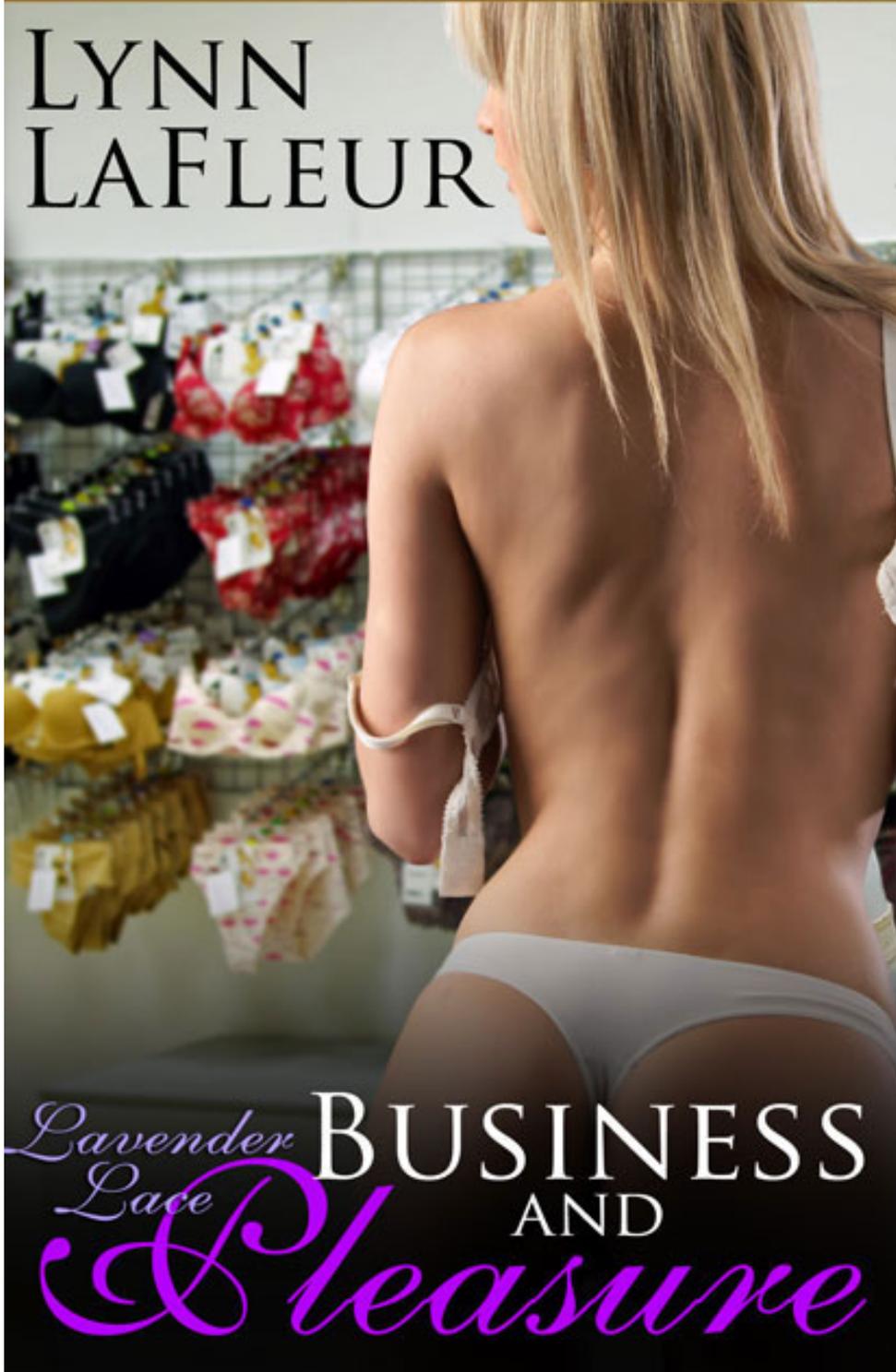


ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*

LYNN
LAFLEUR



*Lavender
Lace* BUSINESS
AND
Pleasure

Business and Pleasure

Lynn LaFleur

First in the Lavender Lace series.

