

A romantic couple is shown in a close embrace. The man, on the left, is shirtless and has his arms around the woman. The woman, on the right, is wearing a red strapless top and is looking towards the camera with a soft expression. The background is softly blurred, showing warm, golden light and hints of Christmas decorations, including a red and gold striped gift box and a red Christmas ball. The overall mood is intimate and festive.

BRENNA LYONS

ALL I WANT FOR
CHRISTMAS IS YOU

LoSeId

All I Want for Christmas is You

Brenna Lyons



All I Want for Christmas is You

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About this Title

Genre: Erotic Contemporary

Two years after Robin's fiancé dies in a car crash, she has sorted her priorities and decided to follow through with one of their plans. A baby. Of course, it would be best if that baby shared some of Zach's genes.

Enter David, Zach's older brother. He's her best friend, her confidant, the one person who won't dismiss her plans as insane...she hopes. And maybe sex with him will get David out of her fantasies, fantasies where he takes Zach's place.

Or maybe they won't. If Robin hadn't been Zach's when David met her, he would have stopped at nothing to make her his own. If she doesn't hate him for giving her what she's asking for, they might both get the Christmas gift they want most.

David is nothing like Zach. He's more physical, more adventurous in the bedroom, and not patient enough to take the long, slow approach to what he wants. Which is precisely what Robin loves about him.

Publisher's Note: *This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable: Anal play/intercourse.*

Dedication

To my inspiration for this story, Liam Neeson.

Prologue

January 29, 2008

Robin Lewis snapped awake at the sound of the doorbell and forced herself up to sitting. She focused her bleary eyes on the red LCD glow of the clock. “Three o'clock?”

A shaft of fear struck the center of her chest. Stories about people murdered or raped in their own homes magnified it.

Would it be better not to answer it? They might go away, if there was no sport inside. *Or they might come in, believing the house is empty.*

Then again, if she answered, they'd know a woman was inside.

Damn it! She'd never been afraid with Zach here, but Zach was in Portland on business, trying to finalize the purchase of another established company to expand Carson and Carson.

The doorbell rang again, and a brisk knock followed. Something in the latter told her that feigning an empty house would be a very bad idea.

Her knees shaking, Robin pushed to her feet and grabbed the heavy fleece robe off the headboard. She belted it around her on the way to the door, hesitated, then scooped up the cordless phone.

While she didn't want to appear foolish by calling the police before she knew what was going on, at the first sign of trouble, speed dial would be her best friend. Better yet, the police would respond to even an open line and silence, if she dialed 911.

The doorbell sounded a third time, just as she reached the door. Although the outside light was on—which Zach insisted on, whether he was home or not—she'd never been able to get a good look through the peephole, even on tiptoe.

“Yes?” she called out.

“Robin, it's me.”

She nearly crumpled in relief. “David? What are you doing here so late?” Without waiting for an answer, she started working the locks. Chances were, the storm had taken down the power lines between his house and hers and he needed somewhere warm to crash for the night.

Robin swung the door wide and stopped in shock. David wasn't alone. She stared at the police officer on the top step, her mouth going dry and gummy.

This was a first. Her soon-to-be brother-in-law had pulled a lot of stunts in his life, but to her knowledge, none had involved being arrested since he was twelve.

A nervous laugh bubbled up. “Aren't you a little old to be brought home by the police?”

Their grim expressions were the only answers forthcoming. Robin shivered...less from the cold from the open door than from a sense of dark foreboding. Something was wrong here. More than wrong.

She vaguely noted the edge of the door cutting into her fingers. A wild buzzing in her skull impeded her hearing. Her head spun, and her breathing went rough. Robin shook her head, gasping out a refusal of the obvious reason for their arrival.

The officer cleared his throat. “I'm sorry to have to tell you—”

“No,” she pleaded. *It's not possible. Zach is in Portland.*

“There was an accid—”

“No! He's at the Doubletree,” Robin insisted. She turned from the open door, hurrying to the notepad Zach kept next to the phone. “I'll get you the number. He's in room ten-twenty-f—”

“Robin!” David interrupted her.

She stared at him, shocked to silence by his outburst.

He stepped into the house and took careful, precise little steps toward her. It was nothing like his usual swagger. His hands were up in a calming gesture, as if he were approaching an injured animal. His shaggy brown hair was sticking up at odd angles, as if he'd dragged his hands through it repeatedly. His deep brown eyes—so like Zach's—were agonized, so tortured that she swore she could feel his emotions eating at her.

Maybe, it's my own pain I'm feeling.

“No,” she repeated. *I have no reason to feel pain. Do I?* A strange numbness stole over her muscles, and the cordless dropped to the table, bounced off the base, and went skittering across the room.

His expression went from concerned to stricken. “He came home early, Robin. Zach...wanted to surprise you, but...he...he was tired.”

A tear glistened at the corner of his eye. She stared at it, fixated.

No! Robin shook her head, sobs choking off another denial. Tears blurred her vision. Her knees buckled, and David gathered her to his chest.

“I’m sorry for your loss, Miss Lewis,” the officer intoned.

He sounded it, which only made her cry harder.

Miss Lewis. Only six weeks away from being Mrs. Carson, and that day will never come.

“Thank you,” David replied. “I’ll take it from here.”

The door closed and latched.

David held her until her legs gave out entirely. Then he carried her to bed and tucked the blankets around her. “I’ll take care of everything, Robin. You have my word.”

She choked again at the promise. Robin didn’t want to consider what needed “taken care of.” Zach wasn’t a load of girders. She didn’t want him to have to be “taken care of.”

“I’m here for you. I’ll always be here for you.”

He didn’t tell her everything would be all right. There was nothing right in this situation, and they both knew it. As such, David didn’t lie to her about it.

Chapter One

November 29, 2009

"I want to have a baby."

"C-come again?" David managed to stutter out. Overall, it was a better response than she'd anticipated to the announcement.

Robin took a calming breath and prepared to explain. Despite how many times she'd rehearsed the speech, it deserted her in the heat of the moment, just as she'd feared it would. Just as it often had with Zach.

"Well...Zach and I had planned to have a baby right away."

He nodded, setting his beer on the table between them. "He mentioned it."

That would make things easier. *I hope.* "I still want to."

"Have...a baby."

Robin hesitated and then nodded. *He thinks I'm insane.* Then again, she thought she was insane some days. How many weeks had she argued this with herself? How many times had she reversed course? More than Robin cared to count.

David gulped down another few mouthfuls of his beer, seemingly steeling himself for something unpleasant before he answered. "Robin, I know you love Zach."

And she loved David for phrasing it that way. Anyone else would have said "loved Zach," marginalizing her feelings, dismissing them. Putting the nails in the coffin of her love for him. She winced at the pun.

"But, baby... Much as we both love Zach, he is gone."

Anyone else would have ended up with a faceful of red wine at that blunt statement, but David had always been honest with her when no one else would.

"I know," she replied with all the dignity she could muster.

"The plans you made together..." David sighed. "They were meant to be carried out *together*. I'm not saying you're incapable of doing this without him," he hastened to add.

"What are you saying, David?"

He darkened a notch. "Be sure, before you do something this...big. Be certain you're not doing this just to hold onto a piece of what you and Zach planned."

She stiffened, offended that he'd think her capable of it. "I'm not."

"Just be sure," he insisted. "Holding onto the past just to—"

"I'm not!"

A couple at a nearby table slid a glance at them at her outburst. Robin pretended not to notice it, and they went back to their conversation.

David took her hand, stroking his thumb over the back and his fingers in the bowl of her palm. With that little provocation, her body responded.

It seemed to be happening more and more often. Touches he intended to soothe her aroused her senses. Shared looks made her heart pound in excitement. Whispered words had her wet and aching.

His voice dragged her back to the present.

"You've thought this through, then?"

"For months." That was no exaggeration.

David raised her hand and pressed a chaste kiss to her knuckles. "Then I'll help you."

Her breathing hitched. *That simply? I ask the seemingly insane, and he agrees nearly without question.* David was a rare man. Zach would have demanded weeks of negotiation on the subject. She pushed that thought away before she started second-guessing herself again. "Thank you."

"So what's it going to be? A sperm bank?"

Her face burned in embarrassment. *Now comes the moment when he says I'm insane.* Robin didn't doubt that his offer to help was about to be rescinded.

"Robin?" There was an edge of steel in that question, and he stopped stroking her hand.

"I was hoping..." She couldn't form the words. *Damn! Why did I spend all that time practicing the logic if I can't speak coherently enough to say it?*

One dark brow arched at her hesitation. "Hoped?" he prompted her.

"To have...ah...a donation from someone who shared chromosomes with Zach." She knew she was pleading with him with her eyes. Not so much for his agreement; it was unlikely she'd get that much. Robin would be lucky if he didn't walk away and wash his hands of her.

The beer came up in David's free hand, and he drained it. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and set the empty glass back on the table. After a tense moment of silence, his eyes opened, and he forged on.

"You want me to... What? Leave a sample with your doctor or something?"

It sounded horrid, when phrased that way. Besides that, it wasn't what she wanted. She tried for humor, her heart aching. "If that's the only way you will." At least, she'd get the baby that way, which was better than not, she supposed.

His eyes widened, and dark patches of color bloomed in his face. "If... If...?"

She stared to speak, uncertain what would spill out. It had been too much to ask. It was time to let him off the hook and get therapy for her fascination with him.

He put up an index finger, an unmistakable order for a moment of silence.

Robin snapped her mouth shut while cursing herself for not dropping the whole idea. She'd argued it was crazy at least a hundred times. Why had she bothered to pursue it?

David dragged out his wallet and tossed a twenty on the table. A whirlwind of a moment later, he was ushering Robin out of Mik's and into the crisp winter air outside. She zipped her jacket and, averting her eyes, anticipated the lecture to come.

He turned to her, and she looked up against her better judgment. His face was all harsh lines. Oh, yes. The lecture was coming.

"If that's the only way I will?"

There was something manic couched in his tone, but he wasn't shouting at her or suggesting a shrink. To her surprise, he seemed to want answers, so she organized her thoughts, seeking out the reasons she'd so carefully prepared.

"I've investigated every—"

“Robin,” he warned.

She stared at him, confused. What had he been asking, if not the reasons why he should consider a more intimate donation to the cause?

“Are you saying you'd *prefer* another option?”

* * * * *

David was already rock hard—a fact hidden by his untucked quilted flannel shirt—and he wasn't sure Robin was offering anything...or why she was.

Her mouth worked as if to form words, but nothing emerged. Just when he would have prompted her again, she found her voice.

“Yes. I am.” Robin shifted from foot to foot in a fit of nerves. But was she unsure of herself or worried about his response to the bold statement?

David looked heavenward, seeking divine guidance. Surely, the Almighty would take a dim view of David screwing his brother's—

Look who I'm talking to! There are Bible stories about this subject. It was practically expected in biblical times, when a man died without producing heirs, that his brother would step in and do it for him.

As if in confirmation, David spied the sprig of mistletoe hanging above them. *How serendipitous.*

“David?” The edge of tears in her voice was unmistakable.

“You want to have my baby?” He wanted to hear her say it.

“Yes.”

No. You want me to give you Zach's baby. The thought tortured him.

If I don't, someone else will. That tortured him worse.

“David?”

He tipped his head down and, closing on her lips slowly, gave Robin every opportunity to back out. She didn't.

Robin rose on tiptoe, parting her lips under his. He tasted her and moaned at the mixed flavors of red wine and willing woman.

In a few fevered seconds, her hand was buried under his flannel shirt and T-shirt, her skin hot against his. It was a dream come true, the culmination of hundreds of wet dreams and shower fantasies about Robin.

The jingling of bells went largely unnoticed. The catcall that followed broke them apart. The interloper didn't tarry, probably fearing a knuckle sandwich to come, based on the way David's body tightened in response to the abrupt wake-up call. Silence fell again in the wake of the stranger's departure.

Robin stared at him with half-lidded, angel blue eyes, her lips deliciously kiss-swollen, her dark hair windblown and sexy. "David?"

"I need to..." *Get my head examined!* "I need to think...about this." He eased his hands away from her, and she did the same. "Promise me you won't do anything without talking to me first."

She shook her head slowly. "Not a thing." It was low and breathless, and his cock hardened fully at the stark invitation.

"Good. Let me walk you home."

"Sure."

* * * * *

David sat on his sofa, glaring at the beer he'd opened and hadn't swallowed a drop of. He wanted a clear head for this internal argument. That single fact had allowed the beer to go warm, while he was no closer to an answer.

He fisted the keys for the fourth time in less than ten minutes, replaying "the plan."

There was no denying what he wanted. It hadn't changed in the three years since he'd met her. It had only intensified in the nearly two years since Zach had died. Right or wrong, David hadn't been able to stop thinking about Robin since the first time she had smiled up at him.

While Zach had been alive, it had been easy enough to talk himself out of pursuing her. Robin had been his little brother's fiancée. No matter what David wanted, crossing family to get it hadn't been an option. If you learned one thing working the beams, you learned how important trust was, and the Carson and Carson crew was heavy in family members.

His brother's death, traumatic as it had been for the family, could have proved the reprieve David had needed. It *could* have, but it hadn't turned out that way. Two years later, Robin still thought of herself as Zach's.

The signs of it were everywhere: the way she clung to the house they'd shared, the way she'd cleaned out Zach's clothing but not other personal items, and now her insistence on having the baby she and Zach had planned.

Some rational part of David's mind proclaimed the whole thing dysfunctional. He should get her a psychiatrist to help her through what was plainly confusion and denial.

There's no way to force her to see a doctor. She wasn't a danger to herself or others...at least not an immediate danger to herself, though the mind could only take so much abuse.

The fact that he wanted Robin tormented him. If he refused to help her conceive and suggested mental health services, she'd feel he was dismissing her wants and needs, her well-laid plans.

Just the thought of “well-laid” and Robin in the same sentence had him hard again.

And she will be well laid by someone else, if I refuse her.

That was even less of an option than letting Zach marry the woman David wanted. It had been bad enough when it was Zach in bed with her. Another man would be too much.

A stranger, his mind taunted him. *Someone who doesn't know Robin and doesn't care...past getting off with a beautiful woman.*

David was on his feet that quickly. He grabbed his quilted flannel off the hook by the door and launched into the cold. That seemed to snap sense back into him, as it had the last two times he'd started the seven-block walk to her house.

She'll come to her senses. She'll be confused. She'll hate me for doing this.

Or she won't. She'll use me to have Zach's baby and want to go on being friends.

He stopped short at that thought. At least this time it hadn't sent him back to the sofa and the warm beer.

David didn't question that he was going to go through with it. But he had to protect himself. Either eventuality had the capability of crushing him.

“Hence the plan,” he muttered and forced himself into motion again. On the walk, he reran it in his mind.

Don't forget what's at stake here. She wants a baby, not a replacement for Zach. Don't lose your head.

Don't spend the night. After that, letting her go will be too hard.

Don't ask for too much. According to Zach, their sex life was rather vanilla. You ask for too much, and you'll scare her off.

She's confused. Take it slow, and be prepared for her to throw you out on your ass halfway through.

Enjoy it while it lasts. As soon as she comes to her senses or conceives a baby, it's over. You know that.

David stared up at her door, surprised he'd made the distance so quickly and without turning back again. As he reached for the lock, one more rule occurred to him.

Don't let Ma and Pop get wind of this. If you were going to marry her, they'd be no more upset about this than they were about Robin moving in with Zach. Since there's no way she's going to allow that, it's better not to piss them off.

* * * * *

Robin yawned, listening to the stillness around her. Something had awakened her, but what? A dream she didn't remember? A sound in the darkness?

She scanned the room, passing over an oddly-shaped shadow, then returning to it. Just when she tensed to react, he spoke.

“It's me, Robin.”

She fought the urge to bury herself beneath the blankets. It was David. Why would he make her nervous?

Because he's inexplicably in my home? “How did you get in?” Surely, he hadn't broken in.

He raised his hand in the near darkness. The sound of keys jingling was unmistakable.

Her heart eased, releasing the tension she hadn't realized was strangling her slowly. “Oh... Zach...gave you the spares.” She'd known that but had forgotten. Since she'd never lost her keys, she'd never had to recall that bit of information.

“Have you thought this through, Robin?” There was something soft and unexpected in that, but she couldn't imagine what it might be.

Her mouth went dry at the possibility that he was going to agree...or maybe the more likely possibility that he was going to refuse. “Completely.”

The keys clinked to the top of the dresser. The silence stretched between them.

He's going to leave. I've pushed him too far. “David, if I—”

“If you want this, it's going to be me. It's going to be this way.”

Her heart stuttered. It wouldn't have been anyone *but* David. If he had turned her down, she would have dropped the whole idea. Didn't he know that?

“Robin? Do you want this?”

“Yes.” It came out more a gasp than a word.

She went lightheaded at his approach. In her mind, she argued that it was David. She knew David; she trusted him.

Her body had other ideas. Memories of the kiss outside Mik's tantalized her with the knowledge that whatever happened next wouldn't be predictable, as Zach had always been predictable. That thought kept her off balance, overheated.

As if he was thinking the same thing, David stripped off his T-shirt. The whisper of it landing on the floor was drowned out by the blood rushing in her ears.

His knee settled on the mattress, and David leaned over her. Anticipating him pressing down on her, Robin sank back to the pillows.

David was in no hurry to get there. As he had at Mik's, he slanted his mouth across hers, his breath making her weak and warm. When he held his ground, she levered her head up, closing the last inch of distance between them.

This kiss was no less involved than the one earlier had been. David was less the marauder than Zach had been; instead, his mouth danced against hers, his touch light and teasing.

