Her lips brushed one corner of his mouth and then the other. "No, you don't."

Dan planted one long, drawn-out kiss on Nikki's lips. "Yes, I do. You can't beat me. I win every time. Especially in bed."

"Awfully sure of yourself, aren't you, fireball?" She kissed him three times, quickly, and then once long, soft and crippling.

When she was finished with him, Dan laughed out loud. This woman never stopped. Sometimes it seemed her sole purpose on earth was to serve as a constant, never-ending challenge. Especially to him. But he'd known this about her a long time ago. During the hours and hours they had spent engrossed in hushed, middle-of-the-night conversation Dan had learned that Nikki took nothing for granted. She honestly believed all things true today could somehow be altered tomorrow. She also believed she could be the one to alter them.

Every day, Dan was more and more inclined to agree with her on both accounts.

"You're scared." Her expression had hardened in a millisecond. Dan felt her body stiffen under his. "Why are you scared?" she asked.

Dan had to focus to figure out why she'd picked that up. What had he been thinking that had evoked fear?

"I was thinking about some of the very first things I noticed and liked about you." His mouth curled into a lopsided smile. "And I can't believe you felt that."

She was still very stiff. "Why would remembering those things make you afraid?" she asked.

Challenging indeed. Little did the woman know how easily soft, sweet-smelling challenges turned him on. Suddenly impatient to be inside her Dan used first one hand and then the other to draw each of her legs around his waist. When they were both comfortable and she had relaxed, he pressed the tip of his erection against her warm, moist sex.

"I was thinking about how I felt when I came back and you weren't the same woman I'd fallen in love with," he explained. "You were so angry and distant. You seemed so unhappy. Lifeless, almost. You weren't anything like the Nikki I loved. I guess I was remembering how afraid I was because I thought I'd lost you."

"I was afraid I'd lost you too," she admitted. Nikki was quiet as her eyes searched the ceiling past Dan's head. "At least, I think I was."

"What do you mean?"

She looked back at him with a mixture of childlike wonder, the very adult, very knowing lust of a grown woman, and something else. Something Dan hadn't yet identified.

"I mean, I'm not really sure if I felt that way or not." The tips of her fingers were traveling up and down his spine. "I'm sure I was just as afraid of losing you as you were of losing me."

The first two elements of her expression he could handle. He even liked the combination. As for the third unidentified ingredient? That one had Dan a little worried.

She was exploring his back with her hands. Tracing and caressing each muscle. Finding and fingering each line. "But I wonder if my own fear was that strong by itself, or was it so strong because it had mixed with yours?" She cupped Dan's ass with both hands and gave it a good squeeze. "Which emotions were mine and which ones were yours?"

"That's a good question," he agreed. "That's a damned good question. Although I don't really think it matters. Rather, I don't think it should matter. Not even to our research."

She was grinning. The third contributor to her expression was growing brighter by the second. "Why not?"

What was she up to, Dan wondered? Why was she grinning?

Dan took a moment to consider those questions as well as the weight of his next series of statements. "Because I suspect you're not as odd as most like to believe," he started. "I think the way you feel the emotions of others might be the way it's supposed to be. What if you are the normal one and the rest of the human population has something wrong with them?"

Dan could tell she understood what he was saying, but she was having trouble believing it. He silently cursed anyone who had ever called her a freak or told her there was something wrong with her.

He pressed the matter. "Maybe you're the one who isn't broken. And maybe the way you feel others is the way human beings were designed to operate." He took a deep breath. "When you think about it from a scientific standpoint, what you can do could have been a survival mechanism in the beginning. We're the only animals intelligent enough to destroy ourselves as well as everything else on the planet. Nature may have installed something inside us to keep us from doing that."

"You mean empathy."

"Yes."

She was still grinning but there was a new seriousness in her eyes. "So instead of being some new kind of human being that's evolving like the New Age 'Indigo Children' proponents would have us believe, you think psychics and empaths are actually..."

"An endangered species," Dan finished for her. "And a breed of beings mankind can't afford to let die."

Nikki was completely silent. Thinking. Dan wished so badly that he could read her mind. But when her eyes lit up he realized it was probably best that he couldn't read it.

He couldn't imagine how boring life would be if Nikki could be predicted.

"Duuuuude?" she whispered with an exaggerated surfer-style drawl and big, excited eyes. Her hands were on his butt again. "Do you know what this means?"

Dan fought back a smile. Nik was just so damned...strange sometimes.

And he loved that about her.