Marci Bayne, president of a successful media company, refuses to get involved with an employee. She doesn't consider it professional, especially after an affair with one ended badly. Enter her new vice president, hunky Keefe Donegan with his black hair and blue eyes, and she's a goner.

When Marci visits Lavender Lace, a store run by Celtic goddess Ashlyn, she can't resist the sexy lingerie. Ashlyn convinces Marci to be brave and buy something new, something a man wouldn't be able to resist.

Keefe is delighted to discover the sexy underwear beneath the president's business suit. He's even more delighted to find the sensuous woman inside the president. Their lovemaking is hot and passionate, but he wants more than sex. He has to convince Marci that business and pleasure are the perfect combination.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Business and Pleasure

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BUSINESS AND PLEASURE

Lynn LaFleur

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Prologue

Ashlyn Flanagan tilted her head to the side and looked at the sign from a different angle. She wiggled her mouth back and forth. Something simply wasn't right. The sign itself was perfect, a soothing lavender background with dark violet lettering in a scripty font designed from her own handwriting. It had taken the sign maker three times to get the coloring right, but he'd finally succeeded. And yet...

"Another of your romantic adventures, me love?" a masculine voice whispered in her ear.

She would know that lilting Irish brogue anywhere. Joy coursed through her body, a prelude to the pleasure she knew would come later. Smiling, Ashlyn turned to see Llyr grinning at her. The sight of the Celtic god of the sea always made her heart flutter in her chest. She wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him tightly. "Where have you been?" She released him, but clasped his hands to keep him close. "I haven't seen you in months."

"Takin' care of me duties, lass."

"Since when do you have duties? Don't you have dozens of little gods and goddesses who work for you?"

"Aye, but I still have to oversee those dozens. 'Tis a full-time job lately. I'm wearing meself down to nothing."

Ashlyn looked at his shoulder-length coal black hair, his sky blue eyes, those dimples that made her knees weak when he smiled. Llyr was six-feet, one-inch of broad-shouldered, husky male who had captured her heart five hundred years ago. "You don't look like you're wearing yourself down to nothing."

Llyr dipped his head. "I thank ye for the compliment, but I could use some time off to relax and recuperate."

The wicked gleam in his eyes told her exactly how he wanted to relax. That would be fine with her. She hadn't experienced Llyr's incredible lovemaking in much too long. "Would you like to go back to my house?"

He smiled, flashing those dimples along with his white teeth. "'Tis a grand idea ye have, darlin'. But first..." He looked up at the sign above the door. "What is Lavender Lace?"

"My new lingerie store."

"Lingerie. Those frilly undergarments women wear that get in the way?"

Ashlyn giggled. Llyr had always said women's underwear had been invented to aggravate men. "Bras, panties, slips, garter belts, pajamas, nightgowns, and other goodies. I have everything a woman could want to entice her man."

Llyr slid one hand down to her buttock and squeezed. "Your skin entices me, lass. That's all I need."

Quickly grabbing his hand, she pulled it back up to her waist. "We're on a public sidewalk, Llyr."

"Then take me someplace private. I've a yearnin' to touch ye all over."

Ashlyn had the same yearning about touching Llyr. She loved his body. He had the perfect amount of hair on his chest and stomach to tickle her fingertips. Muscled arms and thighs and a nice big cock completed the package.

But first, she wanted his opinion. "What's wrong with the sign?"

A frown turned down the corners of his mouth. "What sign?"

"The one above the door. The sign maker made it exactly as I designed it, but something isn't right about it."

His chest rose and fell with his heavy sigh. "Ashlyn. I haven't been with ye in months. I'm here now, ready and willing to ravish ye. 'Tis not the sign I'm thinkin' about."

The word "ravish" sounded delicious. "I suppose you could look at the sign later."

His smile returned. "A grand idea."

"My car is nearby."

"Lead the way."

* * * * *

Ashlyn offered to let Llyr drive. He declined, saying he hadn't driven an automobile in several years, plus she knew the Seattle area much better than he. Once on their way, she knew exactly why he let her drive. He tortured her every mile to her house. A tickle of her earlobe. A brush of his thumb across her nipple. A dance of his fingertips on the inside of her thigh. By the time she pulled into her garage, her pussy was wet and her body on fire for him.