Robin explored his chest and arms, moaning at the finely etched muscle of a working man. Zach had worked at a desk, and it had shown. There was nothing soft about David.

Besides his voice and tongue.

He retreated slightly and then began again the maddening kisses that heated her blood for more. Just when Robin thought she could stand no more, David trailed his lips to her earlobe and nibbled at it gently. She sighed, turning her head to give him more room to play.

His whispers warmed her ear...then sent her body into overdrive for what she hadn't had in two years.

"You taste so good, Robin."

She licked her lips, visions of herself sampling his taste almost more than she could bear.

"You're thinking about it. Aren't you?"

"Thinking...of?" Robin wasn't certain she was capable of thinking anything...of forming coherent and logical streams, as she normally would.

"Of my mouth working your sweet body. Your breasts." He traced the shell of her ear with his tongue, prompting a shiver of delight from her. "Your clit."

Robin pushed her hips up, encouraging him.

"What do you want first, Robin? My mouth?" He pressed his hips against hers, stroking his cock in promise of more. "Or—"

She cried out, pulling at him shamelessly. The teasing was too much.

David grumbled something that might have been a curse. He backed away, dragging the blankets down her.

Robin sat forward and worked at his belt. He lifted her short nightgown up her thighs, and she was abruptly glad that she'd shaved her legs and trimmed, just in case David agreed.

He cupped a hand behind her neck and drew Robin into his kiss. She fumbled at the button and zipper on his jeans, and David growled. His arm and chest muscles tightened.

His cock pushed out at his underwear, seeking escape. Robin tugged the jeans and underwear to his thighs and took his cock in her hand.

Oh God! He's big.

David was easily as long as Zach had been, but he was much thicker. So thick that her fingers barely overlapped.

While she was rapt on that fact, David moved, sliding his cock in and out of the hollow she'd created. Robin squeezed lightly and stroked, teasing him, enticing him.

He tore his mouth from hers and guided her hand away. Before Robin could question him, David was spreading her thighs. She grasped at his buttocks and urged him in.

The first thrust stuffed her full, top to bottom and stretched tight around his girth. Robin rocked her head back, a weak cry she barely recognized as her own voice escaping her lips.

David peeled her nightgown over her head and off her trembling arms. Still, he didn't move.

Robin panted in pleasure mixed with pain. "David," she pleaded. He had to move. He had to do something...anything.

"Slowly, Robin."

She shook her head, gasping out a plea for more. Robin didn't want this maddening stillness. She didn't want slow. She wanted more thrusts like the first.

He slid back until only the crown breached her and then in again. Robin tried to drag him closer by gripping his ribs. Failing that, she raked her fingernails down his back, seeking an anchor.

David grumbled something unintelligible. He performed one smooth glide after another, forcing Robin to a shattering orgasm.

He roared, his cock jetting a heated flood of cum into her sensitized body. It was breath-stealing. Robin's hands tightened, driving her nails in hard, snapping at least one off at the nail bed.

David growled. His back arched, and he drove himself to the hilt in her.

* * * * *

David fisted his hand in her hair, his body and mind in a riot. He'd vowed to make it slow for her. What had happened to slow?

He cringed, waiting for tears...for her realization that it wasn't Zach's cock nestled inside her. *That it never will be again.*

Her breathing slowed, and he tensed in response. Robin was coming to her senses. Would she cry? Scream him out of her bed? Out of her life? He didn't know what would be worse: one of those three possibilities or the dreaded "baby daddy/friend" routine.

Her head came forward, and her lips pressed to his jaw. She nibbled along the line, from below his ear toward his lips. It wasn't a sisterly move. It wasn't one that marked her as upset either.

Her hands played over the scratches she'd left, and his cock renewed before it had a chance to fully subside. He'd dreamed of this moment for so long, it wasn't going to be difficult to keep him hard.

Robin gasped, shifted...urged him back to his knees with her impaled on him and straddling his lap. She took control from there, using her grip on his shoulders to ride his cock.

Her body gripped him tight, and David reveled in it. He'd known Zach was smaller around than he was. Boys being boys, of course they'd compared. Between her abstinence and his greater girth, Robin was almost painfully tight, the illusion of virginity in a passionate woman.

He closed his hands around her hips and started thrusting into her. Her already frantic pace stepped up several notches into a blur of sensation and sound.

"Yes! David, please."

The early compressions of her muscles, signaling the coming climax, worked like a cock ring would, slowing his release at the right moment. Her climax was punctuated by a scream.

David followed her, reeling in the aftermath of his second orgasm of the night. It had been years since he'd come in such quick succession; he'd thought he'd outgrown that somewhere before twenty-five.

Robin held on to him, and he waited for the teary realization of what they'd done together again. It didn't come. Her head dipped...rested on his shoulder, her breathing slowing and deepening. Her muscles relaxed, her hands dropped away from his shoulders, and she fell asleep in his arms.

For a tense moment, the reaction offended him. Then his mind started functioning again.

Come on. I did wake her up at sometime after two in the morning, and that wasn't exactly lazy-day sex.

And she trusted him. Robin felt comfortable enough with David to fall asleep with him.

She feels comfortable enough with me to have sex with me to conceive Zach's baby, too!
That stung.

Then again, it was supposed to. He couldn't lose track of what was going on here. If he did, the end was going to be all the worse.

Still, he savored the moment. It might be gone all too soon. There wasn't time to waste them. He knelt there, allowing himself to go semierect, then soft enough to leave her body. Robin sighed at the change and snuggled against David's chest.

It's time to leave. He hesitated. The last thing David wanted was to leave her.

I have to. Whether Robin turned on him or wanted to be friends, there was near-zero chance this would be a long-term affair.

He winced at the pun, then forged on. David had agreed to share his body, for as long as it lasted. What he couldn't do was risk more of his heart.

That in mind, he lowered her to the bed and tucked the blankets around her. Getting dressed to leave was depressing for more than one reason. It wasn't just leaving her that bothered him. It was the fact that his jacket and shirt were the only clothes he'd managed to remove before fucking her.

Chapter Two

November 30, 2009

Robin winced at the sound of her alarm. She batted blindly for the Snooze button, groaning at the idea of getting up.

In the silence, she burrowed under the blanket. No one would begrudge Robin the day off. She rarely took them, and Mollie had cashed out at least ten of her fourteen every year, since she'd maxed out the fourteen they were allowed to carry forward in her first three years with Carson and Carson.

Even after Zach died, she'd buried herself in work. Mollie and Cal had tried insisting she take time off. David had—

David! Memories of steamy sex, coupled with the shocking realization that she was sleeping nude and the sticky residue on her inner thighs, stole her breath. That had been no dream. The pleasant ache attested that she'd never had a dream that good...of anyone, in her lifetime.

Robin forced her eyes open and worked her lower lip at the sight of the empty bed. Questions warred in her mind.

When had he left? Why had he? Had David left this morning to prepare for work? Had he slept with her at all? Had he wanted to?

Much as she wanted to stay buried in blankets for the day, the fastest way to answers was going to work. David would be at work. Although he didn't spend much time in the trailer, and she didn't spend much out on the site, surely there would be time for a short conversation.

That decided, she threw the blankets back and did the zombie walk to the bathroom. She went about her morning routine, all too aware of the aftereffects of intense passion.

She'd always known David would be good in bed. There was something in the way he moved, the way he swaggered, that announced to any woman with a handful of hormones that he was available and good. But she hadn't counted on him being so avid and attentive.

She paused with her hand under the shower spray, misery eating at her. She'd had daydreams of something more permanent with David. Now those dreams would mock her.

* * * * *

"Problem, David?"

Les clapped a hand on David's shoulder, sending shards of disconcerting pain through him. Before he could stop himself, David grimaced.

His cousin stopped short, his eyes narrowing. A moment later, his smile widened, probably at about the time David's face started to burn.

Les's chuckles warmed the chill morning air. "And what misadventure have you been up to?"

David cleared his throat, his cheeks flaring to a high that would heat the enclosed work desk without the space heater. "Just an accident."

For some reason, he didn't want to admit what was making him sore, whether Robin's name came into it or not. This was private...personal.

It can't be personal! It won't last. Remember the rules.

He was so busy brooding, Les managed to grasp the back of David's T-shirt and unbuttoned flannel and yank them up to his shoulders. David wrenched out of his hands and smoothed the shirts down, shooting a glance around and sighing in relief that no one else had seen it. His face flamed at Les's hoot of laughter.

"An accident? Yeah, I guess it *is* an accident when *you're* that good," he taunted.

David glared at him, his hand fisting in an automatic response.

Les sobered, putting up a calming hand. "You've got it bad," he muttered.

"Got what bad?" The urge to slug Les hadn't faded. The only thing stopping him, besides the fact that his cousin worked for him, was the fact that they weren't twelve anymore.

"Yeah right. Got what bad," he quipped. His mocking smile faded again. "I see..."

"See *what*?" David snapped.

There were no more hints at amusement. “You've finally found the one. Haven't you?”

His hand loosened in sick resignation. Yeah, he'd found the one. Unfortunately for David, Zach had found her first. He was so screwed, it was pathetic.

Les's voice dropped to a harsh whisper. “Who is it?”

David ached to answer. After all, Les was a married man. Maybe he had insight that David didn't. But that would mean taking his cousin into his confidence, and that was problematic. He shook his head.

“Come on, man. You can trust me.”

He couldn't trust anyone with this. Certainly not anyone at Carson and Carson, most of whom were relatives, of one sort or another...all of whom were fiercely protective of Robin and loyal to Pop. There was no question about what his father would do, if he got wind of this...thing. Whatever it was between him and Robin.

David glanced up at the Plexiglas wall, searching for the words to buy himself some time. Les was curious as a box of kittens, and the last thing he needed was Les asking questions David didn't want asked.

Then he saw her, striding across the site...late, but here. Until that moment, David hadn't realized he'd been wasting time, putting off his rounds, waiting for Robin to appear.

Terrified she wouldn't appear. Strange how he could only admit that to himself once she'd made the appearance in the first place.

Robin looked his way. She faltered, smiled. Her hand went up in a wave. At his nod in return, she went into the trailer. When the door closed behind her, David realized he'd been rapt on her retreating ass.

Without thinking, he licked his lips. If she were still willing, it would be his mouth first tonight.

David turned, smiling...and came face to face with Les. He swallowed hard, steeling himself for his cousin's response. *Damn it! How could I forget he was here?* Easy...the brain that had been functioning at the time wasn't concerned with it.

His mouth gaping, Les's gaze shifted from David to the trailer and back again. He shot a glance at David's cock that wouldn't miss the fact that he was semierect, though definitely waning.

At last, Les found his voice and offered his uninvited opinion. "Pop is going to kill you."

David ground his teeth at the thought of his father's reaction to this.

Les sighed. "What are you going to do about it?"

He shrugged. "Whatever she'll let me. What else can I do?"

His cousin turned away with a grumbled "good luck."

David grunted his agreement. He could use all the luck he could get.

He started for the lift, intent on his rounds. Halfway there, David hesitated, then did an about-face and strode toward the trailer. A fresh cup of coffee would be innocuous enough.

* * * * *

Robin settled behind her desk and started organizing invoices.

Mollie's hand against her cheek startled her, and Robin snapped a look up at her. Her heart pounded. Coming to work meant more than seeing David. It meant facing his mother and father...most of his family.

My family. But they'd never formalized that.

As if arguing the thought, her would-be mother-in-law started speaking. "Are you all right, Robin? You look pale."

"Just fine, Mollie."

"You're late. You're never late."

Robin worked at that. She'd been in such a panic to see David, she hadn't thought through how she'd explain her tardiness.

Fast. Think fast. What excuses do people give for being late? I've heard a hundred of them, delivered to Mollie.

Not the car. Cal would be out checking it before the words echoed.

"Oh. The clock!" Robin feigned realization. "I didn't wake up all that late, so I forgot. The breaker tripped, and I guess my backup battery ran out and—"

“You really should check the emergency backups in all your electronics once a month,” David offered smoothly.

She took a moment to compose herself and then turned and shot him a smile. “Guess so,” she quipped.

David stirred half-and-half into his coffee, then returned it to the mini fridge. He'd removed his quilted flannel jacket at the door, and his muscles tensed and flexed under the skintight navy blue T-shirt.

Finally, he turned, a speculative look on his face. “But that breaker bothers me. I'll stop by after dinner and check it.”

Her heart skipped in excitement. “Yeah. Sounds good. Thanks, David.” Robin wasn't sure how she managed an even voice with the lump in her throat.

There was no doubt David wasn't planning on fixing the circuit breakers tonight. He had something much more electric on his mind, to employ a pun.

“Electricity is nothing to take chances with,” Mollie mused. “Maybe I should have Cal stop by.”

David shrugged. “Might just be power strips drawing too many amps on the circuit. You still have that space heater in your bedroom?”

Robin blushed. He knew she did. He'd been standing five feet from it the night before. “Yes. Is that a problem?”

His lips curved in a crooked smile. “Could be, depending on what else is on it.” David swallowed a mouthful of his coffee. “If that's not it, we can call Pop in. He'll want to know if something is failing in those units. After all, they're only three years old.” With that, he was gone...out of the trailer and back to work, his flannel draped over his left arm.

“If you're sure...” Mollie sounded dubious.

Searching for a way to stall the older woman, Robin forced a weary smile. If Mollie told Cal something was wrong, her husband was sure to show up unexpectedly.

“I'm sure David is right. I always did tend to overload power strips. Zach used to say—” She stopped short at that.

I said I wouldn't do this. On the drive to work, Robin had promised herself to stop comparing Zach and David.

I love you, Zach. But David is right; you're gone. I have to live with that.

Mollie's hand settled on her shoulder, and she squeezed lightly. "I know," she breathed. "I don't know what I'd do without Cal around the house."

You don't know. Robin offered a strained half smile. *Thank God, you don't.*

Although Mollie and Les's wife, Andrea, had hinted at the fact that it was time for Robin to start thinking about dating again, there was little question this wasn't what they had in mind. Maybe, if they were engaged, it might be different, but sleeping with her dead fiancé's brother?

If she finds out, this is going to be bad.

* * * * *

David hesitated with the key in hand. He'd abused Robin's trust by letting himself in the night before. He didn't have the right to do that again. The keys returned to his pocket; he raised his hand and knocked.

Time seemed to move slowly. Finally, Robin opened the door for him, peeking from around the heavy wooden monstrosity Zach had insisted on. She smiled, and her cheeks darkened in a demure little blush. She waved him in, and David rounded the door.

He peeled his tongue off the roof of his suddenly dry mouth at the sight of her short robe. "Friendly neighborhood electrician." His voice was raspy, and the accompanying lift of the toolbox he'd brought for show died a slow death at her turn to shut the door.

David fumbled the toolbox onto the nearest chair, his gaze locked on the sway of fabric as she moved. He stripped off his jacket and dropped it over the tools without looking that direction. For all he knew or cared, it had slipped onto the floor. A shiver of anticipation worked down his spine at the sound of the lock clicking shut.

Robin turned to him and sauntered across the distance between them. It took a moment for him to realize he was staring at the dancing edge of the robe. She stopped just in front of him.

"Naked under that?" he managed to force out. His cock was already hard and rooting for yes.

Robin wrapped her arms around his neck and guided his mouth down to hers. Just before their lips met, she breathed a sexy little yes into his mouth.

Any self-control he'd possessed ended there. The kiss was hard and demanding. Very specifically, he was demanding another journey into that tight box of hers.

I am so screwed. She could ask him anything, and he'd do it right now.

Then again, he wanted to be screwed. Literally, screwed until he couldn't see straight, until he was walking gingerly, until she wanted his cock inside her more than she wanted the baby it might give her. That thought firmly in mind, David dragged Robin to his body and strode to the bed.

She moaned and yanked up at his T-shirt, folding her legs beneath her at the edge of the mattress. David guided her hands out of the fabric.

He pulled the knot on her robe open, breaking off the kiss as the dark blue satin that matched her eyes slid aside. The slice view wasn't enough; David pushed the robe off her shoulders and let it flutter to the mattress.

Robin let out a mew, her breathing ragged, her breasts quivering in the rapid movement of her chest. Her nipples were hard already, enticing him. She reached for his belt.

"No."

Her hands wavered, and Robin looked up at him, confused.

David circled a nipple with his index finger. Robin started to rock toward him...then arched instead, letting her arms relax to her side. She hissed at the feel of his thumb against the tip, and David retreated, mumbling an apology.

His hands were rough. After years in an office, Zach's had been smooth. His mind tormented him with the fact that Robin was probably making unfavorable comparisons between them.

She guided his hand to the other breast, her eyes pleading. David rasped at the nipple with his callused thumb, and her head dropped back with a moan of delight.

Okay. Not so unfavorable, his mind amended.

David lowered his face, latching onto the other nipple. Robin tunneled her hands in his hair, holding him to her. Incoherent sounds left her mouth on choppy breaths, and her hands closed into fists, causing his scalp to sting at the tugging motions.

Down. He had to get her to the mattress, get between those thighs, and—

No. If he did that, he'd be inside her again. David didn't doubt that he wouldn't even get his jeans and boots off. It was time to slow it down.

* * * * *

His mouth left her breast, and Robin licked her lips in anticipation of that glorious suckling on the other. His voice bathed the first instead.

“I didn't get to taste last night. Tonight, I'm going to taste until you come in my mouth.”

His bold statement wrung a gasp from her. There was something decadent in him telling her what he was going to do. Zach had been a fan of asking what she wanted.