Her palm was drawing a circle on his ass. Round and round. Circling vulture-like as she grinned. "That means New Age is actually old school! And I bet it's old skool with a 'K'!" While she faked wide-eyed amazement, Dan went ahead and let his laughter out. "I'm a paradox!" she exclaimed.

He was still laughing. "Not to mention, a conundrum," he offered. "Until we figure all this out."

"And we will." She tightened both her arms and legs around him and nibbled on his ear. "In time."

"Yes, we will." Dan winked and kissed the tip of her nose. "Partner."

Nikki smiled. "I like that word." Dan hummed his agreement. "But you know what word I like better?" she asked. "You want to know what my favorite word in the whole English language is?"

Dan nodded, anxious to see where this was going.

Mischief. It wasn't the word Nikki was about to say but it was that third ingredient he'd had trouble identifying. Dan did finally recognize it. He just recognized it a second too late.

Even if the lick to his bottom hadn't stung like a mother, the loud *slap!* of her open palm against his bare butt would have made Dan jump and squeal.

"Spank!" She was rolling. Obviously pleased with herself. "I love everything about the word 'spank'!"

Dan was tempted to reach around and rub the offended spot on his ass, but there wasn't time. Not right now. Not when there was one ridiculously mischievous psychic underneath him who was in serious need of some discipline.

"Do you know what I do to naughty little girls who slap my ass?" He really did try to sound serious. "Have you any conceivable notion of what I do to naughty..." She was giggling and fighting to escape. Dan stopped talking long enough to pin her to the bed. "Naughty little girls who like to slap my ass?" he finished when she was completely helpless. "Do you have any idea, Nicole?"

She wasn't fighting anymore, nor was she laughing. But she was far from subdued and she was telling him as much with the glint in her eyes. He only hoped she could just as easily read what he was thinking.

Is there any possible way I could love you more than I already do?

"You fuck them." This wasn't the little girl speaking. "And you fuck them hard."

Dan hummed and slowly, inch by inch, slid his cock past her lips. Nikki made a distinctly contented sound as she moved her hips back and forth, taking him in. When Dan was as deep as he could go, he stilled.

Her entire body was wrapped around him. Every muscle, every ounce of heat, every bit of energy she could generate had come together around his cock. This was the sensation coursing through Dan as he lay there inside her.

Did she know how much he loved her? Was there any way she or anyone else could comprehend something that large? And did she know how many fascinating things they were going to discover together? How many old, worn-out ideas and concepts they were going to explore and shed new light upon? More importantly, did Nikki understand the most significant of those old, outdated ideas was right here between them? Or that it was a concept that had to be redefined?

Dan had always wanted to believe that real, true love was like a four-minute mile. After centuries of man accepting that he'd pushed himself as far as he could go, run as fast as he could run, one person finally broke the four-minute barrier. Now athletes ran the mile in under four minutes all the time.

He also wanted to believe Nikki was right when she said one person could alter the truth, and that such changes in the universe were sparked when someone crazy enough to think they could recreate reality crossed paths with someone crazy enough to agree.

The intersection of two believers, she'd whispered to him one night, was where magic came from.

So was he at that very moment inside a woman who could change the way the world defined love and the human soul and the concept of an afterlife? Dan withdrew his cock just as slowly as he had entered her, but immediately pushed it deep inside her again.

If that's who Nikki decided to be, Dan was going to second the motion.

More importantly, he wanted to fuck her regardless of who Nikki wanted to be.

Slowly, gradually, G's movements were increasing both in speed and intensity. The tension in his body was building every time he pushed a little harder. A bit faster. Even harder, even faster, harder and faster. Finally, the strain of holding back for her sake became unbearable for him and G's strokes turned into thrusts.

That was fine with Nikki. Hard and bordering on out of control was exactly how she wanted him.

"You're so hard it hurts, aren't you?"

A low, decidedly feral sound was his response. Nikki squeezed, constricting the muscles around his cock and making the passageway it wanted to travel even tighter. He was forced to take shorter, more powerful strokes. Both the increase in force behind his thrusts and the resistance were delicious. Nikki loved seeing him work to get inside her. She loved watching him yield to his urges in spite of the effort he was having to put forth.

"I can feel every ridge and vein in your shaft." She closed her eyes and concentrated on learning every minute detail of his length. "You could blindfold me and I bet I could still identify your penis out of a lineup of ten men who were the exact same size."

"Is that why you like wrapping your pussy around me like this?" He was breathless as he teased. "So you can map out my cock?"