She didn't make it any farther than inside her kitchen when she attacked him. Pushing him against the door, she kissed him passionately while rubbing his hard shaft with her mound. He returned kiss for kiss, his hands sliding up and down her sides. With each pass, the heels of his hands brushed the sides of her breasts.

Llyr ended their kiss and cradled her face. "Are ye hungry, darlin'?"

"Very."

"I shouldn't have stayed away so long."

"No, you shouldn't have. Stop talking and kiss me."

He made a *tsking* noise. "So impatient. The buildup is worth it, don't ye think?"

"You teased me all the way over here. That was my buildup."

Leaning closer, he whispered into her ear. "Are ye nice and wet, darlin'?"

"Definitely."

"Then take me to your bedroom so I can find out for sure."

Walking would take too much time. Ashlyn snapped her fingers. One moment they stood in her kitchen, the next they stood by her bed.

A cocky smile curved Llyr's lips. "You *are* hungry. Let me help ye."

A twirl of his forefinger and their clothes lay on the floor. Ashlyn stuck out her lower lip in a playful pout. "I wanted to undress you."

"Takes too much time." He tugged her against him and moaned when their bodies touched. "Bare is much better."

Bare was definitely much better. She especially liked that glorious hard cock pressed into her belly. She crawled on the bed and motioned for Llyr to follow her. Stretching out on top of her, he rested his weight on his elbows.

"I've missed ye, lass." He brushed her nipple with the tip of his finger. "I've missed holding ye, touching ye." He shifted his hips, sliding his rod along her creamy labia. "Being inside ye."

She moaned at the feel of his cock brushing her clit. It wouldn't take much more than a few strokes and she'd come. "Don't make me wait, Llyr."

"Never, darlin'."

Clasping her buttocks, Llyr slowly slid into her channel. "Ye weren't lyin', lass. Yer pussy is so wet for me."

Ashlyn closed her eyes with a contented sigh. Other lovers had come and gone over the centuries. She had no doubt other women occupied Llyr's bed too. They'd never made promises to each other, never pledged undying love. But when she was with Llyr, no one else mattered. After five hundred years, he knew her body perfectly, as she knew his. They could drive each other to orgasm over and over and still want more.

She knew the climb toward the heavens would happen quickly. She'd been without him for too long. He stared into her eyes as he moved inside her. Ashlyn placed her feet flat on the bed so she could meet every thrust. Each movement grazed her clit exactly the way she liked.

"Do ye need more, darlin'? Do ye need me tongue?"

"In round two. Just keep... Mmm, *yes*... Just keep moving like that."

Ashlyn gripped his buttocks. She pumped her hips faster, driving his shaft harder

inside her every time she moved. Oh, she had missed this so much! The feel of Llyr's skin against hers, his hands on her body, his cock so deep inside her. Any thought of duty completely disappeared when she was in Llyr's arms.

The tingling started in her toes. It moved up her legs and whooshed through her chest before the pleasure exploded in her pussy. Her inner walls gripped Llyr's rod with each contraction, as if trying to pull him farther inside her. She dug her fingernails into his ass and cried out when another tremor passed through her.

Llyr bit her neck. Goose bumps erupted across her skin. He thrust once, twice, three times. His body trembled and he growled low in his throat. Another thrust and he lay still on top of her.

Sweat glazed his skin, releasing the scent that was uniquely Llyr. She could stand blindfolded in a room full of men and she'd find Llyr by his scent. Ashlyn ran her hands slowly up and down his spine while his heart slowed. She so loved touching him.

Llyr raised his head and smiled at her. "Ah, lass. 'Tis always good with ye."

"And quick."

He threw back his head and laughed. "The first time, anyway." Holding her close, he rolled to his back so she lay on top of him. His softened cock remained nestled inside her. "We'll savor round two. And three."

"Planning on staying awhile?"

"As long as y'll let me."

Ashlyn sat up so she could touch his chest and stomach. As a god of the sea, Llyr spent many hours in the water. Although he could change his appearance any time he wished, she knew all his muscles were real and came from swimming. He had the most incredible body she'd ever seen.