Although he didn't always give it to me, she thought ruefully. How many times had she—

No. This wasn't the time to replay the niggling problems she'd had with Zach.

David continued, dragging her thinking mind back into the present. “I'm not going to let you stop me, Robin.”

Was that a challenge? A tease? She shook her head, gasping out an incoherent assurance that she wouldn't deny him.

“I guess I'll have to tie you down to do this right.”

God, yes! How many times had she asked for this with Zach?

Robin went lightheaded. Her gaze strayed to the nightstand. The drawer contained everything David would need.

He leaned that direction and slid the drawer open. His eyes widened a bit. “Oh, yeah. I see several things I intend to use.”

The rustling from the drawer had her staring intently, anticipating what he'd choose. A blindfold came out first. Robin closed her eyes, shivering as the satin covered the upper half of her face.

He retrieved something else from the drawer, and it thumped to the far side of the bed. Robin reached for it, curious.

His hand circled her wrist. “No, you don’t,” he chided. “You won’t know what’s coming next.”

Her body perked at that promise. Visions of the many toys in the drawer circled in her mind. There were so many dizzying possibilities.

David released her hand. The mattress shifted. Just as she was about to ask what he was doing, the sound of a zipper filled in the mental picture.

Robin listened intently. One boot hit the floor...then the second. His belt buckle clacked, a sure sign that he was easing his jeans down.

She shifted toward his former position.

“Uh-uh. I’m going to tie you down anyway, but...” David paused, seemingly letting the visual form in her mind.

Her legs shook, and Robin settled on her buttocks with a *thump*.

“Oh, yeah,” David growled. “That’s a lot more like it.”

It took a moment for Robin to put his words and her position together. Her knees were spread. She widened her stance.

The mattress dipped with the addition of his weight, but David didn’t start with a taste. He stroked at her clit, his callused fingers adding a depth of sensation she hadn’t experienced before.

Robin pushed her hips up, urging him to her aching slit. David took the hint and thrust two fingers inside. Starbursts of color exploded behind her closed eyelids, and she held to consciousness by a thread.

“That’s what you want. Isn’t it?” David’s voice was rough, raising pleasant tendrils of sensation down her body.

“More.” Her voice didn’t sound like her own.

“Show me.”

The first movements up and down his fingers wrenched a groan from both of them. Robin did it again, taking him deeper.

She didn’t doubt that he was watching. She didn’t question that he was hard, maybe considering thrusting inside. The urge to pull off the mask and watch his expressions was maddening.

“David,” she pleaded. She needed more.

“Do you want to come the first time before you get tied down or after?”

Robin forced his fingers to the hilt, needing the friction, needing to—*Oh, God!*

David was twisting and thrusting his fingers, apparently taking the move as her answer.

Wasn't it? Was it? She couldn't be sure of anything but that she didn't want to think. Feeling was taking up more than her available supply of brain cells.

“Come for me, Robin. Let me taste it.”

His commands in the bedroom—something indefinable about his take-charge manner—affected her. All he had to do was take her along for the ride, wherever he wanted to go, and Robin's libido went into overdrive.

As if confirming it, she climaxed around his fingers. Beyond caring about the rules he'd set, she reached for him.

What is he going to do? Tie me down? That set off aftershocks.

David dragged her astride his thighs, his fingers working between her widely-spread legs. His mouth parted hers in an unrestrained kiss that made her lightheaded in pleasure.

At last, they parted, and David eased his fingers out of her. Her head spinning, Robin anchored herself to his body. She licked her lips at the feel of his damp cock brushing against her stomach.

He pulled the blindfold off, and she blinked against the light from the reading lamp on her nightstand.

“David?” She didn't understand why he was changing things. Had she done something he hadn't liked? Had she done something he had?

The blindfold went sailing toward the window. “I want you to see what I'm doing.”

Robin nodded, her heart beating in a strange nonrhythm. Part of her hoped he still intended to tie her to the bed. The other was rooting for him to impale her on his cock as he had the night before.

* * * * *

David was torn between dozens of possibilities.

Taste her. He wanted to so badly, his mouth was watering to do it. He'd set out to taste her tonight, and he'd decreed nothing would stop him.

If he tied her down and started eating, he could make this last half the night. If he didn't, he'd end up doing what he nearly had when he'd pulled her onto his lap. He'd fuck her until neither of them could walk straight...and then some more.

Her dark eyes questioned him, and David moved. He laid her back on the bed and reached for the restraints, his mind working fast and coming to conclusions and decisions.

There was no question that Zach had gone for the basic spread-eagle type of bondage. With his aversion to trying new things, it would be most palatable to him.

From his brother's earliest days, Zach had lacked in imagination. The sky was always blue, the grass always green, and the clouds always white, though it wasn't so in real life. The only bad grades Zach got were in things like creative writing.

And savoring the woman who wanted so much to be savored, apparently.

I'm not Zach! From uncovering her eyes to doing the unexpected and inventive, David wasn't going to give Robin any leeway to imagine he was his dear little brother.

He tied two of the web leashes to the headboard and tightened the straps to secure her wrists in the fur wristbands. When he started tying the other two leashes farther out on the headboard, Robin stared at them in seeming concern.

David didn't comment. He slipped one band and then the other over her feet and up to just above her knees. Tightening the straps brought her legs up and out until she was wide open for him.

The position excited her. Robin's nipples were hard and erect. Her honey beaded on her plump slit. The position had her slightly parted like lips begging for kisses.

"I want to taste all of you, but I can't wait anymore." He'd meant it as an apology of sorts, but David couldn't bring himself to feel sorry for what he was about to do to her.

Robin opened her mouth to say something, and David lowered his head and stroked his tongue into the enticing gap. Whatever she'd intended to say never emerged; instead, a scream echoed off the walls.

Drunk on her scent and taste, David sucked and licked. Robin tested the restraints frantically, and he smiled. She was close already.

Of course. She's had only me in the last two years.

That thought increased his fervor. Only him, and she was going off like Roman candles for him. He wondered how many times she could. Having her tied down this way, he might just find out.

Fractured sounds left her lips, then a howl. Her thigh muscles tightened. David played his tongue inside, moaning in ecstasy at the early twitches that announced her rise to climax. She climaxed hard against his tongue, flooding his mouth with her musk and cum, setting off a growl of need and success mixed.

She came around slowly, her head rocking side to side, her hair tangling around her angelic face. "David. Oh, David, please."

His cock let loose a spurt of precum at the sound of her begging. He suckled hard at her clit, setting off more spasms against his sensitive lips.

"David!" Her hips came up off the bed.

He eased away, then blew a puff of air over her clit that had her back arching and her legs trembling in the bands.

"Yes?" he asked sweetly.

"In... Please, please, I need—"

"Not yet."

Robin whimpered at that.

"I'm going to taste until you can't stand anymore." *And I can't.* "Then I'm going to slide into your body and sate us both."

The whimper became a moan. She pitched her head back and forth, but her vocalizations said she agreed.

Oh, yes. This was going to be sweet—stroking his cock deep inside her in this position.

But not until I've exhausted us both.

* * * * *

Oh, God. He's going to kill me. If Robin could form words, she'd tell *David* that.

She'd lost count of how many climaxes he'd driven her to. She didn't even know what time it was.

At last, he raised his head and met her gaze. His smile quirked up on one side. "That's right. That's just how I want you."

If he wanted her mindless with need, he was right on target.

David shifted closer, stroking his cock up and down the sensitive line of her body he'd been torturing. His eyes closed in apparent pleasure.

Robin pulled at the straps holding her down and tried to force him deeper. His laughter sent pleasant chills down her spine. His expression was dark...nearly baiting her with what she wanted.

"Maybe I should do some more eating," he teased.

She glared at him.

"Or maybe..." He dipped his hips and thrust deep inside her. "Yes. Oh, hell, yes," he breathed.

Robin nodded, her breathing hard and harsh. She closed her hands around the straps, shifting her buttocks farther up to force him deeper.

David planted his hands just below her outstretched arms, gliding in and out slowly. There was no rush to where he wanted to take her. As he had all evening, he was drawing it out and driving her crazy.

His stomach muscles undulated, dancing with each motion of his body. It was like watching a snake charmer, but Robin was the one entranced by watching.

David looked between their bodies, momentarily blocking her view. Then his gaze was locked with hers, his eyes crinkled in amusement.

"Promise me anything." There was something sinfully decadent in his voice.

Her voice cracking, she repeated the word *anything*. His smile made promises she desperately wanted him to keep.

David moved faster, and she went back to watching him. Licking her lips, she imagined his hips sliding back and forth that way with his cock in her mouth.

He growled a curse she only half caught, his pace increasing until he was pounding hard and fast. His sounds were fierce. Nearly feral in their intensity. His face contorted into a look of pleasure-pain.

Or maybe the strain of holding off his climax.

Robin wanted him to come. She needed him to. Somehow, she forced the words, urging him to.

His roar echoed off the walls, and his heat shot into her. But his hips kept up that glorious rhythm.

The combination sent her over into a kinetic climax, and David shouted again, his muscles tightening, his hips rocking harder, his stomach so tight she imagined it had to ache from the exertion.

At last, he settled over her, holding himself up on one hand to avoid crushing her. She stared at him, at a loss to explain what she was feeling. For a long moment, he didn't move. Then his free hand came up, and he started loosening the straps, switching his supporting hand when he switched sides.

Her legs were first, and Robin let them relax, circling him loosely. Then her hands. He shivered as she tangled her fingers in his sweat-soaked hair, and his cock bucked inside her. She gasped, her body exhausted but her libido in overdrive.

As if he understood completely, he resumed the slow, gentle rocking of his half-erect cock inside her.

She groaned. "How long can you?"

David didn't smile. His expression was starkly serious. "Let's find out."

Chapter Three

December 1, 2009

David woke, still nestled to Robin's back. He closed his eyes and savored the sensation.

I shouldn't. He'd promised himself not to spend the night, yet here he was, two days in and already breaking his self-imposed rules right and left. Going slow hadn't lasted ten minutes, let alone two days. *What is wrong with me?*

Well, that was a stupid question. He wanted Robin to wake in his arms and fall head over heels for him. David wanted her to realize how much more they could have together, if she let them.

More likely, she'll call me Zach when she's half asleep. That killed his morning erection.

David conceded that leaving was better than the horror show he'd concocted, and he eased out of bed. A glance at her clock reinforced the decision. If he jogged home and hurried through his morning routine, he'd make it to work on time.

He had his T-shirt on and his boxer briefs in hand when she moved. Robin stretched, a long slow movement that accentuated every curve. She turned, burying her face in the pillow he'd vacated. His name emerged on a moan.

His cock hardened, and the punch-to-the-gut sensation winded him. David pulled off his T-shirt and dropped both pieces of clothing to the floor.

Before he could argue himself out of it, he was sliding back into bed. Robin raised her head, and he captured her lips in a searing kiss. She didn't hesitate, and in moments, they were moving against each other, grinding hard.

Robin's alarm went off, and David reached a hand out and slapped the Snooze bar.

She pulled her mouth away. "We'll be late."

"I don't care." David buried his face in her hair, drinking in their mixed scent.

"David, if we're both late, won't it look—"

"Someone let the air out of your tires."

"What?" It was low and breathless. Robin arched up against him.

"Someone let the air out of your tires. You called me to come fill them with the compressor." He nibbled at her ear, tracing the line from top to bottom of the lobe.

She nodded, mumbling it back as if committing it to memory. "Want to share a shower?" she rasped.

David groaned. "We're dropping your car at the shop this morning."

Her hand circled his cock, sending little bolts of delight through him. Robin started stroking him.

"Mmmm... Why?"

"I'm sure you need some sort of preventative maintenance. And it will give us more time."

She hissed out a yes as he started leaking precum down the head.

* * * * *

"So..." David hedged. "I never knew Zach was so adventurous." He'd wanted to ask about that all day. He'd wanted to ask it when he'd opened the drawer the night before, but he hadn't dared.

Robin stared at him, her brow crinkling in that cute little expression of confusion. "Adventurous? Zach? You're kidding, right?"

"The sex toys in the drawer?" *Have had me hard half the day.* Of course, visions of Robin and Zach using them had him on the verge of beating his skull against the brick pile. "I never knew—"

He stopped short as her face went crimson. Robin stared out the window, but she didn't fix her gaze on anything, which told him she wasn't interested in anything in particular.

His mouth went dry, and the coppery taste of fear overpowered his senses. He'd asked something wrong. He was sure of it. "Robin?"

"You know he wasn't," she replied. "Zach was about as vanilla as you could get. It was like pulling teeth to get him to have sex outside the bedroom, let alone anything else."

David waited, unwilling to press her. Either Robin wanted to talk about it or she didn't. Still, the possibility that she'd owned the toys before Zach and had used them with some other guy tortured him. If that were it, he wasn't sure he wanted to know the details. To hear Zach tell it, Robin had been a kitten in the bedroom, not a tigress.

No. He said their sex life was vanilla. Not that she wanted it to be vanilla.

She cleared her throat. "I wanted to experiment a little. Zach... Well, you know Zach. Any move out of his comfort zone required weeks of preplanning and...discussion."

That last had a bite of something acid in it. It was obvious that she hadn't been happy with his brother's clay feet. Conflicting emotions—mainly satisfaction that their relationship hadn't been perfect, relief that Robin knew it and admitted it, and guilt that he was glad about it—assaulted David.

He nodded, forcing out the one question that couldn't be quelled. "How much experimentation did you manage?"

Her shoulder cycled in a weak shrug. "Not much. A little bondage play."

The contents of the drawer paraded through his mind. The many uses they could be put to followed. "How much do you want to do?" David reminded himself that she might have bought some of the toys as a gag or lark. Having them didn't mean she wanted to use all of them.

Her head swiveled around, and the pleading in her eyes rendered him hard as a girder. "Everything," she whispered.

It was a dream come true.

* * * * *

Robin stared at David, waiting for his response to her bold offer. The best she could hope for was a better response than Zach had given her.

He shifted as if discomfited, and she focused on the ridge of cock against his jeans. That was an encouraging start.

David pulled into her driveway and shut the truck down. Silence crept around them, setting her nerves on edge.

At last, he answered. "Did you enjoy last night?"

Enjoy it? "I can honestly say it's the best night of sex I've ever had."

His expression hardened into something dark and hungry. "It's nothing compared to what I'm going to do."

The heat and wetness between her thighs stepped up several notches.

"I'm not Zach, Robin."

Her heart stuttered at that pronouncement. Of course, he wasn't Zach. Why did he feel the need to state it?

"I won't be holding debates over what happens in the bedroom."

She nodded.

"And I like experimenting."

Her breathing went ragged, making vocalizations problematic.

He offered a curt nod of his head. "Inside. Into the bedroom." Although his voice was soft, something in his eyes made it an order.

Robin hurried to comply. At the door, she struggled to get the key in the lock, her hand shaking.

David appeared behind her, his body crowding hers, his breath painting hot trails on her chilled cheek. His hand covered hers, and the key slid in. He guided it around, torturously slow. Just when she was starting to wonder if there was a sexual message in that, his fingers started stroking circles on the heel of her hand.

The click of the lock radiated up the key. His hand left hers, and he turned the doorknob. The door swung open before them, but they didn't move. The sexual tension made her feel too hot, even in the gathering darkness of a winter night.

"Inside," he repeated.

Her knees quaking, she did so. David shut and locked the door, and the lights switched on.

A noise she couldn't readily identify brought her attention around. David was closing the wooden Venetian blinds over the living room windows.

Certain he intended something hard and fast in the living room, she started peeling off her jacket. David paused on his way to the kitchen and raked a gaze up and down her body. She started undoing the buttons on her blouse, teasing him.

“In the bedroom. Undress for me.” He took four long steps across the kitchen and groped for the blind pull.

Robin headed to the bedroom, at a loss to explain him closing the blinds in living room and kitchen if he intended the night's action for the bedroom.

She was stripped to the waist when he breezed through the bedroom doorway. David didn't hesitate. His clothes started dropping to the floor with dizzying speed. Robin slid her jeans and panties down, her gaze rapt on his deep-cut chest and narrow hips.

How many months had she stared into his deep brown eyes and at his shaggy hair? At the way his shoulders moved against his T-shirts at work? Now that she could see him naked, all she could look at were the parts of him she hadn't been able to see unless he was in bathing suit.

Had she been staring at him like this at family Fourth of July parties? Surely not. Someone in his family would have noticed that.

She kicked her jeans and panties away and pulled off her thick winter socks. It was amazing that he could find her sexy in these layers of fleece and wool. One glance at him reminded her that she found him sexy in whatever he wore.

The last of his clothing removed, David stepped toward her. His fingers combed through her windblown hair, and his mouth closed on hers. He guided her to the bed, his hands stroking up and down her body. One hand left her, and the drawer slid open.

David leaned away, leaving her gasping for breath and trying desperately to figure out how he did this to her with a simple kiss.

Simple? Okay, with David, nothing was simple. Nothing was vanilla. Nothing was boring.

He was back, urging her legs wider with the knee he slid between them. One hand stroked at her seam, sending swirls of sweet reminders of his tongue and lips through her body. Wet heat trickled down her thighs, most likely coating his fingers again.

“Perfect,” he breathed. “It's going to be so easy.”

“What is?” Nothing he was saying made sense.

He spread her open, and Robin grasped at his shoulders. Something oval and soft slipped between. She would have thought it was a jelly vibrator, but it was too small, and it went all the way inside.

Robin searched her memories of the toy-buying binges, but her muddled mind drew a blank on something fitting this description. It had been more than two years and way too many impulse buys to pinpoint what he'd chosen.