"That's part of it." Nikki grinned and flexed her pussy yet again. "I like knowing you this way. I like knowing the details I can only get by doing this with you." She grunted and smiled up at him when her statement prompted him to drive a little deeper. "What do I feel like inside?" she asked. "Why does being inside a woman's pussy feel so good?"

Strain rested heavy on his face and the tendons and blood vessels in his neck bulged. When he spoke even his voice was coiled tight. "Because of your heat," he managed. "My dick is always out here. It can never be as warm as it is when it's inside you."

With his next stroke, Nikki squeezed again and rolled her pelvis to create a dragging sensation against the head of his cock when he pulled out. A small, unintentional moan escaped G. Nikki smiled.

"So is that all?" she asked. "Is it just the heat?"

He wanted to come. G wanted her to shut up and let him fuck her so he could come.

But when G came Nikki wanted him to come hard. She wanted him to have the most intense, most powerful orgasm he'd ever had. She wanted him to explode, and she wanted that to happen inside her.

"Am I slick?" she pushed. "Are the walls of my pussy wet and slick?"

G nodded and paused after a stroke. Up to this point he had been bracing himself above her, leaving a measurable distance between their bodies. Now he apparently wanted to close the gap. Nikki released a sigh of what felt very much like satisfaction when he cupped his hands behind her head and let the weight of his body rest on top of hers.

"Are you okay?" He settled into her as he asked.

Nikki hummed affirmatively and wrapped her arms around his waist. She wasn't simply okay with him on top of her like this. She was even happier. Now she could really feel him. Her hands and forearms could find and caress the muscles in his shoulders and back and she could delight in how the firm, flat landscape of his chest mashed and distorted the soft roundness of her breasts.

"Our bodies are so different," she whispered. "And yet they fit."

"Perfectly," he agreed.

G began to grind against her. Alternating thrusts with slow, circular motions of his hips designed to stimulate her as much as they did him.

"There's something familiar about the inside of a woman," he finally explained to her. "A man doesn't have the same parts, and yet every one of us instinctively knows what a woman feels like inside."

He'd just managed to grind perfectly against her clit. Nikki drew in a ragged breath before asking, "A man knows what a woman feels like even before he's had sex for the first time?"

"Yes."

He caught her clit again and Nikki gasped. His eyes were dark and his face smug with male pride when she was able to look at him again. "But, how do you know?" she insisted. "How does a man know pussy is what he wants?"

G believed Nikki's orgasm was close. The circular grinding motions of his hips were slowing, testing to see what resolve she had left. He didn't answer her question, and Nikki understood why. G was tapping his foot. Waiting on her. As patient and generous a lover as he was, G needed her to hurry.

Nikki lifted her hips and met his next thrust. "You want to come, don't you?" Her voice was barely audible in his ear. Nikki let a long, slow breath into his ear and down his neck punctuate her statement. "You want to come so badly it hurts."

The control he'd wielded so efficiently was slipping. His desire to see her pleased again was slowly being replaced by the desire to satisfy his own needs. Nikki slid her hands down until her palms cupped the curve of his ass and with each subsequent thrust, she urged him to go deeper.

"Come inside me."

Her order came out so quietly, the words were closer to a thought than a sentence. As soon as they were spoken Nikki took a soft, peach-fuzzed earlobe between her teeth and bit down.

The harmless but surprising jolt of pain she inflicted broke his concentration. For a split second G wasn't able to think about holding back so she could come too and his body seized the opportunity.

The man wasn't a screamer. He hadn't said as much but Nikki somehow knew it wasn't his style to vocally announce a climax.

But this once, G groaned when he finally came. It wasn't a whimper, nor was it the victory cry one might expect to hear during what most men considered a triumph.

The long, mournful, helpless and happy utterance Nikki managed to provoke during G's orgasm could only mean one thing.

It was good.

The best he'd ever had? Possibly. Even if it wasn't the best orgasm he'd ever had, Nikki knew in time she'd claim that spot.

As for naming when and with whom her own "personal best" occurred, there was no doubt in Nikki's mind.

Just like everything else she now shared with G, the best orgasm she'd ever had started slowly. Just a gentle, rhythmic pulse as she lay there blissfully trapped and entangled with his body. She wouldn't have known it was the beginnings of a climax at all if she hadn't stopped to pay attention to something very different, and yet very, very right going on inside her.

It wasn't like any other she'd had before. This orgasm didn't simply overtake her and give her what she wanted. This one had been building while she was paying attention to something else. Now that it was here, it was making demands. Almost as if it knew it could insist she focus and recognize it and then appreciate it because it had graced her with its presence.