She tickled his navel, and giggled when he jerked.

He scowled. "Watch it."

"It amazes me that you aren't ticklish anywhere on your body except your navel."

His scowl faded and the devilish light returned to his eyes. "'Tis only ticklish when ye touch me with yer finger. Yer tongue doesn't bother me at all. Ye can run it all over me body and I won't chuckle once."

"Such willpower."

Grinning, he tucked one arm behind his head. Ashlyn admired his bulging biceps and the tuft of dark hair beneath his arm. She never tired of looking at him.

"Tell me about your new store."

She'd gladly talk about Lavender Lace to anyone. "I officially open next week, on Saturday."

"And will ye be meddlin' in people's love lives again?"

"I do not meddle," she said, lifting her chin. "I help. There's a difference."

"'Tis silly of me not to know the difference."

She knew he teased her, as he'd done many times in the past. Still, she felt she needed to explain what she planned to do. "Mortals need a lot of help with their love lives. So many people don't even *talk* to each other. Men, especially, don't talk."

"Men can't get a word in because women talk all the time."

He flinched when she raised her fist. Eyes twinkling, he pulled her fist to his mouth and kissed her knuckles. "I love to get yer ire up."

"And you do it so easily."

Llyr laughed. "I do have a talent." He entwined his fingers with hers. "So, ye have all those frilly undergarments that women like to wear."

Ashlyn nodded. "I have lingerie in every color, but I'm featuring purples, orchids, and lavenders."

"Which just happen to be your favorite colors."

"Exactly. There's no reason why I can't try out some of the lingerie first."

One black eyebrow rose. "And who might ye be tryin' them out on? I told ye all

that fancy stuff isn't necessary for me."

"But you aren't always here, Llyr. I do date other men."

"And take them as lovers."

Ashlyn shrugged. "Sometimes, just like you take other women as lovers."

"Aye, that I do." He cradled her breast and circled her nipple with his thumb. "But I've a soft spot in me heart for ye, Ashlyn."

Everything inside her melted at his sweet words. "I have a soft spot in my heart for you too."

He continued to caress her nipple, sending pleasant little zings to her clit. "So what do we do about it?"

"The same thing we've done for centuries – pleasure each other."

She leaned over and kissed him...a soft, tender kiss that spoke of her feelings. She and Llyr could never be together, not as a normal couple. He had too many duties that kept him away from her. Her duty was to help people find love, or rediscover the love they'd lost.

His cock stirred inside her. Ashlyn deepened the kiss, stroking her tongue across his. He slid his hands down her back to her buttocks. He gripped them tightly and arched upward, driving his hardening shaft farther inside her.

Llyr nipped the tender skin below her chin. "I think we should start round two. What do ye think?"

Ashlyn moaned when he began a gentle thrusting. "Oh yes."

Chapter One

Marci Bayne glanced at her watch for the fifth time. The line moved slower than a snail today. Jennie's Java was busy, as always, but the usual three baristas weren't behind the counter. She saw only two, which explained why the line moved so slowly.

If she didn't need the jolt of caffeine so badly, she'd give up and leave. She'd never make it through her morning meeting without her double-shot latte.

The barely-out-of-his-teens boy took her order without offering an apology for the long wait. If he worked for her, he'd be on his way to the unemployment office instead of flirting with the girl behind the counter with him.

She wondered whatever happened to manners.

As president of Marshall Media, she could set her own hours. More often than not, she was the first one at work and the last one to leave. Not today. She had almost two hours before her meeting and planned to spend that time right here, savoring her coffee.

Paper cup in hand, Marci turned to find a place to sit. Every table was occupied.

Well, hell.

She looked around the room for someone she knew whom she could join. She passed over a young redheaded woman pecking away on a laptop. Marci's gaze quickly snapped back to her. She'd seen the redhead in here several times. They'd exchanged smiles and hellos. Perhaps she wouldn't mind if Marci joined her.

Marci refused to think about how rude it would be to interrupt the woman. She only wanted some time to enjoy her drink and relax before her upcoming meeting. Straightening her shoulders, she approached the young woman. "Excuse me."

The redhead glanced up, a faraway look in her eyes. Guilt swamped Marci when she realized the woman had been deep in thought. "I'm sorry to bother you."