"Have you had sex in the kitchen?" he inquired.

"No. Just the bedroom and bathroom."

One brow went up at that. "With Zach?"

Her cheeks flamed in the realization that she'd done more with David in a few days than she'd done with Zach in more than a year. "Yes. With Zach." She kept her tone neutral.

He made a *tsking* sound at her. Before she could react to it, he was speaking again. "Zach forgot the number one rule of moving into a new home."

The toy inside her started buzzing lightly, making breathing in a steady stream problematic. "And that is?"

"An old construction and realty superstition." One of his hands closed on her hip. "You have to make love in every room of the house for good luck."

Her mouth went dry. "Good luck?" She and Zach hadn't had much of that.

Make love. He called it making love. David probably meant her and Zach, not—

"Do you have any TV dinners?"

"What?" His jumps from topic to topic were making her dizzy. Or maybe it was the toy inside her. Was the movement getting stronger? Or was it her imagination?

"TV dinners?"

"In the kitchen, of course." Where else would they be?

"Just where I want you."

"I don't care where," she admitted. "I just want you."

A cocky smile pulled up one side of his mouth. "We'll see."

"See?"

He didn't answer. David guided her to the kitchen and lifted her onto the edge of the breakfast bar. He paused, licked his lips, and dove in for a taste of a nipple.

Robin wrapped her hands in his hair and held him to her. His taste turned into a near-brutal suckling that said his plans for the evening were going to be better than she could imagine.

David drew away with a teasing kiss, and she tried to tug him back.

“Have to put dinner in the oven, or we'll starve,” he chided her.

“The only thing I'm hungry for isn't coming from an oven.”

He unwound her hands, a self-satisfied expression on his face. “Give me a show while I get dinner in the oven.”

She stared at him, not quite certain she knew what he meant. David guided her to her back on the breakfast bar and brought her hand to her clit. She circled slowly, and David smiled.

There was something darkly arousing about lying out naked and touching herself for him. She changed her pattern, stroking herself harder. The toy inside was definitely getting more intense.

“That's how you like it. I'll have to remember that.

She traced her lips with her tongue.

“Ask nicely, and that's on the menu tonight.”

“Cook,” she ordered.

“Yes, ma'am.” There was amusement in his tone, but he meandered to the stove and set the temperature. He watched for a moment, before he went to the freezer and pulled it open. “Which flavor do you want?”

“I don't care. I like them all.” In truth, she couldn't remember which types she had, but since she bought them, she liked them.

He returned to the stove, stripped off the boxes, and turned to watch.

“David!” Her body was screaming for more...for him. Now!

“The oven has to preheat,” he offered innocently.

Too innocently. She considered some form of torture for him.

David retrieved a knife from the drawer and cut away whatever plastic covers the directions called for. He opened the oven and slipped the trays in. When the door was closed, he set the timer and turned.

His eyes narrowed, and his cock bobbed. “Oh, yeah. That's what I wanted to see.” He picked up something from the countertop, and the toy kicked up several more notches.

Remote! Robin tried to remember if she'd purchased a remote control vibrator. *If it was in the drawer, I must have.*

He turned it up again, what must be its high setting or close to it. His hand circled his cock and teased her with the fact that he was leaking precum from the slit in the head.

“Come here.” Her voice was low and sexy. Had she ever sounded quite like that before?

“What do you want?”

“Good luck.”

* * * * *

David nearly laughed at the witticism. “Tell me what you want, Robin...specifically.”

“Your cock.”

It sent shivers down his spine. “Where?”

“In my mouth.”

He had to squeeze down on the base of his cock to keep from shooting right there. “We'll need more room for this.”

Her fingers were twirling on her clit, her legs open wide for him. Her deep blue eyes were half-mast in pleasure.

“Anywhere. I don't care,” she breathed.

David considered his options. The table would work well enough. It was a hardwood monstrosity that Zach picked up, so it would support their weight and any energetic movement they engaged in.

He crossed the room and scooped her up. She started to raise her hand to circle his neck, and he captured her fingers in his mouth and took a taste.

It wasn't enough. David settled her on the table, jumped up, and lay down opposite her orientation for some sixty-nine.

Robin didn't waste time. She turned halfway over him and sucked his cock down. David lay beneath her, stunned, his body rioting.

Her flavor in his mouth spurred him to motion, and he pulled her over him, positioning her knees to either side of his head. At the first hard suck at her nether lips, she released his cock and shouted out, her fingernails biting into his thighs.

He did it again, and she went back to his cock, taking him deep. It was David's turn to momentarily release her. He ground his teeth and considered banging his head on the table to right his senses.

Her head bobbed up and down, and she provided stinging suction. David went back to work on her, determined to make her come before he did.

She released him again, her hips cycling against his tongue. In the next instant, she was moving. His frustration that she'd done so before coming was short-lived. A light buzzing resonated through the tabletop, and he dimly recognized that she'd removed the still-vibrating egg. It went skittering toward the edge and dropped to the pristine Pergo floor. But then the sweet, tight sheath engulfing his length stole all conscious thought. David powered his hips up and down, meeting her downward thrusts avidly.

Their sounds overlapped, mingled...made a soundtrack he wouldn't mind hearing again and again. Finally, Robin screamed out his name, pressing down hard as pure sensation exploded and raced throughout his body.

They lay in the aftermath, Robin astride him, her cheek pressed to his chest, panting and mewling with each movement.

David tried to make sense of the world, but it was a lost cause. He had no idea how long they'd stayed there. For that matter, their dinners could be turning to charcoal. The timer could have rung, and he never would have heard it...wouldn't have cared, if he had heard it.

"I have never..." Robin gasped. "*Never* felt that before."

He smiled. "Do you still have whipped cream for your cocoa?"

Her head came up, her brow scrunched in that expression of confusion he loved so much. "Yes. Why?"

"You'll see."

Chapter Four

December 4, 2009

"I have to talk to you."

David looked up at Les and noted Les's tense shoulders and sideways glance toward his brother Neil. His stomach squirmed at the unspoken warning. "Sure, Les. I was about to get a coffee. Ride down with me."

His cousin's grim expression said it all. This wasn't a work-related discussion. It was personal, and there was only one personal subject Les would hesitate to pull out in front of Neil.

As if the thought drew the latter man's attention, he grunted out a request for a cup of that coffee when David came back up.

"Sure." Forcing that out took all he had and more. His mind was in a flat spin. Had someone besides Les found out? Had Pop found out?

They made meaningless small talk on the way to the elevator, rerunning shipments that he'd already triple-checked days earlier. One of the electricians jumped aboard with them, and they rode in silence for three floors, until he got off.

"What's wrong?" David asked the moment they were in motion again. *Not Pop. Anyone else I can probably talk sense to. Not Pop.*

"The ladies have decided it's time to get Robin in circulation again."

The squirming turned to a roiling. "They're not setting her up on a blind date, are they?"

"I talked Andrea out of that. I told her it would be too much a shock to Robin's system. But she's planning something."

"What is she planning?" He prayed it wasn't some sort of speed dating or Internet dating thing.

Les darkened, averting his gaze. “She won't tell me. Said something about me being a party pooper or some shit like that.”

David ground his teeth in frustration. He ranted internally at their interference, then calmed himself with the truth that they only wanted to help. The whole family loved Robin. They all cared for her. From their point of view, she was still home every night pining for Zach.

He considered having Les tell Andrea the truth, but there was no question she would tell Neil's wife Barbara. The story would filter from Barbara to Heather to Ross's sister, Diane, to...his mother, most likely. That wasn't counting the guys' side of the picture, when Barbara told Neil, and Heather told Ross. Since Neil wasn't the most vociferous, it would be Ross that—Oh, the whole thing was stomach-clenching stuff, if one wanted to keep a secret, and the communication lines were fairly predictable.

“What are you going to do?” Les asked.

“I'll figure it out.”

David supposed that it depended on what the game plan was. If it were a ladies' strip club or a night at the bar, he wouldn't have to interfere. If it were something more, he'd have to invent a reason to.

* * * * *

“You know what you need?”

Robin looked up, meeting Andrea's gaze in shock. “Me?” What in the world was she talking about?

“Yes, you.”

Oh, no. “I don't need anything,” she denied. *I'm getting everything I want...nearly.* Robin focused on the stack of paid invoices she was entering in the computer and hoped that she'd headed it off at the pass.

“You need a girls' night out.”

In the background, the door opened and closed.

Robin pressed the backspace key, clearing the amount she'd just entered as if it was an error. “I don't think—”

“Aw, come on, girlfriend.” Andrea plopped on the edge of the desk. “Feed your feminine core.”

Her face went hot, and images of David provided an unintended double meaning to her comment.

Andrea continued, oblivious to Robin's upset. “A few drinks. A few men.”

“Hell no.” It was out before Robin could stop herself.

“Well, not *that* way, honey. There's no law that says I can't look, though.” Her chocolate eyes were wide and earnest, childlike when framed by the long, loping curls around her coffee-and-cream cheeks.

“I think it's a great idea.”

Robin choked at the sound of David's voice. How long had he been there?

He forged on. “Maybe a little male stripper action. I could see that.”

She turned and glared at him. “Oh, you could. Could you?”

David shot her one of his devilish grins. “Sure. Can't you?”

That stung. Robin went back to her work. “Maybe.”

“Good. Glad that's settled. Now—”

“Settled? Who said—”

“Andrea, you and the other ladies will be picking Robin up at what? Seven? That way she'll have time to change and eat first.”

“I didn't agree,” Robin called out sweetly.

“But you will,” David countered in the same singsong tone she'd used. “Seven?”

“Sounds good,” Andrea agreed. “Seven it is.” She pushed off Robin's desk and, strolling toward him, pulled out her cell phone from a back pocket, most likely to call Barbara with the “good news.” Just before she passed David, she shot him a cocky grin. “Who knew *you* could be so handy?”

“Oh, I am that,” he teased.

“No, you're not,” Robin grumbled.

But there was no point in arguing. When Andrea got her teeth into something, there was little chance of talking her out of it. Once she had the other girls on her side, she'd be nearly unstoppable, and David had removed the one roadblock she had...lying about a previous engagement with him.

Andrea snagged her coat off the hook and sauntered through the door, dialing without looking at the phone.

I haven't agreed! Robin fumed at being treated like a preschooler. She'd been handling her own social calendar for the last decade, after all.

David sighed. "I know you don't want to go."

But you want me to. And that hurt. Why was he so quick to foist her off on Andrea and the girls? And what would he be doing while she was out watching strippers? Jealousy burned in her gut, making her glad she hadn't eaten lunch yet.

She forced out one innocuous question. "Then why are you helping her?"

He didn't reply immediately, and she turned her head. David was making two cups of coffee, his movements slow and measured.

To her surprise, he turned his head to scan the office and then the view outside the trailer through the big window that faced the site. Once he was sure they were alone and unable to be overheard, he met her gaze solidly.

"The ladies aren't going to give up until they've got you dating again."

I am. Sort of. Robin wasn't sure what to call what she and David had. Her heart told her that it was more than physical, but how much more? That was anyone's guess.

As if he heard her inner waffling, he suggested, "You could head them off at the pass by telling them about us."

Her mouth went dry at the suggestion. Since they weren't exactly dating, what they were doing wouldn't go over well with his family, she was sure. As it was, they'd have to agree to lie and say she'd gotten David to agree to artificial insemination.

But why would we have kept it secret? Why wouldn't we have told them? Would Cal and Mollie take offense to that?

In retrospect, Robin wanted to kick herself. With all the well-laid plans, how could she have completely ignored this part?

Because there was no way of knowing how long it would take her to get pregnant? Lying about when she planned to be inseminated could go badly, if she didn't get pregnant for six months. How many times would they believe she'd tried? Would they try to talk her out of it? Or talk David out of it? Would they want to consult with the nonexistent doctor she'd engaged to perform the fictitious procedures? It would be their grandchild, after all.

Her thoughts swung back to the idea of six months. It was better than considering the very sticky problem of presenting an illegitimate grandchild to Cal and Mollie, in any form. Just the thought of six months of David in bed with her was mind altering. Would he give her that long? As far as she knew, he'd never dated a woman longer than a month or a little more. Would he get bored and want to date other women while he slept with her? Or move on altogether?

He executed a stiff nod, snapping her out of her internal argument. "I figured that would be your answer."

What was that half-hidden note in his voice?

"If you go out with them and make it clear you aren't looking for more, you can stall them off for a while."

She nodded dumbly, still working at the hard edge to his expression without results.

His gaze slanted toward the window and didn't return. "We're leaving at four today."

"We?" What was he up to?

"Your car is in the shop," he reminded her. "I'm driving you home."

"Oh... Yeah." Why did she keep hoping for more than these mundane concerns?

"We have a lot of preparations to make for your girls' night out." He flashed her one of his I'm-about-to-make-trouble grins and headed out the door with both cups of coffee in his hands.

So much for one of them being for me.

Preparations? Robin chewed on the inside of her lip, her thoughts scattered. Somehow, she doubted he meant a shower and change of clothes, but any thought she had of following him and asking died at the sight of Mollie and Cal walking in from lunch.

* * * * *

David was rock hard before they made it into the truck, and the hand teasing him while he drove wasn't helping.

"Tell me what your plan is," she purred.

He smiled. "I don't think I will just yet."

"When we get home?"

Home. Just the sound of a home with Robin sent shivers of delight through him. "That would do nicely." Getting it out of his mouth without tripping over it was a damned miracle.

"And what else will we be doing at home?" She pulled the button on his jeans open under the cover of his flannel shirt, teasing him.

"Nothing you'll object to." If the toys she'd purchased were any indication, Robin would be game for anything he wanted to try.

His zipper started to slide down.

Shit. Time to slow her down. "Call Tony's and order dinner in. On me."

Her head tilted back, and she stared at him in disbelief. "What? Why?"

"Because it's the only way we'll get to eat before you go out." *That should be enticement enough.*

It was. Robin pulled back and fished her cell phone out of her jeans. "At this time of night, we'll be waiting an hour," she cautioned.

"Good. That's what I want."

She made the call without any further questions. David didn't listen to what she ordered. He didn't care what she did. What he was hungry for wasn't coming in a brown bag or pizza box. It was currently wrapped in a snug pair of dark jeans.

He pulled into the driveway with a smile on his face.

* * * * *

Robin slipped out of the truck, her senses in a riot. Whatever David had planned, it was going to be explosive. She let them in and kept walking, shedding her jacket onto the sofa. His gaze on her ass was like a physical caress, and she added a sway of her hips.

David locked the door and followed her into the bedroom. He glanced at her half-open shirt and then at his hands. "I'm just going to wash up before."

“Want company in the shower?” she offered.

“No. The shower is for later.” He shot her a hungry look over his shoulder. “I want you naked in the bed.”

With that pronouncement, he was gone, and Robin was left gaping. The sound of water running in the sink spurred her into motion.

He emerged several minutes later—his boots and socks shed, his jacket likewise absent, his face and hands scrubbed, his hair damp...and his jeans buttoned again. Robin wondered at that move.

“I *do* plan on taking advantage of that,” he commented.

“Of? What?” What was he talking about?

“Whatever I want to.” There was a challenge couched in that statement. “Say it. Say I can have whatever I want.”

Her heart pounded out a warning her head ignored. “Anything.”

“On your knees, facing the head of the bed.”

She complied, her breath coming in ragged little gasps, though he hadn't even touched her.

The drawer opened, and Robin closed her eyes. She wanted to see what he chose, but she didn't, at the same time. Not knowing was a delicious form of foreplay.

As if he agreed, the blindfold covered her eyes. Other items caused ripples in the mattress and quilt beneath her. He hadn't removed his clothes yet, and she wondered what he was up to.

David forced her ankles wider, his jean-clad knees coming to rest between her calves. Robin bit back a moan. Letting him call the shots this way was better than the actual act of sex with any man before him.

Something brushed the outside of her leg, and Robin tried to focus on the sensation. Maybe she could guess what he'd placed on the bed. As if he guessed her aim, David pulled the item away. She groaned aloud at that.

His chuckles rumbled against her shoulder. Was he leaning toward her? Tipping his head down?

David's arm circled her, and his fingers went to work on her clit. They were slick. Robin doubted it was his own precum, since she hadn't heard his jeans open. Since he wasn't using the copious juices she was producing, that meant he'd used the lube.

He played her expertly, reducing her to a mewling, shivering ball of nerves in moments.

"David, please." She needed more, and begging for it wasn't out of the question.

He pinched her clit lightly, and she gasped. His cock was heavy and thick, and he was denying them both. Why?

"You're going to come for me." David didn't question it.

Robin circled her hips, grinding against his fingers. "When don't I?"

His voice went rough. "I love that about you."

If only he loved her and not just things about her!

One slick finger plunged inside, and she bucked her hips instinctively, forcing him farther.

"I can feel your climax building up," he whispered. The finger slid back and forth, teasing her with what she really wanted—his length and girth thrusting inside.

He added a second finger, and the precursors of a violent climax assaulted her, stealing her breath.

"That's my girl."

The thought of herself as David's propelled her over the edge. She was so lost in the fractured sounds, scents, and touches that one touch nearly escaped her notice.

The prodding at her anus had her arching in shock, and her muddled mind labored at processing it.

"Push back against it," David instructed.

Robin complied automatically. She always followed his commands in the bedroom. Why would this be different?

It was different. The finger easing through the ring of muscle was different.

"Push back," he reminded her.

She did with a half-swallowed squeak, reaching back for his hair as the finger slid inside.

Oh God! Her body was a riot of sensations she couldn't separate long enough to make sense of it.