And appreciate it, she did. It seemed the slow build of tension had been a distraction so when her body finally collapsed there was no way Nikki would have imagined something this strong was about to take control of her body.

She wasn't normally a screamer either, but after the first half dozen spasms Nikki felt a cry tear from her throat. After that a series of smaller, less demanding cries escaped, one for each muscle spasm that tightened and released her from the inside out.

Even after she had her cries under control, Nikki continued to quiver and tremble underneath G. By the time she was coherent again, he had reached the afterglow of great sex and was simply resting on top of her, watching.

"Show-off," he teased. "Who said you could have another?"

Nikki made a mental note to snap back something witty about men making more money than women as soon as she could breathe and speak properly. "I didn't mean to do that."

G laughed as heartily as his own depleted energy level would allow and rolled to lie next her. As soon as he was comfortable, he pulled her to his side. "I guess there are much worse accidents."

Nikki nodded and laid her head on his chest. Between them the quick but steady beat of her heart was echoing the pace of his. "I'm glad I decided to love you."

G chuckled, most likely at her choice of words. "I'm glad you did too. Although, I'm not sure if we have a choice in such matters."

Nikki let her fingertips draw circles around his nipples. "I think we do, and we don't."

He kissed her hair. "What do you mean?"

Nikki had never been so relaxed and yet so pumped up in her entire life. She was exhausted from two of the best orgasms she'd ever had, and yet more excited about simply being alive than she'd ever thought possible.

One person, one man, had made everything in her life make sense. All the name calling, all the pain, all the frustration and loneliness over being something very few people were willing to try and understand. None of it mattered. Not anymore. Not since she opened up and let herself love and be loved.

"I think love can be right there, right in front of you. I think it can even be inside you and you can still choose not to get anything good from it," she explained. "I think it only has the power we allow it to have."

G was quiet.

Nikki finally knew why the oldest book in her collection had called to her that day in that Atlanta bookstore. She had known even before she "knew", that she would run into a man named Daniel. Nikki suspected she may have even known that this "Daniel" would understand and appreciate her bizarre gift more than she could ever imagine.

Who knew? Perhaps her Daniel was a prophet too.

"I love you, Dan."

Nikki heard his heart speed up. Just a bit. Her partner's arms tightened around her and he pressed his lips against her forehead. The memory of slapping his ass flashed through Nikki's mind when he laughed and said the exact words she needed him to say.

"I know you do."

Epilogue

Six months later

“What about that one?” Nikki used the Twizzler to point to a line of numbers, and then caught the end of the candy between her teeth and pulled. She chewed thoughtfully as Z Version 2.0 shook his head. “Okay. That one, then.” She pointed again. He shook his head. Nikki swallowed her candy and then insisted, “There has to be one thing on this list you can admit.” When he shook his head yet again, Nikki wiggled her candy at the ghost. “Not every mistake ends up being a regret. You’re telling me there isn’t anything on your list you consider a lesson learned or that you chalked up as just plain,” she bit off another piece of candy before she finished, “dumb?”

Z Version 2.0 saved his work, clicked on the red “X” and reached for his list. Nikki fished another Twizzler out of the bag as he flipped through page after page of binary code.

“Damn.” She teased. “You and fucking up go way back.”

The spirit grunted. “You have no idea.”

Nikki watched and waited and then rolled her chair closer to the desk when he stopped flipping. Z Version 2.0 pointed to a string of ones and zeros. “That one right there.” He shook his head. “That was just plain dumb.”

Nikki turned her head sideways so she could see the code. She flashed a shit-eating grin and caught the end of another Twizzler between her teeth. “What’s it say?”

Z Version 2.0 sat back in the chair and tossed his list onto a stack of Astral Realm Assistance applications. “I got really drunk one night. And when I say drunk, I mean plastered.”

Nikki was already chuckling. She bit off another piece of candy. “Yeah? And?”

“And this girl had this lacy nightgown-looking thing. Or it might have been a robe. Anyway, she also had a camera. And for some reason, I thought it would be funny if I—”

“Nikki?” The IT Department door slammed open. Reilly was waving an application as he and L floated in. “We need to talk about this applicant you approved.”

Nikki chewed absently on the end of her Twizzler as she scanned the paper in Reilly’s hand. When she saw nothing out of the ordinary, she asked, “What about him?”