She focused on Marci and smiled. "No problem. What can I do for you?"

"This is probably incredibly rude, but there aren't any empty tables today. May I sit with you if I promise not to disturb you?"

She quickly glanced around the room. "Wow. It *is* busy today." Smiling again at Marci, she motioned toward the chair across from her. "Sit, please."

"Thank you." Marci sighed as she sank onto the padded chair. She wore heels every day, yet her feet were always happier when she sat. "Don't let me disturb your work."

"You aren't." She pressed a couple of buttons on the keyboard and closed the computer. "I was just making some notes."

Marci guessed the redhead to be in her late twenties or early thirties. That didn't mean she couldn't be in college. "School notes?"

She laughed. "No, book notes. I'm writing a book."

Marci sipped her latte. The caffeine traveled straight to her brain cells and kicked them awake. "You're an author?"

"A would-be one. Doesn't everyone write a book at some time or other? Or at least want to?"

Writing had never interested Marci. She spent a lot of time reading in her job, yet had little time to read for pleasure, much less write a book.

"I'm Molly Ross."

"Marci Bayne."

"It's a pleasure to share a table with you, Marci."

She liked Molly's friendly personality. She doubted if there were many people who would willingly share a table with a stranger. She nodded toward Molly's laptop. "What kind of book are you writing?"

"Romance. I'm a sucker for a happy ending."

Molly must be young to still believe in happy endings. Marci had given up on those a long time ago.

"It's a nice dream," Molly said. She tore off a chunk of her chocolate muffin and popped it in her mouth. "I know the chances of ever getting published are slim, but slim is better than not at all. While I'm waiting to be rich and famous, I work at Nordstrom."

"One of my favorite places."

"I can tell." Molly looked over Marci's navy jacket and ivory turtleneck. "You bought your suit there."

"I'm impressed."

Molly grinned. "I know our clothes."

Marci wondered if she could steal Molly for her own company. She could use more intelligent people on her staff.

"Where do you work?" Molly asked.

"Marshall Media." Marci decided that was enough information for now. She didn't want to sound as if she were bragging by telling Molly that she ran the company.

She saw Molly's gaze shift past her shoulder. "Looks like there's another gal who can't find a place to sit."

Marci shifted in her chair so she could see over her shoulder. A tall, voluptuous woman stood next to the counter, a frown on her face as she peered around the room. Her black hair was cut short and very curly. Marci sighed. She loved the woman's short hair. With her straight, fine hair, Marci had very few options for hairstyles. That's why she kept it long and either pulled it back in a ponytail or swept it up on top of her head.

She turned back to face Molly. "We have room. Shall we ask her to join us?"

"Sure." Molly raised her hand to draw the woman's attention. She smiled and motioned with her finger. "She's coming this way."

The woman stepped up to the table. "Hi."

"Hi." Molly gestured toward the third chair. "Join us, please."

"Really? Oh, thank you." The dark-haired woman sat down and released a sigh. "I can't believe how crowded it is today. I don't usually have any trouble getting a table."

"I don't either," Marci said. "Molly graciously let me share her table."

Molly shrugged. "I don't mind. The company is nice. I'm Molly Ross."

"Marci Bayne."

"Twyla Gardiner."

Molly's eyes widened. "Ooh, I love your name. I may use it sometime for a character."

Twyla threw a confused look at Marci before turning back to Molly. "A character?"

"I'm an aspiring author." She tapped her laptop with one long pink fingernail. "I come here every morning at seven to write. That gives me almost three hours of peace before I have to be at work."

Twyla removed the lid from her drink. "Is it noisy at your house?"

"Apartment. My sister lives with me. She likes her music loud. She's neat and does her share, but I wish she didn't like heavy metal. Pop is okay. Rock is okay. Metal I can do without."

Marci silently sipped her coffee. She hadn't seen her sister in ten years. Their last meeting had been one of the darkest times in Marci's life. She had no desire for a repeat.

"Where do you work, Twyla?" Molly asked.

"For the Sharber and Neely law firm. I'm secretary for one of the junior partners."

Molly crinkled her nose. "Sounds boring."