Her hand was clenched tight, fisted around a handful of his hair. She was probably hurting him. Robin forced her hand to relax.

As if David had been waiting for that sign, he started thrusting his finger in and out slowly. Robin licked her lips, encouraging her mind to function.

The plugs. David had seen the butt plugs and assumed she wanted to try anal sex.

But she hadn't. She'd thought all men wanted to try it. She'd bought the plugs with a plan in mind. If she offered Zach something she didn't mind trying for him, maybe she'd entice him into experimentation she wanted. But Zach hadn't taken the bait, and she'd written it off as seventy wasted dollars.

David added a second finger, and she followed his earlier instructions automatically, easing him in.

I should stop him. He has the wrong idea.

Still, she'd promised him anything. She'd told David that she wanted to try everything. Both were all-inclusive terms. She hadn't balked at letting him teach her then.

Robin had purchased the plugs with the thought of offering Zach anything he wanted. Was David so much different? She'd offer him anything to get what she wanted. With Zach, that had been sexual range; with David, it was the type of commitment she'd had with Zach.

David eased his fingers out, and Robin moaned at the sensation. She wasn't stopping him. She wasn't going to. Why had he—

The next prod wasn't a finger. She didn't question that it was the smallest plug. Robin took it as she had his fingers. All told, it was smaller than two of his fingers, though it reached a little deeper than he'd pushed.

For a moment, neither of them moved. They barely breathed.

“Maybe I should tell you the game plan now,” David grumbled.

Robin nodded, sexually exhausted, though he'd barely started.

Chapter Five

David stared at Robin across the table laden with uneaten pizza. “Acceptable?” he asked.

She nodded shakily, sending her tousled hair over her shoulders and beneath the edge of the short robe she'd greeted him in their second night together. “Can I ask one question?”

“Of course. Ask whatever you need to.” This was a big step for most women to take, after all. He'd be surprised if she only had one.

“You're not going to leave me wanting this way all night, are you?”

Biting back the groan was impossible. “That wouldn't be right,” he agreed. *Right. Comfortable. Acceptable.* His cock had been making demands since this idea had occurred to him in the trailer.

Robin moved closer, seemingly intent on climbing into his lap at the table.

“Eat first,” he ordered. “Andrea is picking you up in an hour and a half. In that time, we still need to get food in your stomach, put the next plug in, sate ourselves, shower, get dressed—”

“And put the largest plug in,” she reminded him.

His cock started screaming instead of barking orders. “If you're ready for that.” No matter how easily the first went in, the largest wasn't likely to go in as smoothly.

“And if I'm not?”

“I guess you'll have to take it with you in a baggie and change them out in the bathroom.”
Or wait for me to do it here.

No, that would mean waiting far longer than I want to.

Her mouth opened in an “oh” of surprise. “I don't think I'm quite advanced enough for that. We'd better get it in before I leave.”

Fuck! His cock was going to kill him. Could someone die of a terminal hard-on? “Sure.” The blood leaving his skull for points south was making him sound like an idiot.

Robin hesitated, then flipped the pizza box open. Two bites into her slice, she stopped and looked at his empty plate. “Aren't you going to eat?” she asked, guiding her slice up for another bite.

The grin she loved so much was back on his face, he was sure. “I will. The sooner you finish, the sooner I can start.”

That bite seemed to go down a little rougher than the others did. Robin stared at him. The first slice of pizza disappeared in a series of bites the likes of which he'd typically take. On her, they were gargantuan, a comical reprise of the guinea pig scene from *V* in the making.

He preempted her move to touch him. “At least two.”

Her hand swung to the box, and she glared at him. The next slice disappeared just as quickly.

David pushed to his feet and swaggered toward the bedroom, dragging his T-shirt off as he went. After a heartbeat or two, Robin scampered after him.

He made a show of unfastening his jeans and stroking his fingers up his length through his underwear. Although she'd seen him nude a dozen times, she was intense and attentive. A peevish little voice in the back of his mind wondered if she'd watch the strippers as intently.

Not if I plant another idea now. “You'll be watching them, but you'll be thinking of me,” he teased.

Robin didn't argue it. She settled back on the bed to watch him get undressed, no doubt taking his comment to mean he'd be making a show of it.

Okay. This is a first. He'd never done a striptease for a woman.

But he knew how to dance. Not the fancy waltzes and tangos Zach learned to make himself seem worldly at formal events, but David could shimmy and grind with a woman with the best of them. As a wrench turner, formal events weren't really his thing anyway. Good thing, because a waltz wasn't what he needed here.

Imagining Robin in his arms, he started his hips moving in a sensual glide that would leave no doubt he was hard on the dance floor. Her eyes went wide, but her gaze wasn't traveling anywhere, so he guessed that he had her full attention and interest.

David let the backbeat of one of his favorite hard thumping dance songs run through his mind, peeling his jeans back and then down. Thankfully, they were loose-fitting painter jeans, so he was able to hold them at his upper thighs while he rolled his hips in promise. Then he released them and stepped out of them smoothly.

Thank goodness for loose jeans at work.

Robin slid the tie on her robe open, and it gapped around her chest. Even if they hadn't been running out of time, the urge to be inside her at that move was too strong to ignore.

David hooked his thumbs in the waistband of his last piece of clothing and executed a little three-step to the bedside. The boxer briefs slid away in his grip, and his cock pointed the way to her in excitement.

She was less restrained. Robin grasped the cloth from his hands and pushed it away. It caught at his knees, and David added another little shimmy to send it south.

There were no words between them. There was no need for them. Robin sank to the mattress and opened the robe for him. David took full advantage of her position, planting one knee on the mattress between her knees and one hand next to her head.

He didn't thrust inside her. There was nothing frantic about this. The beat still ringing in his ears, David slid in, moving his hips in one-quarter meter to the song playing in his mind.

The butt plug inside her made her tighter than usual, adding a delicious friction to the mix. If her sounds were any indication, she felt it too.

When climax came, it was less kinetic than most of the other times, a sweet release that might have put him to sleep in any other circumstances. David feathered his lips over hers, indulging in leisurely tastes.

Robin sighed. "Oh, that was good. Why didn't you tell me you could do that?"

"Do what? A striptease? It was my first," he admitted.

Her cheeks went a deep crimson. "Not that, though it was nice."

“What we just did?” David had never had so much trouble following a conversation with her before.

Her hands cupped his buttocks, and she purred, stretching beneath him. “Oh, yeah.”

“Anytime.” Usually, he was a fan of hard pounding, but if the slow approach had this effect on Robin, he'd be more than willing to do it, whenever she wanted.

Her gaze flicked toward the clock. “Oh! We're running out of time.”

Some selfish corner of his mind wanted her to beg off. They could spend the night in bed, exploring the slow approach until they fell asleep in each other's arms.

No. Knowing my cousins' wives, they'll just show up here to convince her, and then what do we do?

Even if they went to his place, where he lived wasn't a secret. If he tried to take her someplace unexpected—a hotel or the hunting cabin—finding them both missing would probably cause concern before it did suspicion.

He nodded. “We'll change out plugs now...then off to the shower.”

* * * * *

Robin nodded, her heart in her throat. The small plug wasn't so bad, but she knew how large the other two were, in comparison. *And I know how large David is, compared to the largest.* She still wasn't certain she could do this, but she was going to give it her best shot.

Seemingly oblivious to her concerns, David reached into the drawer and pulled out the medium plug. The lube was still on the nightstand, where he'd left it earlier.

She watched as he squeezed some lube into his hand and warmed it. There was something erotic in simply watching him paint the plug with it, something that had her spreading her legs for him, misgivings or not.

David looked down at her, his smile widening. “Anxious?” he teased.

“Yes.” She wasn't lying, in either sense of the word. She was anxious, in the negative connotation, about whether she could follow through. Robin was also anxious, in the positive connotation, to see what he'd do next.

He reached for the base of the plug that was in and tugged gently. Robin moaned as it eased free. Not having it inserted felt odd, as if her muscles were trying to hold to the plug that wasn't there, as if the space was conspicuously empty, now that it had been removed.

"Feel good?" he asked.

Robin nodded.

His eyes went hot in need. He set the small plug aside and lifted the medium-sized one, showing it to her. She tracked it, as he lowered it toward her.

The tip was wider than the other had been, but not wider than the lower curve she'd become accustomed to. Robin pushed back, as he pressed the tip inside. He retreated a moment later, and she gasped at his withdrawal.

"Ready for more?" he asked.

"Oh, yes." Suddenly, taking larger plugs didn't seem so problematic.

He pressed the tip in again, working it back and forth, a little deeper with each inward push. Robin planted her heels on the bed, lifting her ass to aid him. That tightened her anus, and the friction increased.

David didn't slow. His jaw tightened in some unnamed emotion. "God, I could come just watching you," he grumbled. If the state of his cock was any indication, he wasn't lying about that.

The plug went deep, deeper than the first had reached. Robin took slow, even breaths, pushing back to open for the wider section.

David worked her up patiently, his breathing harsh. Hers wasn't much smoother, and while she thought it would be rough in outright pain, nothing she was feeling could properly be called that.

The plug seated inside her with a *pop*, and David snapped his gaze to her face, no doubt questioning her acceptance. Robin offered a stiff nod. Minutes passed, and they stared at each other.

If asked, Robin couldn't state if she enjoyed the feeling of the plug or not. Her head said no, but it wasn't at all what she'd imagined it would feel like. It was disconcerting to feel the solid weight of the plug stretching her.

Stretching me for David. She stared at his cock. With everything they'd done so far, why did the idea of this one thing seem so intimate? And when had she decided it was intimate and not invasive?

"What do you want?" David asked solemnly.

Robin could only think of one thing she wanted. She pushed up on her hands, brushing her lips against his. One kiss led to another...and another. Her heart tripped in excitement.

David pulled away. "If you intend to go out with the ladies, you need to get ready now." He hesitated a moment. "Or, do you want to do something else tonight?"

"We can't get away with that, can we?"

A wry smile twisted his lips. "Without admitting what's going on here? No. Not really."

She was seriously considering agreeing, when he continued.

"But that's probably not a good idea...Pop and all," he conceded. "So, I guess we should get you into the shower."

Her heart seemed to wither. He was right. His parents wouldn't approve of this, at all. *Butt plugs, bondage, illicit baby making...* No, there was nothing about this they'd approve of.

"The shower," she agreed.

* * * * *

David headed that direction, hiding his expression from her studiously. He wasn't sure why he kept hinting at making this official. Didn't she understand that they would support her moving on to a new relationship, as long as it was one that looked to be going somewhere?

She doesn't want a serious relationship.

But he did. How could he make her see that without sending her running the other way?

He turned the shower on, letting the water heat, while he mulled the problem over. Robin brushed her hair out at the sink, lost in her own thoughts.

It has to be gently. Robin was still coming to terms with losing Zach. He'd have to hint at it, ease her into the idea that this could be more permanent.

David tested the water temperature and adjusted it to hotter without looking at the knob.

I just hope she gets it and accepts it before she manages to conceive Zach's baby and shut me out.

I won't let that happen. Robin had said she wanted to have *his* baby. She would be having his baby and not Zach's. That was one thing he'd make clear to her, if he had to.

He winced at the ways that could go badly.

"Too hot?" Robin asked, reaching around him to check.

"No. It's fine." The water might be the only thing that was, but he'd change that, if he could.

She stepped past him and into the spray. The water plastered her hair down, and Robin tipped her head back, her eyes closed. She was everything he wanted.

Damn it, she's mine. There was no way he could walk away with nothing more than this.

He joined her in the shower and slid the door shut. Her lips were too tempting for words, and David leaned down and sampled them. Robin didn't stop him.

They migrated to the shower wall, hands wandering over slick skin. David grasped the soap and started bathing her. Their lips parted and joined, again and again.

The urge to continue until the ladies showed up and found them together beat at him. His rational mind rejected that. The one surefire way to end this was to shock Robin when she was starting to come out of the shell she'd hidden in since Zach died.

Be gentle. Hint at more. No sledgehammer. No Mack truck. Robin needs finesse.

Instead, he replaced the soap in the dish and rinsed her. Robin stared up at him, her eyes pleading.

"Time to get dried," he croaked. "I'll choose the clothes, while you do."

Before Robin could agree, he slipped out of the shower and dragged a towel over his hair and body. He handed a second to her and loped into the bedroom. A check of the clock showed they were down to half an hour. There was no time to waste.

"David?" she called out. "What about the largest plug?"

He calculated how long she'd had the medium one in. "It will have to wait until just before you leave."

She didn't reply to that. Visions of Robin following her usual routine in the bathroom assaulted him. David shook them off. If he indulged in that, they'd be back in bed when Andrea got here with the other ladies.

He went to her closet; it was conspicuously empty without Zach's clothes taking up half of it. In yet another sign that she was having trouble coming to terms with his brother's loss, her clothes were still taking up only one side of the hanging bar. He suspected the dresser was similarly empty on one side.

David rifled through the dresses hung at the far right. *All the dresses together. All the shirts next. All the skirts. All the trousers and casual pants to the far left.* He didn't doubt Zach had organized it that way.

And she's kept it that way for two years. Why?

But this wasn't the time to examine that. He pulled out a navy blue sheath dress and laid it across the bed.

The top drawer of her dresser came next. Everything was folded as he'd seen Zach fold clothes. He tamped that observation down and pulled out a pair of lace panties.

Robin sauntered into the room, gloriously naked, her hair tamed. The scent of her body lotion explained the delay in her arrival.

David handed her the panties and waved toward the dress. He headed for his own clothes. It would be as disastrous for him to be nude when the ladies showed up as it would be for her to be...or for them to be together.

"The panties..."

He looked back, his jeans halfway up one leg. "What about them?"

"Well, we still have to put the largest plug in. Don't we?"

His cock tightened to half mast at the reminder. What he wanted was suddenly clear to him. "Get dressed. Panties, too. We'll take care of the plug."

He dragged his clothes on, not daring to look at her. Getting her out the door without landing them both in hot water with the family was going to be hard enough without watching those clothes slide on. When he was dressed and had his boots back on, he finger combed his hair and turned to Robin.

His mouth went dry, and his cock complained at its confinement. She was standing at the nightstand, carefully lubing up the last butt plug.

Oh, damn. This is going to be a long night.

Robin looked up, her expression uncertain.

David strode to her, putting his hand out for the plug. She handed it over, then wiped her hands on a washcloth she'd brought from the bathroom.

Their clothing resonated with him. He looked the workman he was and loved being. She was every ounce the beautiful woman. Robin could have anyone she wanted. What the hell was she doing with him?

Anything I want. She'd promised that more than once.

"Face the wall," he instructed. "And pull the dress up."

Robin took a calming breath and did as he'd asked.

David slipped a finger in the waistband of her panties and worked them down, watching the curve of her ass appearing slowly. When they ringed her thighs, he reached down and drew the plug out.

Her gasp went straight to his cock. David forced his breathing to slow, aware that he was straining his jeans, loose fit or not.

He stroked the plug against the ring of muscle, and Robin placed her hands on the wall and pushed her buttocks back. In addition to making it easier to seat the plug, it would allow him to see it sliding in and out. That in mind, he pulled back on one cheek and pressed the tip into her.

She didn't protest, so he played deeper. Halfway in, he finally hit her comfort zone.

"Stop," she gasped out.

David pulled back slightly, and she took a deep breath. He didn't move the plug. It would take a time for her to acclimate to it.

Instead, he moved the hand spreading her to her mound and guided her into the cradle of his hips. Nuzzling at her shoulder, he basked in her heat and scent. He trailed his lips to her throat, and Robin moaned. She wiggled against his hip.

He moved the plug experimentally, shifting it back and forth at a depth she'd proved comfortable with. When Robin didn't ask him to stop, he returned to his examination of her neck.

Deeper strokes followed, and his hand explored, cupping a bare breast under the sheath. He pinched at her nipple lightly, and she pushed back, taking the plug nearly to the lower curve.

"That's right," he breathed.

Robin tucked her hips then pushed back again, preparing herself for him. Even in his most fevered dreams of her, he hadn't imagined this. Something told him he'd still be hard for her when she got home from the strip club.

She continued, her breathing hitching. The plug flirted with seating fully...once...twice...

It slipped past the curve and lodged in. Robin went still. David held his breath, anticipating her plea to remove it. She swallowed hard. One delicate hand fisted against the wall. At last, she turned her head and sought out his eyes.

He didn't ask what she wanted. David pulled her panties up slowly, covering the base of the plug, already hidden by her lush backside. The dress molded to the curves of her body, and he traced them blatantly, on the excuse of smoothing any telltale wrinkles from her clothes.

Robin came up on tiptoe and wrapped her arms around his shoulders, reinforcing the image of the odd couple he'd noted earlier. She was too good for him, but she was all he wanted, and he'd find a way to make her his.

The doorbell sent him two steps away from her. He recovered and shot her a sly smile. "Put your shoes on. I'll see you later to do something about that plug."

She blushed deeply. "It's a date."

His heart stuttered. How strange that such a simple word could affect him so deeply.

* * * * *

The dancer on stage was hunky enough, but Robin found herself comparing him to David, just as he'd teased she would. How could she help herself with the memory of sex with him fresh in her mind and the largest plug in her ass?

The latter was admittedly odd. The sensation couldn't properly be called painful, past a few twinges when she'd plopped down somewhere without thinking about the consequences of her actions. Still, the sensation of stretching persisted, a light—almost pleasant—burning when she leaned or turned certain ways.

It had taken her more than an hour to reject the idea that someone would know the plug was inserted. If her face had burned any hotter and longer, Andrea would have stopped teasing her that she was embarrassed about going to a strip club and started seriously pursuing the idea that Robin was coming down with a fever.