“What do you mean, what about him?” Reilly was dumbfounded. “Did you not see what he did for a living before he died?” When Nikki didn’t respond, Reilly put his thumb next to line seven on the application and turned it around so she could read it for herself. She didn’t say anything. “He was an English professor!” Reilly exclaimed. “Do you not understand what that means? He was an aspiring writer!”

Nikki looked at L. L shrugged and shook his head.

Reilly rolled his eyes and reached over Z Version 2.0’s head for the Astral Realm Assistance Program’s policy and procedure binder. “It very clearly states in section three, subsection eight of the Applicant Approval Guide that any applicant whose assistance would require an excessive or undue amount of psychic resources, manpower or peanut butter may apply, but only after said applicant can prove he or she has effectively decreased their fear-based regret load by at least twenty-five percent since crossing over into the astral realm.”

Nikki looked at L again. And again, L shook his head.

Reilly closed the binder and laid it on the desk. “Nicole, sweetheart, I know I helped make your life a living hell for the first few years we knew one another. But you also know I think you’re the bee’s knees now. Not to mention smart as a whip and a wonderful judge of character.” Reilly’s transparent form appeared to puff up a little. “I think your choice for head of The Astral Advisor Committee proves that.”

Nikki stifled a laugh when Z Version 2.0 made a gagging noise. Reilly flashed a middle finger at his fellow spirit/coworker and kept talking. “But if you’re going to do

what you've set out to accomplish, you have to think productivity. Your motto has to be 'volume'! In other words, you can't spend the next six months helping a single displaced spirit find the light."

"Why not?" she asked. "Isn't one spirit just as deserving as the next?"

If he'd had a face he'd have dragged his hands down it. Instead, Reilly sighed. "The way the Astral Assistance Association decides which displaced souls are most likely to be successfully relocated into the light is by looking at criteria such as past occupation, previous hobbies, amount of blue box mac and cheese the applicant consumed after the age of ten and the number of adult years the applicant lived with their mother. And by the way," he motioned to L and then to Z Version 2.0, "the Association needs your votes so they can rule on the Warcraft guy who called his mom's basement an apartment." When L nodded and Z Version 2.0 opened his binder to take down the note, Reilly turned back to Nikki. "So, say you have two applicants. One died while making love to the beguiling and yet betrothed daughter of a pigmy cannibal chief. The other died because he was overcome by toxic fumes while painting model airplanes. Now, which applicant would probably have less fear-based regret? Purina Pigmy Chow, or the model airplane junkie?"

Nikki was confused. "What the hell does being an English professor have to do with fear-based regret? Or Pigmies?"

Reilly began ticking off stats. "The Association automatically rejects first time requests for astral assistance from DJ's, English professors and drummers." He waved the application in front of him. "Your professor here can't be approved because anyone whose occupation indicates they went into their field because they were afraid to go after what they really wanted in life has a higher fear-based regret total. This is a proven fact." When Nikki didn't automatically agree, he pointed emphatically at the computer program Z Version 2.0 had just launched. "I can't make this shit up, Nicole. It's right there in the Astral Assistance Association's Statistics and Analysis Database."

Nikki crossed her arms and stared at just one of the spirits she still couldn't stand, but now couldn't imagine living without. "What about drummers?" she asked. "Why does The Association automatically reject applications from them?"

Reilly looked at L.

L looked at Z Version 2.0.

All three spirits fell over laughing. They continued to laugh until they would have been crying had they still possessed tear ducts. Reilly was even wiping his eyes when he was finally able to talk.

"What would be the point?" Reilly asked, still chuckling in little spurts.

"The point of what?" Nikki asked.

Reilly took a deep breath to get his amusement under control. "What would be the point of trying to help a drummer find the light?" Another fit of hilarity gripped the trio. Reilly was even slapping a knee that wasn't there to be slapped. "Nikki, you show me a drummer who has a snowball's chance of going to Heaven when he dies and I will bend over and kiss your psychic ass."

Nikki let the three spirits have their fun. Such disagreements were common since she'd incorporated some of the longest-residing spirits into her plans. Common, but easily remedied. Nikki took the application from Reilly. "I like the guy." She opened the application and scanned a few lines. "And I don't think he'll take as much time and effort as you think."

"But..."

"And besides," she stopped Reilly before he could argue, "the Association can vote all day long."

"But—" he tried again.

"But in the end," and Nikki stopped him again, "it's my decision who I do and don't help."

The spirit looked perplexed. "Nicole, if you aren't going to listen to me, why am I here?"