Sometime around the second hour, she'd had to admit that the plug had a wicked sort of appeal to it, making her aware of herself sexually. *Acutely aware of David and all the things he intends to teach me.* It was a delicious little secret that no one knew she was keeping. Robin had even indulged in thoughts of going into the ladies' room to stroke off and wondered if she could keep it together in a crowd, wearing a pair of vibrating panties to take the edge off.

Her face burning at the audacity of that thought, she took a sip of her Long Island Iced Tea and focused on the dancer again.

"Longbow" was down to his rip-away pants and G-string, which meant his chest was on display. He had defined muscles, of course, but he was lean...more of an office guy than a working man, like David was.

Her mouthful of Long Island nearly came up on a choke at the realization that she didn't like office types. She was making comparisons that put Zach in a bad light again.

And disliking the clean-cut office type? When had that happened? Yes, she enjoyed David's callused hands and heavy muscle more, but when had she stopped finding lightweights appealing?

Robin looked around the room, focusing on bare-chested waiters and dancers of all types. She swallowed down a lump at the truth. It wasn't that she didn't find lightweights appealing. It was that she didn't find any of them appealing.

Any of them but David. Oh, this had the potential to go badly.

Or maybe to go well. It was too early to know for sure.

After all, he'd spent the night more than once now. He'd concocted the story to give them the whole morning together the first time. When had Zach done something like that?

Never. Her heart raced at the idea that there might be something more developing out of this affair.

Andrea leaned close to her, blasting her question through the loud thumping music and into Robin's ear with ringing success. "I thought he'd be your type."

Her face heated. "Not really. I don't do repeats, I guess."

Her friend's eyes lit with glee. "So, you're ready to start dating again. I told Les—"

"No. I don't think so."

Andrea turned on her chair and cocked her head to one side as if considering something. “Maybe a little bedroom action?”

“Maybe. With the right guy. But there aren't many of those around.” Robin put up a hand to stop the flow of suggestions. “I'll find him my own way.”

Barbara chuckled darkly, leaning close on the other side. “If sex is all you want, you should see if David is game.”

“David?” The question was out before she could stop herself. What in the world made Barbara consider David as a possibility? Did they all know? Or at least suspect what was going on between them?

When they'd shown up to pick up Robin, she and David had made a show of him leaving in his truck with the pizza box. There had been no comments or raised eyebrows about it, though it would have been painfully obvious that he'd probably been there while she'd showered and changed into the tight little sheath she'd donned for the evening.

Had her mooning given them away? Maybe.

Andrea pointed to Heather, currently dirty dancing with one of the off-duty waiters. “Word is Heather got down with David before she and Ross got together. That man is ho-*ot*, baby.”

Yes, he was. Her heart sank. No matter what she was feeling, David was the consummate ladies' man. There was no chance he wanted more than what he'd promised her.

Realizing they were still waiting for an answer, Robin pasted on a smile that felt halfway realistic. “I'll think about it.”

Far too much, I'm sure.

* * * * *

David's truck wasn't outside her house. Robin calmed herself with the fact that he would either have left it at his place and walked back...or would be coming back later tonight, as he had the first time. Her entire body humming in anticipation, she hoped it was the former.

Inside the house, she pulled off her coat and dropped it on the sofa. She stopped for a moment, closed her eyes, and drank in the feeling of being home. Without a sound or discarded jacket or any other indicator, she knew David was in the house.

The condo hadn't felt like home since Zach died. It had been nothing more than the place she lived, the place to wash clothes and sleep and shower and read books. She hadn't even cooked a proper meal since Zach's death. She'd eaten what was easy, though she liked to cook.

Her brow furrowed at the truth. She did like to cook, so why had she stopped cooking when she'd lost Zach? What did that have to do with him?

I should cook. I should cook for David.@ Maybe she'd start making meals that she could pop into the oven or roast in the Crock-Pot, so they could have real food in the evenings.

Resigned that she would, she kicked off her heels and headed for the bedroom.

* * * * *

David held his breath, letting it out in a steady stream when Robin started moving again. He wondered why she'd taken so long in the living room. There'd been no discussion indicating that one of the other ladies had come inside with her.

Forget it. She's coming in now.

Her footfalls approached the door...barefoot, so she'd removed her heels in the other room, which was fine with him. There was something sexy about a barefoot Robin that couldn't compare to one of the foam domes—as Heather would call the girls he'd dated when he was younger—in spiked heels.

The irony that Heather had been one of those foam domes never seemed to make it through to her. But, that was Heather.

She pushed the door open and stepped through, her mouth opening in an “oh” of surprise.

David smiled. He'd gone out of his way to set up the candles and incense, the soft music playing at the edges of awareness, and himself on a down comforter...naked as the statue version of his name. *But a hell of a lot more of an erection.* It was good to see she liked it.

“Are you sure about this?” he asked. “If you're not, we can put this atmosphere to other uses.” He certainly wouldn't complain about a repeat of earlier.

“No. I'm sure. I just didn't expect—”

He patted the mattress next to him. “Expect?” He thought he knew where she was going with it, but it was better to know for sure, he supposed.

Robin crossed the room and sank to the mattress beside him. “Isn't this a little incongruous?”

“If you think so, maybe we should leave this for another night.”

“No!”

He startled at her reaction...then smiled, leaning toward her to drink in her musk and spice perfume. “Why?”

“I promised—”

“Forget promises.” He didn't want her to feel obligated to do this. If she didn't want to experiment with it...or wanted to do it slowly, they would. “If you're not ready—”

“I am.”

David pulled back, searching her face for signs that she was unsure or scared. Robin didn't appear to be.

“I want to know.” She didn't say what she wanted to know, but her blue eyes were earnest.

He tilted his head, enticing her into a slow, deep kiss. Hands trailed over heated flesh, under her dress, to the damp lace covering her slit.

Not yet. David moved on, pushing her dress up. He peeled the breast band out and eased it up, baring her to the neck.

Her breasts were just too enticing, and he lowered his head, suckling at the tips. Robin dragged her dress off and tossed it away, watching him with slumberous eyes.

David took his time, bringing her nipples to hard little points that begged for more. Something told him he had to reverse whatever ideas she had about anal sex, and making this a feast of sensation was his favorite game plan for it.

Getting the three plugs in had been delightful. From her reactions, he'd say it had been more than enjoyable for Robin, as well as for him. Memories of her moans as he'd played the largest in and out—her pressed to the wall, still damp from the shower and his stroking there—were almost more than he could bear. He hadn't questioned that she wanted this, even then.

He worked his way down her body, tasting her flushed skin. Just when he would have slipped his tongue past her lace panties, she spoke.

“I want to feel it.”

“My cock?” He'd planned on it. He'd planned on having her put the lubricant on him, working him up for penetration.

“Inside. Like we did earlier, with the small plug.”

David's jaw locked down at the image, and he panted back the urge to rip the damned panties off her. Instead, he eased them down until they ringed her thighs. The large plug, in addition to the pressure from the panties, would make her even tighter.

He was right. The fit was so tight, it bordered on painful. Still, he eased in, an inch at a time, shivering in restraint at her pleas for more. At the pinnacle, she started to climax in waves of milking muscle. It was all David could do not to follow her over.

Holding to him, Robin wriggled against his impaling length. “Oh...yes. Oh, yes. More.”

He consoled himself with the idea that giving her what she wanted and putting her at ease with the plugs would get them to what he wanted sooner. That in mind, David started to move.

“No! You'll come,” she gasped out.

David went still inside her, his head spinning. What did she want?

“You have somewhere else to be.”

His breathing strangled, he eased out. “Be sure. I can finish this way.”

Robin shook her head. “No. I want to know.”

David, at the end of his patience, reached for the lube. “Roll to your side.”

She stared at him, questioning him silently.

“It will be easier for your first time.”

First time? What am I saying? This is where she shies away.

Robin didn't question him. She turned to her side and pulled the pillows down to support her head.

The panties still ringed her thighs enticed him, and David hurried to lube up. At his first move toward her, Robin curled to open herself to him, and David reminded himself to go slowly for her.

His hands unsteady, he grasped the plug and eased it back. Robin gasped as the wide shaft popped through the ring of muscle, but she didn't retreat.

Encouraged, David used the plug to stroke in and out. When there was no sign of distress, he set the plug aside.

David wanted to ask her if she was ready, but he'd learned the hard way that could make a woman tense up. Instead, he slid his lower arm through the hollow at her waist and started circling her clit.

Robin shimmied toward him, and David positioned the head for the first push into her ass. He didn't instruct her. He didn't have to; she pushed back, meeting his forward slide.

"Oh, damn!" David couldn't stop himself from venting the exclamation.

"Okay?" she asked.

Okay? Was she kidding? He'd only gotten the crown in, and it was so good, he was trying not to come. "Yes. Just needed a minute," he grumbled.

David eased in farther, reveling in the compression of his shaft in her tight little hole. He eased back and in farther, trying to recapture the pace he'd used earlier.

It was a lost cause. A more primal cadence echoed in his ears, probably related to his thundering heartbeat.

Robin thrust her hips back, forcing him to the root.

Oh. My. God. A roar of disbelief scorched up his throat and into the room, and his cum jetted out, slicking her for his manic thrusts.

His breathing coming in fits and starts, stars twinkling behind his eyelids, David buried his face in her hair. "Oh, God. I didn't hurt you, did I?" What the hell had come over him? He still wasn't sure.

"Are you kidding?" There was a teasing note in that.

Her hips danced against his, setting off aftershocks that stole his breath and propelled him toward sleep. As he dropped off to sleep, his waning cock sliding from her body, he resolved to make her feel this good tomorrow.

Somehow. I'll think about it tomorrow.

Chapter Six

December 6, 2009

David mounted the trailer steps and shouldered inside, his smile going brittle at the sight of Robin's empty desk. *I'm an ass. I'm pathetic. I'm screwed.* Why was he so disappointed that Robin wasn't here, waiting for him to invite her to lunch with him?

"Problem, David?" his mother asked from the main desk.

"Robin's already gone to lunch?" Since she rarely left her desk midday, it was a safe bet.

"We all switched lunches today. Barbara has an appointment, but she doesn't have to leave until one. I promised to help your father with something, starting at twelve." She raised her shoulder in a delicate shrug.

His mind filled in the rest. That meant Robin ate early to allow Barbara to do her daily bank and courier runs, while Ma was still here to cover the phones; after that, his mother would leave with Pop, and Barbara would go directly to lunch after the errands and before her appointment, leaving Robin on the phones for the rest of the day.

"Right. Okay. I guess I'll head to lunch then." But it would be a much less lively lunch than joking with Robin over a couple of burgers or tacos. He turned toward the door.

"Oh...David!"

He stopped, wincing at her tone. He'd heard it a hundred times before he was twenty, usually right before one of those tedious "for your own good" discussions. "Yeah, Ma?"

"Come over and sit down."

David did an about-face, ambled across the office, and plopped into the chair Barbara and Heather used on alternating days.

"I've been talking to your father about the Christmas party."

That was hardly news. It was time to tell everyone what his or her job was. He racked his brain to find any possible lecture in that. He'd never faulted on his assigned task.

"How do you feel about hosting this year?"

"Me?" Where had this come from? Usually, he was in charge of picking and transporting the tree, hanging lights for the hosts...anything but hosting personally. On top of that, everyone had a hand in bringing food for the potluck, on the theme the hosts set, and cleanup of the house used, after the hurricane of kids came through.

"You have a place big enough now. You don't mind, do you?"

"No. It's just..." How could he voice his concerns without it looking like he wanted to back out?

She waved as if shooing a fly. "I know. It's usually a couple hosting."

The hair on the back of David's neck stood on end, warning that the trap was being set somehow. "Yeah. It usually is."

"It would be nice if you had a date there. Not one of your usual kind. You know... A nice, steady, serious girl."

"Yeah. That." Ever since Zach died, his parents had been hinting at this. Find a "decent" girl and provide some grandchildren.

I've done the former, and I might end up doing the latter, but not in the way she has in mind, at this rate. He would, though, given half a chance.

"David?"

He snapped his head up and tried to work out when he'd averted his eyes. "I'm not really dating anyone right now, Ma."

"Really?"

"You don't have to sound so surprised." Her reaction stung. He wasn't that much of a playboy, after all.

"So, does this mean your tastes are changing?" She leaned across the desk, her dark eyes twinkling in the quest for good news to share with Pop.

More like I finally have a taste of what I want. "Something like that."

She stared at him, hinting silently at the "delicious little details."

No way. Not a chance.

“If you don't feel up to hosting—”

“I do.” It was a lot of work, but it had its perks, including someone else doing the cleanup.

“If you're sure.” There was a note of uncertainty in that.

David nodded, an idea taking shape. “What would you think of Robin cohosting?” He rushed on without waiting for an answer. “It would get her back into the holiday season and give her a project to work on. And, she could keep me in line.”

Ma always believed a man needed a good woman to keep him in line. That was why couples usually hosted the family parties.

Not to mention, it will give us a lot of time together that no one would question. We could have lunch every day, talk on the phone like normal couples, share those delicious dinners she's cooking again... This could work.

His mother seemed to consider his argument carefully. Robin had shied from projects after her last...her wedding had been scrapped. How many times had Ma said Robin needed a hobby or outside interests in her life?

“If it's okay with Robin,” she conceded.

“If what is?” Robin asked from the doorway.

David executed an expansive wave. “Just the woman I wanted to see.”

She dropped her jacket on her desk, her brow scrunched in confusion. Her nose followed suit, giving her a wary look. “That sounds ominous.”

“Does it? Well, maybe for me. I'll be forever in your debt.” Okay, he was laying it on thick, but the banter seemed to have her attention.

Her brow smoothed. “You will? That will come in handy someday.”

Thankfully, his quilted flannel was covering his cock. “You game?” She'd been more than game, so far.

Robin turned and hopped up on the edge of her desk. “For?”

“Cohosting the family Christmas party with me.”

“Me?” She seemed surprised but not upset by the request.

“Left to me alone, there'd be Imperial and nachos for everyone, young and old.”

She laughed heartily. "No, there wouldn't."

"David!" his mother overlapped Robin's protest.

"No, there wouldn't," he admitted. "But a family party is always better with a woman's touch in the mix."

"Okay. You've got my help, but I intend to cash in on that debt." Her rocking finger added a subtle threat to the verbal portion.

"I am yours to command." His cock seconded it.

"If it won't be an imposition, Robin," his mother qualified.

"I'm honored you'd both ask."

David pushed to his feet. "Pizza at your place tonight?"

"Sure." Her head bobbed in an exuberant nod.

"Six? I'll bring the pizza?"

"Sausage and mushroom?" she suggested, as if he didn't know her favorites.

David strolled toward the door. "And extra cheese and red wine."

Robin clapped her hands. "You, sir, are on."

* * * * *

Robin answered the door, a clipboard in hand. David leaned forward as if to read it upside down, and she held it to her chest, whirled away, and made tracks toward the kitchen.

He closed the door and followed, setting the huge pizza box on the table. A brown wine-bottle-shaped bag appeared from under his arm.

"Glad to see you're taking this seriously," he commented.

She paused, glasses in hand. "Are you?" She'd been afraid David was going to treat this as a dodge to get more sex in without his family becoming suspicious.

Not that she minded the sex. At all. Far from it. But she really wanted to host the Christmas party.

She and Zach had talked at length about asking to host it their first Christmas together. They'd spent countless hours making plans for what they'd do.

There was little doubt whatever she and David came up with would be vastly different from those plans. Robin was so sure of it, she'd started from scratch, and she'd suggested things she knew would horrify Zach.

"Well, yeah. I am. It's our first chance to host, after all."

First. It sounded so permanent when he phrased it that way.

Robin grabbed two plates from the cabinet and set them atop the clipboard, then picked it up with her free hand. "Right. And I intend to make it memorable."

"Maybe we should divide the work," he suggested.

She turned toward him, noting him opening the wine with the corkscrew she'd left on the table for it. "That's what I had in mind." She set the clipboard on the table then set the plates and glasses for dinner.

"What's your plan?"

"Fun."

David stopped with the cork halfway out and stared at her. "What?"

"Fun. You know... Dress the kids in clothes you don't mind them getting messy in. Bring a spare set for them...and maybe yourself. Silly. Happy. Fun."

He went back to work on the cork. "It's never been done before. But...*how* messy?"

She went back for a beer for him and opened it with the church key from the closest drawer. *Just where Zach put it. Organized. Never messy.* "The others have cleanup duty."

That wouldn't have worked on Zach. The idea of a mess needing to be cleaned up in the first place would have turned him off.

"Robin," David warned. "How messy?"

She bit her lip, searching for the words to convince him. "I figure we'll empty the den out into the bedroom and spare bedroom. Roll up the rug and remove it." That would leave them with hardwood floors and bare walls. Not too hard to clean up, she reasoned.

The cork came free with a small *pop*. "Uh-huh." He wasn't saying no yet. That was a good sign.

Time to hit him with the worst. "The bathroom is right across the hall, if any of the really little ones need baths." The beer in hand, Robin headed back.

As she expected, he was gaping at her, his eyes wide in disbelief. “Baths?” He took the beer from her outstretched hand, looking like he'd need several to hear her plans through.

He's still not saying no. “The rest will clean up with a few moppings,” she offered hopefully.

David picked up the clipboard and scanned his gaze down it. “A turtle sandbox with lid? Why a turtle?”

“It's green. A blue whale isn't exactly Christmasy.”

“Right.” There was a moment of silence. “Twine and plastic sheeting.”

“It isn't what it sounds like,” she assured him.

“That's good. It sounds like we're either playing sex games that involve cooking oil or disposing of bodies.”

She grinned, pouring herself a glass of the wine.

His jaw dropped. “*How* much Cool Whip?”

Robin darkened. “It'll be fun,” she promised.

He hesitated, took a drink of his beer, and nodded. “Okay. Fun it is. Fun is good. You don't happen to have a menu planned for fun, do you?”

She smiled. “The next page.”

David flipped it over and started reading.

Her heart was doing the happy dance in her chest. Zach would have had a stroke at what she planned to do. Her smile dimmed at the realization that she'd enjoy this party a lot better than the one she'd planned with Zach.

“Robin?”

Forcing the smile back to her face, she looked up at him expectantly.

He had one finger of the hand holding the beer pointing at the second sheet. “Imperial and nachos?”

“That's only one thing on the menu,” she reminded him. “It's fun. It's just not the only thing we'll be serving.”

“I'm starting to like fun.”

“Knew you would.”

Chapter Seven

December 24, 2009

“I think the tinsel needs to go...here.”

Robin stiffened with a squeal and shook the silver strands out of her hair. “David, we’re going to spend more time cleaning up than we spend decorating.”

Smiling smugly, he plucked some tinsel off her shoulder. “Hmmm. Spending more time with you. Maybe I should make more of a mess.”

A fluttering in her stomach made concentrating difficult. More time? They already spent most nights in her bed, though admittedly after whatever time they spent on the party preparations. They ate lunch together every day—his treat—and dinner—hers. He called her cell from up in the building at least twice a day, making small talk. Failing that, he came down to take coffee breaks with her. And they drove in and out together most days, on the excuse that they’d had less than three weeks to plan and execute the party happening in less than six hours’ time.

“Maybe I’ll leave you to clean it up alone,” she teased.

He scowled, looking like a little boy who’d just been told he wasn’t getting dessert. “You said you’d help me host this shindig.” The whine of “you promised” was couched in there somewhere.

Robin assessed the huge tree covered in precious family heirloom ornaments. Here and there, something David owned accented the rest. He’d even talked her into digging out a few of her own from the attic. There were at least five generations of marriages, births, deaths, and other family events commemorated in glass, ceramic, metal, and needlepoint.

The blue satin painted disc she and Mollie had chosen in memory of Zach was squeezed in with the rest, where David had placed it. All around it were happier reminders—Les and

Andrea's third baby, a lace and ribbon ornament made from Heather's wedding favors, and more. Everyone's life was moving on, and hers seemed to have stopped with that piece of satin.

David's arm curled around her hip. "Robin?"

"Yes, I promised, and I'll help. Even when you make a mess."

He hunched down to plant his chin on her shoulder. "So, what do you think Miz Cohost...ess? Is the tree done?"

She cocked her head to one side, smiling as David matched her. "Except for the star, I'd say so."

The star would arrive with Cal. The party wouldn't officially start until he placed it on the tree. Pop Carson took Christmas seriously. Everyone had a job, and everyone took a turn hosting the massive event.

David moved away, turned his back, and started rifling in the bags of decorations he'd purchased for his first foray into hosting. "Let's see..." He came out with a handful of crisp plastic bags. "Where do we want to hang these?"

Robin reached around him and plucked one from his fingers. "What—Uh...Oh! Mistletoe." Heat rose in her cheeks. "There must be ten of them. People won't be able to move without being under mistletoe."

"First of all, there's a dozen."

"Twelve? How many rooms do you plan to put them up in?" He couldn't be planning to put them in the bathroom, though he might have some strange idea about hanging them outside.

David seemed to consider that. "Once I hang one over my bed and one over yours—"

She stared at him in shock. He was planning on hanging one over her bed?

"One inside the front door and one inside the back. One in the kitchen doorway. One over the sofa. And one in the den. That's not too many."

Robin did the count. "And the other five?"

"At both our houses. That's the full twelve."

"Okay. I guess." She hadn't decorated for the holidays since Zach died, and David knew it.

It's time to move on. She glanced at the tree. Without traditions of her own, the Carsons' rich holiday traditions had always enchanted her.

She'd been honored to cohost this year's celebration. Although it was unwarranted, it had given her a sense of permanence...of belonging.

"Did you buy enough of everything to decorate my place, too?" The question was out before she could make sense of why she asked it.

David cocked one eyebrow up in amusement. "How'd you guess?"

Warmth bloomed in her chest. She fought back a smile rather unsuccessfully. "Well then, I guess I better start decorating."

"Is that so?"

She bustled over to the tree and started fussing with the ornaments. "You have a lousy sense for decorating. It's probably a good idea to have me plan the setup."

He chuckled. "A lousy sense for decorating? Do I? I never noticed. Maybe it's good that I invited you to co-host."

Robin pulled Zach's ornament off the tree, and David gasped in surprise. She considered it for a moment, then moved it to the side closer to the wall. A heartbeat later, she did the same with the other memorial ornaments, scanning for the telltale names and dates they were all inscribed with. A few older birth ornaments and wedding ornaments took their places at the front.

"There," she announced. "That's better. Christmas is about happy memories. The not-so-happy... They should be in the background, don't you think?"

David didn't reply, and her nerves jumped at his alarming stillness. Was he upset at her pronouncement?

"You don't think they'll mind, do you?" If he did, she'd move the ornaments back.

His arms circled her shoulders, and he tucked his face next to hers. "Not at all. I think they'll understand."

Her muscles unknotted in relief.

David gave her a gentle swat on the ass. "Okay, woman. You say I'm bad at this. Start telling me where to put things."

It took a moment for her mind to dissect that and her sense of outrage to overcome her contentment at the scene. “Woman? Did you just call me—I’ll show you where to put something.”

He ducked the mistletoe she threw at his head, laughing heartily at her mock fury. Before she could concoct her next move, he crushed her to his chest, and their mouths fused in an involved kiss.

* * * * *

“A little to the left.”

David shifted his weight to *her* left and waited for the determination.

“Perfect.”

Thank God. He forced the tack through the white ribbon on the sprig of mistletoe and into the drywall ceiling. It had taken them most of the day, but they’d transformed his condo into a winter wonderland.

That sprig had been the last decoration. Now all they had to do was clean up and get the last of the drinks on ice. David stepped off the sofa, feeling like he’d spent the day hauling supplies, as he had the summer he’d turned fifteen.

“That wasn’t so bad, was it?” Robin offered cheerfully.

“Would have been easier to move the furniture,” he grumbled.

Her laughter lightened his spirits.

“We’re not done yet,” he reminded her. “You sweep while I ice the drinks?”

Robin pressed against him. “I had another tradition in mind.” She went to work on his jeans.

“I thought it was a *kiss* under the mistletoe?” David’s lungs were laboring, and they were still fully dressed.

“I intend to.” She shot him a mischievous smile. “I just won’t be kissing your lips.”

The air in his lungs scorched a pleasant trail in and out, and his cock strained against her hand. Before he could find the words to question her, Robin was on her knees, easing his jeans and boxer briefs down to his ankles.

David reached out, planting a hand on the wall for support. She hadn't touched him yet, and he needed it. The sampling flicks of Robin's tongue and brush of her lips had his knees threatening to buckle, just as he'd feared they would.

"Think I better sit down," he managed thickly.

Robin wrapped her hands around his hips, as if she could support him if he fell. He eased down, sighing as the cushions molded around him.

His hips arched up at the first suckling motions against the crown of his cock. It was hard, deliberate...a blinding sensation.

She rocked back and forth, taking more of him with each dip toward his lap. His mouth went dry, and his senses swam in bolts of pleasure.

Robin had sucked him before, but always as foreplay. There was no mistaking the difference. This time, she intended to make him come in her mouth.

Some back corner of his mind crowed in triumph. There was nothing about conceiving a child in this. She wanted him for more.

Her concerted effort silenced all coherent thought patterns. After that, it was all sensation: her soft lips and her nibbling, her tongue stroking against the veins on the underside of his length, her suction that had him moaning in sweet pleasure-pain...

The press of her fingers behind his balls.

Massage.

David licked his lips. Fractured pleas for more escaped his mouth.

Oh God! There was no mistaking the gentle pressure against his anus. He forced his hips down, pushing back by instinct. *Oh God! She means to—*

His response opened the ring of muscle to her, and her finger slid in to the hilt, teasing at his prostate. David bucked, moving her fingertip against it again...and again.

It was sublime. Every move drove his cock into her mouth, massaged his prostate, or both.

He arched his back with a strangled cry of climax. A draining rush of cum shot up his length, and Robin swallowed.

His roar echoed off the walls. His toes curled in the carpet. His hips jerked, stimulating the wicked little nub in his anus, setting off aftershocks. He babbled out something incoherent, his breath coming in ragged gasps that would hyperventilate him, given enough time.

His system settled slowly, leaving him panting in the aftermath.

Robin eased her finger out, and he shuddered in response. She knelt there, staring at him, seemingly uncertain.

“You sweep,” he croaked. “I’ll ice the drinks.” *Once I can move again.*

“And?”

“Do it quickly. That earned you a proper repayment in kind.”

Her cheeks darkened, and her eyes crinkled in amusement.

* * * * *

She was beautiful. Robin was nude from the waist up, in his bed, and they had three hours until people would start arriving for the night. He could spend at least an hour of that right here, before they had to shower and dress.

Robin forced her breast farther into his mouth, one hand grasping at his shoulder. So far, his plan to make her scream was well on its way.

“David? Robin?”

Ice cramped David's stomach, and her nipple slid from between his now-gaping lips. *Pop! What the hell is he doing here?*

His mind processed that his father had probably stopped by to check on the setup. After all, David had never had his own place to host the family Christmas party before, and he was a bachelor, Robin's assistance or not.

She jerked back at the sound of Pop's voice, her eyes wide and wild. A moment later, Robin's arms crossed over her bare breasts and her face darkened.

David rolled to the edge of the mattress, fished his T-shirt off the floor, and handed it to her. She pulled it on in a rush.

“David?” That was closer, in the main room instead of the doorway, at least.

He levered himself up and fastened his jeans over his waning cock. One last glance at Robin revealed her misery.

It's over. He knew it would end eventually, but not like this. He'd done all he could to keep it from ending this way.

David strode to the bedroom door, out, and closed it behind him. The hallway to the living room felt like the last mile, and Pop had gone silent, a sure sign that he was putting one and one together and coming up with sex.

It was worse than that. David winced at the sight of Pop holding Robin's discarded shirt and bra. Anticipating an explosion, he shoved his fists in his pockets and cleared his throat.

Pop whirled around, his gaze panning from David's mussed hair and sweat-misted chest to his bare feet and back up again. He motioned to his son, seemingly at a loss for words to protest David's state of undress.

It wouldn't have been an issue, if I'd been home alone. He didn't voice that thought. Instead, David tipped his head toward the clothing fisted in Pop's hands.

His father snapped a startled look at them. His hands opened, and he dropped them to the sofa.

It took a moment for Pop to find his voice. "Are you serious?" he asked with deceptive calm. Anyone who'd seen Pop uncork when one of them screwed up knew that look well enough.

"Yes. Very." *Completely. More than Zach ever was.*

"If you hurt her..." The threat hung like a pall over the room.

"I won't," David promised. Never purposely, but after this fiasco, there was little chance Robin wouldn't run screaming the other way. Whatever was growing between them was too fragile for this kind of shock.

She is too fragile for it.

Pop grunted in that way he had of announcing a discussion wasn't over. Or maybe that he'd be discussing it with Ma and letting her smack heads for him. He started toward the front door, shot a pained look at the master bedroom, then let himself out. The slam of the truck door was like a gunshot in the silence of the condo.

David ambled to the sofa and scooped up her clothes. He hesitated, then marched back to her. Robin looked up from the laces on her hiking boots, her face paling at the sight of the clothes in his hand.

He didn't return them to her. Something told David she'd bolt, if he made it that easy for her.

Robin didn't go back to the laces. She didn't look directly at him either.

The rising tension was too much for him. "Don't do it," he whispered.

She stared at her boots, twisting the laces around her fingers in a nervous little motion. "Don't do what?" Her voice sounded of tears.

"Whatever you're about to rush into. Consider it carefully. Talk to me first." He managed not to plead with her...barely.

Robin shook her head slowly. What was she saying? That she didn't want to talk to him? That sex had ruined whatever friendship they'd enjoyed before it, as he'd feared it would, in the beginning?

Ice settled in his gut at that thought. "It's over. Isn't it?" *God damn it! Never my time and never my fault, but I'm always fucked over with her.*

Her head tipped back, and she gaped at him. She pulled tight on the laces, turning her fingertips a few shades paler than her face. "You want that?"

"No! Hell no, I don't want that."

She didn't reply. Robin seemed to consider it, then went back to tying her boots. Her hands shook, so that she fumbled the tie the first time and had to start again.

David ground his teeth in frustration. "I don't want you to go," he admitted.

"What does Pop want?" she countered.

"This has nothing to do with him."

Robin faltered, took a deep breath, and pulled the double tie tight.

I have to stop her from leaving. "I don't know what Pop wants. I couldn't care less what he wants. But, Robin... I don't think he—"

She pushed to her feet and took two jerking steps toward him. Her hand came up in silent request for her clothes.

He didn't relinquish them immediately. "This isn't over, Robin. When you're calm, we *will* be discussing this."

Tears pooled in her eyes.

It was time to lay all the cards on the table. “I walked away once before without a fight. I won't do that twice.”

Her face went a few shades paler, and she moved her mouth as if to question him. She didn't force the words out, whatever they were.

David settled her clothes in her wavering hand, heartened that she didn't fist them and run. She stared at him, shocked...or perhaps waiting for something he couldn't name.

He leaned toward her and feathered a kiss against her lips.

When Robin moved, she meandered toward the front door. David turned to watch her. Her coat shrugged on, she hesitated with her hand on the knob. Just when he felt sure she was going to look at him, Robin let herself out.

“It's not over,” he vowed.

Chapter Eight

Robin reached for her jacket again, then retreated. Nothing made sense anymore. When had the world stopped making sense?

For a short period of time, after Zach died, it hadn't. But it had been well over a year since she'd felt this lost and confused.

Should I go to the party?

Her stomach clenched at that thought. If Cal and Mollie were upset, showing up would be a bad choice.

Then again, they might be offended if she avoided them. They might take it personally.

And David... She shivered. What had he meant when he said he'd walked away once? According to Zach, David had never been serious about a woman before. As close as the brothers were, it was unlikely David hadn't shared something of that magnitude with Zach.

Before? Her heart stuttered at the idea that he was serious now...about her.

"I won't do that twice."

She ambled to the sofa and dropped onto the center cushion. Okay... David was serious about her. It wasn't just sex games.

This is what I wanted. It was, so why was it so damned scary?

Because she never believed for a moment that this was possible? Because she'd written David off as nothing but a ladies' man who would never commit?

Or maybe because she could lose David like she'd lost Zach? Could she survive that loss twice?

Stop that. She was panicking and making excuses. Robin just wished she understood why she was doing it.

* * * * *

David could feel Pop's glare from across the room, and he flicked a glance at the clock. Robin was more than half an hour late. She wasn't coming. His heart sank.

If he was very lucky, she was home thinking and worrying. The alternative was her packing up with the idea of running and leaving the whole problem behind. How many times had Zach complained that Robin was flighty? Too many.

Would she do something that crazy? What would he do if she did try to break all ties and leave?

Screw this. It isn't ending this way.

He marched to the tree, pushed the other packages from the pile, and scooped up his gift to Robin. It was one of three he'd bought her, and it wasn't the one he'd intended to give her in front of his family, until Pop had interrupted them.

A quick pit stop in his bedroom to retrieve another, and he shouldered on his leather jacket and headed for the door.

No one called out to him. No one stopped him. His mind processed the information and returned the answer that they all knew, and they wanted to see what he was going to do to make this right.

David didn't look back to confirm it. As he'd told Robin, he couldn't care less what they thought about it. Instead, he left the party and made the seven blocks to her condo in as many minutes.

The key was in the lock before David stopped to consider his reasons for it. The time for the cautious approach was long past. If he left without Robin, it wouldn't be for a lack of making himself clear.

Robin looked up at him, her expression unreadable. She'd dressed for the party, and her coat lay a few feet away, but she hadn't screwed up the courage to face Pop.

Or maybe to face me. "Coming to the party?" he inquired. "You did help plan it."

"What's the mood over there?"

David shuffled over to the breakfast bar and leaned against it, pushing away images of their very intimate dining experience on it. "Everyone wants you there." Probably more than they wanted David there, if the truth were to be told.

She didn't reply.

"I want you there," he stressed.

"I thought you said we needed to talk." Her voice squeaked a little in the middle.

"We do."

She launched in before he could decide where to start. "What did you mean?"

"About?" His shoulders eased somewhat. At least she'd been thinking while they'd been apart. Though Robin wasn't making sense, she was asking questions about what happened earlier.

"When you said you'd walked away once?" she qualified. The hands clasped in her lap tightened in anxiety.

"I thought that would be obvious."

Her expression said it wasn't.

David dragged a hand through his hair. How many times had he lain next to her at night, considering telling her how he felt? How many times had he argued that he'd have to hint at it? How ironic was it that he had to hit her over the head with it like a sledge against an old horsehair wall?

He'd come here with the intent to be blunt. It was time to max out the bet and hope for the best. "Zach knew what he was doing when he didn't introduce you to me until you were a steady thing. Anything less, and I would have made my move, too."

She glanced at the windows and then back at him. "You...uh..." Her throat moved, as if she was swallowing a lump.