A familiar face, one she could never see enough, peeked around the door. Nikki's eyes immediately lit up and she stood to go. "I do listen to you, Reilly," she said as she made her way across to G. "And I take your advice under careful consideration, as I do the advice I get from L and Z Version 2.0 over there." She motioned to Z Version 2.0.

Z Version 2.0 grunted.

Nikki slipped her arms around the only other living being in the office. Her embrace was immediately returned, as well as a kiss.

Nikki loved how quick G was to reaffirm and agree with their understanding. What had started out as an unlikely romance had evolved into something even more bizarre. Nikki and G were very much together. Very much partners in many, many ways. Best of all, they both knew no matter what happened, they would continue to be partners for the rest of their lives.

They both understood what real love was. When Nikki said she loved G, and G said he loved her, they meant it.

For the first time in her weird, freakish life, Nicole was really, truly happy. She'd finally found someone who didn't mind that she saw and heard a different reality than anyone else around her. In fact, G was fascinated by the way Nikki saw things. Contrary to what she would have ever dreamed of having, G loved her not in spite of what she was, but because of it.

In the six months since admitting what she'd known since the first night G wandered into her life, Nikki had realized the man standing beside her was absolutely the best thing that had ever happened to her. He was the reason she wanted to be who she really was. He was her best friend, her lover, her buddy. Someone she never, ever wanted to live without. That was Dan. Although to Nikki he would always be "G".

"As for why you're still here," Nikki kissed her best friend/lover/buddy on the cheek and turned her attention back to Reilly, "I assumed you were still looking for that Bermuda Triangle."

The spirit cocked a flirtatious grin. "Hell, I'll never stop looking for that."

"I would hope not." She grinned back.

"Oh, for the love of God," Z Version 2.0 barked. "Will you two get a room?" Under his breath Z Version 2.0 muttered something that ended with, "vomit on my keyboard." The spirit spun around in his chair and palmed his mouse, only to spin back around to face G. "I can't believe you let those two carry on like this," he argued. "What are you gonna do when you come home one night and he's giving her a good old-fashioned ectoplasm shower?"

Nikki watched G silently consider Z Version 2.0's question. What would he do if he came home one night and caught Reilly giving Nikki a kickstand salute? Nikki could barely contain her laughter as she waited for G's response. She knew the way his mind worked. She knew his thoughts wouldn't go in the same direction most men's minds did. While most men were worried about infidelity and losing their girlfriends or wives to other men, G was on another level altogether. He didn't have to worry about losing Nikki because it was never going to happen.

At the end of the day, she was his and he was hers.

Not much more to talk about.

G looked at Reilly, then at Nikki, then at Z Version 2.0. "I'd probably hand her a towel."

Z Version 2.0 was visibly horrified. For the spirit's sake, Nikki tried to remain stoic until she and G were outside in the hall.

"Not making much progress, is he?"

Nikki looked back at Z Version 2.0. "Sure he is." Her statement was more hopeful than a lie. "Just today he went for a walk without an umbrella and yesterday he seriously thought about touching broccoli."

G snorted. "The fear of broccoli. Does that phobia have a name?" he asked. While Nikki shrugged G pulled her to him again. "How the hell do people get so messed up?"

Nikki sighed and relaxed into the warmth and comfort of G's arms. "Same way they get straightened out," she said quietly. "One warped idea and fear at a time."

"Yes, but he's afraid of everything."

"A lot of people are," Nikki agreed. "I was for a long time." She hummed contentedly. "I was afraid of love, of being happy, of living, of dying." As she talked, G kissed her nose, her neck and her chin. "I was afraid of you," she admitted. "Most of all, I was afraid of being myself."

"But love swooped in and saved the day." Nikki shivered as G left a tiny line of love bites down her neck. "And by love, I mean me and my big cock."

Still giggling at his comment, Nikki let her head roll to allow him better access to the tender flesh below her ear. All around them spirits floated and darted this way and that. Each of them trying to find the light.

It's right here, she wanted to say to them. I found what you're looking for.

But it wouldn't have helped them in their quest. This was her path. Her gateway to heaven. And they each had to find their own.

About the Author

Blayne Edwards was born, raised and still resides in the foothills of the Appalachians with the human animal she married and the timber wolf she adopted. After marrying the animal—but before adopting the bitch—she completed a degree in English Language and Literature from the University of Tennessee and promptly went to work in business management because it was the adult thing to do.

It only took a couple of years for Blayne to realize being an adult isn't all it's cracked up to be.

A chance online encounter with fellow author Angela Knight led Blayne to the world of e-publishing and erotica.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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