"I've been waiting more than three years, Robin."

"For?" The squeak was back in her voice.

"You. I asked you if I could have anything I want. I know what I want, Robin."

She was silent for a handful of moments. "And then?"

David pushed off the breakfast bar and strolled to her, offering his hand.

* * * * *

Robin took it, her heart pounding. He wanted her. He was serious about her, but she didn't know the specifics. Was this a one-upmanship thing or something more?

When she was standing next to him, David reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a package about the size of a Nintendo game controller. "I wanted to give you this," he announced.

She took it with shaking hands, turning it to the line of tape down the bottom. It was roughly the same size as the package he'd been teasing her all week was hers, but this one was wrapped in green foil wrap instead of the pearlescent, blue-and-white-striped paper.

It took a few heartbeats for the present behind the torn wrapping paper to make sense. When it did, Robin's heart sank.

"Vibrating underwear?" Then again, what had she been expecting? It was a sexual relationship, after all.

The fact that he was going to give these to her lit off another horrifying fact. "You were going to put these under the tree at a *family* party? The guys and their wives are one thing, but your parents and the kids?"

"No. This present was stashed in my bedroom."

Another reminder that it was sexual. She stared at him. "I don't get it." Was he trying to tell her that's all he wanted? A buddy with benefits? That was appalling.

A second present appeared from an inside pocket, the blue and white wrapped one. "The other one was just in case this one fell flat. It was the least I'll accept. This one... This one is what I'm hoping for."

Robin dropped the first on the sofa and took the second. The box inside was a beautiful white satin that could have acted as its own wrapping. On some level, she was surprised he'd wrapped it further.

White does get dirty. That was probably it. Wrapping it kept the satin clean.

"Robin?"

She opened it, lifting out the stained glass ornament inside. It was in shades of blue, white, and gold, with both gold-plated lines and yellow-gold rings in the design. The interlocked ring design was set onto a backdrop of a blue and white geometric pattern. Robin turned, seeking to highlight the design by getting a strong light behind it.

It didn't work. "There's something inside," she wondered aloud.

"Why yes, I believe there is." David gave her a few heartbeats to stew at his teasing. Then he reached over her shoulder. "There's a clasp...right—"

Robin batted his hand away and worked the clasp open. There was no doubt what the blue velvet box inside held. Words stuck in her throat.

"I bought it more than a week ago. Just so you don't think I did it to get Pop off our backs or something."

Her face burned at the insinuation. "Pop..."

"He would only have been upset about me sleeping with you as a lark, you know."

She wasn't so sure about that. He hadn't been happy about Zach living with her before they were married. What was different now?

David lifted the ring box from inside the ornament and sank to one knee before her. "You don't have to decide tonight. You don't have to wear the ring now, if you don't want to. I'll even take it with me, if you ask me to. If you're not ready to make this decision, I understand completely. I just..."

"Yes." To nearly anything he offered. Where they lived, what furniture they kept or discarded... It was all unimportant.

His mistook her answer, probably as a hint that he should finish his sentence. "I just want you to know what I want. What I hope we're heading for here. You're all I want for Christmas, Robin. I love you. And, if you won't let me put that ornament on the tree this year, maybe—"

"Yes. David...yes." Happy tears stung her eyes. "I love you, too."

"Yes, to...what part?"

"Yes, you can put that ring on my finger and the ornament on the tree. And, yes...I will marry you."

He stared at her, seemingly stunned that she'd agreed so readily. David took the ring from the box and slipped it onto her finger.

Robin flexed her hand, admiring it. "I was wrong. You have great tastes in decorating...or accessorizing, anyway."

She glanced at the clock, and her heart stuttered. "Oh no! We're an hour late...and we're hosting."

David rose, planting a kiss on her cheek. "Let's go put that ornament on the tree."

* * * * *

All conversation in the room ceased at Robin's first step through the door. David shut it and followed her to the tree. She raised the ornament, and David grasped the chain loop hanger. Together, they placed it front and center in the overloaded mish-mash of heirlooms.

"Looks beautiful," she complimented his choice.

"So do you."

Her laugh was muted by his kiss. He'd intended it to be a simple peck on the lips, but her lips parted to his, and her arms wrapped around his neck, her fingers twining into his hair. He indulged himself.

The silence in the room was replaced with relieved sighs. Then a squeal of delight. A second. An "ew" from one of the younger boys. Excited chatter and laughter.

Now it sounds like a party. David pulled away from the kiss, releasing Robin into the throng of women vying to get a look at the ring.

Les stepped between them, blocking his view of her. "Good thing you brought her back. I think Pop would have disowned you and kept Robin."

"Pop and Dad would disown me and keep Heather," his cousin Ross commented.

"They'd be right to," David quipped in return.

The crowd hushed, and David looked around for a reason. Pop mounted the stepstool set next to the tree and placed the antique star on top.

It was a moment that always stole David's breath away. There was something magic in that motion. He glanced at Robin, heartened to see that her awe of it had survived the last two years of hell.

"Now," Pop announced, "Christmas has begun."

"It can't begin until everyone is home," his mother agreed.

"And if I hadn't managed to convince Robin to marry me?" David inquired.

After nearly three decades, David knew Pop's mock warning look when he saw it. "If you hadn't brought Robin home to the family somehow, it would have taken a proctologist to get the pine needles out of your backside."

David winced, and the roar of laughter was deafening. *That's Pop.*

Epilogue

February 5, 2010

"You did not," Robin protested, clearly horrified by his joke.

"You don't want to elope?" After the rigid, scheduled wedding she'd had planned with Zach, he'd felt sure she'd want something uncomplicated.

She sank onto the sofa next to him, deep in consideration. "Well, I do. With a family party afterward," she qualified.

"No Cool Whip, please." Far from a simple mop-up, they'd found smudged, tacky handprints for weeks after the children's treasure hunt in the sweet dessert topping. It was almost enough to turn David off the idea of food-based sex games. *Almost*.

"No Cool Whip," she agreed. "It was a bad idea."

David draped an arm around her and pulled Robin to his side. "No. It was a good idea, but maybe more for the Fourth of July, where the kids can jump in a lake afterward...or play in sprinklers."

"We'll have to suggest it."

"Jack will be so pleased. He offered his lake house this year, you know."

Robin didn't smile as he'd expected her to.

"So, back to the subject," he hinted.

"Well, the Elvis impersonator thing was a little much." Her nose scrunched up in distaste.

"*That* was a joke." Didn't she know that? He'd laid the image of the tacky Vegas wedding on just to annoy his parents and to stall their overt hinting at a wedding date.

Still, his Internet cruising on the subject of wedding chapels had yielded one gem. "There's a sweet little chapel just outside Vegas, though. There's a man-made lake on the property, and

they have an arbor for sunset weddings. There's a professional photographer on staff. His work is pretty spectacular.”

She hummed a note that sounded like contentment and laid her head against his chest. “How soon can we arrange it?”

Score! “I took the liberty of checking. Next month, if you're game.”

Her arms circled his waist. “Four tickets to Vegas, coming up.”

“Four?” His dreams of a romantic honeymoon on the lake before returning home seemed to wilt.

“This is your parents' only chance to see a son get married,” she reminded him.

David kicked his feet up on the table. “I guess it is.” And he wouldn't begrudge them that. His mother had been as excited about the wedding preparations as Robin had been the last time. He couldn't cheat her out of that. “Okay. Four tickets and a party when we get back.”

The one niggling question he had to ask was still there. “Are you sure I'm not rushing you?” He'd been stalling his parents for a month, and he didn't mind doing it for a year, though saying so would certainly pressure her.

“Probably better sooner than later.”

Something in her tone warned that it was more complex than it sounded. “Is it?”

Robin peeked up at him, a mischievous smile curving her lips up. “Well, now that we're on the subject...obliquely.”

What subject?

“There was a little something I wanted to mention.”

That piqued his interest. “Yes?”

“Maybe a new ornament for the tree this year. You could show me where you got that beautiful one.”

David worked at that, coming up short of any answer. “Okay...”

“I was thinking something in pink or blue.”

The words echoed in his suddenly blank mind. Then thoughts crowded in. “How long have you known?”

Her smile faded, and she worked her lower lip between her teeth nervously.

Signs. Have there been signs? None that he could remember.

The doctor! “You said it was just a routine visit.” She'd lied to him, and that hurt.

Forget that. How long ago was it? A week? No more than two weeks. His mind settled on about ten or eleven days, since it had fallen at the beginning of a work week.

“It was,” she replied. “Sort of. I mean, I was due for a yearly anyway, so I asked the doctor to check, and...” There was something meek in that.

“And you kept it a secret from me, because...”

“When I asked you... Back in November, I mean...” A touch of scarlet bloomed along her cheekbones, and she cleared her throat.

His mind caught up at last. How many times had he ranted internally at the idea that he was helping her conceive what she'd see as “Zach's baby”? Too many for his mental health.

“If you think I had any intention of being anything but Daddy to my own child, even as far back as November, you don't know me very well.” No matter how many times he'd argued about how insane it all was or practiced how he'd explain it to his parents, he'd decided to keep that part aboveboard.

A slight smile curved the corners of her mouth back up. “You're not upset?”

“Hell no.” *As long as it's my baby and not Zach's, that is.*

She grimaced. “But your parents might be.”

David sighed. Unfortunately, Robin might be right about that. “No more upset than they would have been if you'd wound up pregnant while you were engaged to Zach.” He stored that thought away to use on Pop, if it became necessary.

He noted, in surprise, his ease with the idea of Robin and Zach together. Maybe this relationship had laid his brother to rest for both of them and not just for Robin.

“Zach would never—” Robin shut her mouth with an audible *snap*.

David smiled. “I don't mind you making comparisons. As long as they stay favorable to me,” he teased.

“Is this one?” She seemed earnest in that question, too serious.

“I think so.” They'd been so at ease, he'd nearly forgotten the possibility of creating a child existed between them. Knowing his brother, Zach and Robin had obsessed over the precautions

to prevent it, until after they were married and it was acceptable for her to get pregnant. *Preferable for her to.*

Moving Robin into his condo had been an education. She often moved to put things where Zach had, stopped herself, and changed them purposely. It almost seemed as though she needed to discard the organization his brother had imposed on her.

Sorting through Zach's belongings and those they'd purchased together had been harder. In the end, she'd given many of his trophies and other memorabilia to Ma and Pop. A few pieces of furniture had replaced David's own, but most of them had gone to other family members or been donated to charity. As each decision was made, her mood seemed to lighten.

"But your parents—" she persisted.

"Let *me* worry about telling my parents."

"Not up on the beams," she joked weakly.

He laughed at the mental image of that. "No. Definitely not." The only "open air" on the site these days was the roof anyway. And while he seriously doubted Pop would toss his only living son—the father of his only grandchild—off the roof, David wasn't about to tempt him or give him ideas.

"Should we invite them to dinner?"

"No. I'll take care of it."

"How?"

David wished he knew. "I'll take care of it," he promised. "Now..." He lifted Robin across his lap. "I think it's time I took you to bed."

"Bed? David, it's only eight-thirty."

He scooped her up in his arms and stood with Robin cradled against his chest. "You *are* the one who just told me she's pregnant," he noted.

"Pregnant. Not six years old. I'm not even tired."

"Who said anything about sleep?"

Her mouth—open to protest—shut, then curved in an impish grin. "Oh, well... In that case, carry on, McDuff."

* * * * *

February 8, 2010

Robin shot a raised eyebrow at David and got a smug smile in return. She still wasn't sure what his plan was. Sex games at the office had never occurred to her before, but he'd apparently put a lot of thought into whatever he had planned for her.

She turned away, placing one foot on the lowest riser of the stairs for the trailer...and it struck.

The buzzing against her clit and slit was so intense and unexpected, she stumbled. David's hands were there, catching her and swinging her up into his arms, but he didn't stop the damned panties immediately.

That came two steps later, leaving her gasping for breath and cursing him silently. Her head spun in sickening circles as he slid sideways through the door Barbara had thrown open for them. Trying to regain her sense of balance, Robin pressed a shaking hand to her forehead.

Okay, there is no way I could have done that in the club, with the butt plug in, and acted unaffected.

Mollie was already on her feet and on her way across the office. "What is it? Is she okay?"

David didn't crack a smile at that, and Robin hoped he was truly remorseful for activating the panties while she was on the stairs. He settled her on her desk chair and opened the zipper on her jacket. "She's fine. Barb, can you get Robin some water, please?"

His mother's brow creased in worry, and she placed a hand to Robin's cheek. "Maybe we should take her to a doctor."

"No need. We already have, and Robin will be fine, as long as she doesn't make sudden moves and eats small meals."

Barbara jerked to a halt halfway across the floor, a smile erupting on her face. "She has morning sickness?"

David nodded, and Barbara hurried toward him with the cup of water held out to him.

"I do not," Robin protested. This was his idea of "taking care" of the situation?

He raised one eyebrow and shot her a hard look. "You have another explanation you'd like to give them for why you nearly collapsed on the stairs that way?"

She opened her mouth to do so, but the realization of what she'd have to admit to stopped her short. She shook her head, her face burning.

“Good. Then you won't mind the pampering everyone is going to give you, will you?”

As if in confirmation, Barbara handed the cup of water to David and pulled out her cell phone, most likely to get her husband on the line and start the communication lines buzzing. In a few minutes, Pop would be here. Who knew what would happen then? But whatever it was, David had done the one thing that would ensure no explosions; he'd fanned the flames of the family's protective nature in her direction.

Damn him for it.

David offered the cup to her with a shit-eating grin pasted on his face. “Here, honey,” he crooned.

“Better hope nausea doesn't kick in while you're still kneeling there,” she replied coolly. “It might get messy.”

“Ah...the snippy comebacks have started already,” Barbara noted. She laughed, most likely at something Neil said in return.

Truth be told, Robin hadn't had a single complaint about pregnancy, so far. She wouldn't have even known she was pregnant if it hadn't been for missing her period. But now, his entire family would be hovering, watching for some sign that she was sick or fatigued, pampering her mercilessly.

He shrugged. “Probably better than old Cool Whip.”

“Maybe.” She took the cup and swallowed a mouthful of the water.

Over his shoulder, she saw Barbara hand the cell phone to Mollie. The meaning of that was clear. Neil had passed his phone to Cal.

Oh, we are in full Carson family mode now.

David leaned toward Robin and nibbled at her ear. “I'll make sure you're sitting before I set off the panties again,” he assured her.

“Maybe I'll take them off.” *Of all the boneheaded ways to announce I'm pregnant...*

He groaned into her ear. “You naked under those jeans is still a treat.” He crowded closer, and she felt his cock go rigid against her knee.

Her mouth went dry, and she drained the cup of water, trying to wet it again.

Yes, knowing she was going commando would be arousing for him but damned uncomfortable for her. “Guess you won’t know which I choose, then.” *Let him wonder. He deserves it.*

“Cal thinks you should take the day off,” Mollie called out. “I happen to agree.”

Robin spoke before David could take them up on it. “Don’t be ridiculous. I’m fine.” Some corner of her mind said that she was being peevish and reminded her that she’d never been so short with David’s family before. One more change, she noted.

Or maybe it really is a pregnancy temper. That was an argument for later.

“Are you sure?” His tone was a blatant offer of a day in bed.

“I am going to get you back for this,” she warned in a whisper his mother would miss while she was talking to Cal.

“Anything you want.”

Robin had to admit that held appeal for her.

As if he could read her thoughts, David leaned toward her, tilting his head to one side.

“This doesn’t get you off the hook.”

“Yep. Got it.” His breath warmed her face.

At the end of her self-control, Robin wrapped her arms around David and kissed him.

“Cal wants to—Never mind.” Mollie’s laugh said it all.

David deepened the kiss, his fingers threading through her hair to draw her closer. The paper cup slipped from her fingers and went skittering across the floor. When he pulled away, she was dizzyier than she had been outside. Robin gripped his jacket with her fingertips and tried to right her senses. Her breathing was thin and fast, and she tried to force it to slow without much success.

The door opened, and Cal strode in, the cell phone still pressed to his ear. Neil, Les, and Ross crowded in behind him. Cal took one look at her trembling and ordered her home in the tone he had that announced no argument was allowed.

“Yes, sir,” she replied weakly. Her head was still in a flat spin, and she wasn’t entirely sure how she was going to get to the truck this way.

David eased her back into his arms. "Don't worry. I'll make sure she stays in bed."

Les offered a hoot of laughter at that. He cleared his throat and hunched his shoulders at a warning look from Cal.

Mollie reached between them and fastened Robin's jacket. "And don't bring her back until she's steady on her feet."

David's expression said that she might not be steady on her feet for a *long* time.

"Guess it's a good thing I have so much extra time on the books," Robin grumbled.

There was a moment of silence. Then his entire family erupted in a mixture of snickers and outright laughter.

 THE END 

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Close Enough to Human

Brenna Lyons

Brenna Lyons wears many hats, sometimes all on the same day: former president of EPIC, author of more than 65 published works, teacher, wife, mother... She's a member of ERWA, WRW, TELL, MWW, IWOFA, WPM, and Broad Universe. In her first five years published in novel-length, she's finaled for 6 EPPIES (in five different categories), 3 PEARLS (including one HM, second to Angela Knight), and a Dream Realm Award. She also won Spinetinger's Book of the Year for 2007.

Brenna writes milieu-heavy dark fiction (in 18 established worlds plus stand-alones), poetry, articles, and essays. She teaches classes in everything from POV studies to advanced editing, networking to marketing. Brenna loves talking to readers and can be reached via her site at <http://www.brennalyons.com>