Instead of being insulted, as Marci expected, Twyla laughed. "It can be. But I suppose every job is boring at times."

Marci disagreed with that. She loved every aspect of her job. While she had wonderful employees who did their jobs well, including finding new material for movie projects, sometimes Marci couldn't help diving into a stack of books to try to find the

perfect story for a movie. She'd discovered a new author early last year and had turned his first book into a movie that grossed \$57 million the first weekend of its release. It was one of Marshall Media's biggest successes.

Twyla glanced at her watch. "I'd like to stay longer and chitchat, but my boss has a breakfast meeting in about half an hour. Thank you for sharing your table with me."

"I'm here every morning," Molly said. "You can share my table any time."

"I may take you up on that." She stood and smiled at the two women. "Nice to meet both of you."

Marci watched Twyla make her way through the crowded tables. She stood close to six feet tall with large breasts that drew the eyes of every man in the room. Twyla didn't seem to notice the male attention. She didn't meet anyone's gaze, but looked straight ahead as she headed for the door.

She would look incredible on the wide screen.

"She's beautiful, isn't she?" Molly asked.

"Stunning." Marci looked back at Molly. She saw the shoulder-length red curls, the scattering of freckles across Molly's nose, the slim figure with small breasts. "So are you."

Molly released a loud snort as she laughed. "The best I can go for is cute. I'll never be beautiful like you or Twyla. That's okay. I accepted that a long time ago."

She may be young, but Marci thought Molly more mature than many people she knew who were years older.

"My sister Shawna got the red hair and green eyes like I did, but her hair is straight and glossy. Mine frizzes when the humidity rises above twenty percent."

"Which is most of the time in Seattle."

"You got it."

Marci chuckled. The more she talked with Molly, the more she liked her.

She drained her cup and thought about ordering another latte. If she did, she'd be bouncing off the walls all morning. That would make a lousy first impression on her new vice president.

Keefe Donegan had worked for one of the largest media companies in Los Angeles before he decided to move to Seattle. His resume was impressive, plus he came highly recommended. His former boss couldn't say enough good things about Keefe, according to her Human Resources vice president, Peggy Sharples. Peggy said not only was Keefe intelligent and charming, he was cream-your-panties gorgeous.

Marci didn't care about his looks. She wanted performance, someone who would put Marshall Media at the top of the entertainment business. Nothing else came close to being as important to her.

She still had an hour before her appointment with Keefe, but she felt antsy to get to her office. Picking up her cup, she wiped off her area with a napkin. "Thanks, Molly. I enjoyed our visit."

Molly smiled. "Me too. Have a great day."

Marci dropped her trash in the can by the front door and stepped out into the cool, cloudy morning. It *would* be a great day. She'd met two women who made her feel comfortable. Twyla wasn't as outgoing as Molly, but still nice. She worked for the law firm that was only three blocks from the coffee shop, so probably stopped in there often. Molly said she was there every morning to write. Marci didn't stop at Jennie's Java every day, but maybe she should. She'd enjoy getting to know the two women better.

* * * * *

Keefe looked at the brass plaque that read *Marci Bayne, President* in black letters. This would be his first meeting with the woman who ran Marshall Media. He knew little about her, except what he'd squeezed out of Peggy Sharples during his interview.

Marci had worked at the company for fifteen years, slowly moving up the ladder to the top position after the owner died two years ago. She was forty years old and single.

He hadn't found out if she'd always been single or if she'd been married sometime in her life. He had no idea what she looked like, but it didn't matter. Other than obtaining final approval from Marci Bayne on his projects, he'd have no reason to be around the older woman. That didn't bother him at all.

Keefe rapped on the door. A soft "Come in" surprised him. He'd expected her voice to be husky and gruff. He pushed and the heavy oak door silently swung open. A view of the Olympic Range through the large plate windows drew his attention first. A small conference table with eight chairs occupied the space on his right. A comfortable seating arrangement with loveseat, two overstuffed chairs, tables and lamps filled the area to his left. Directly in front of him, a lovely blonde woman sat behind a large oak desk. She smiled and rose as he pushed the door closed behind him.

"Hi, Keefe. Welcome to Marshall Media. I'm Marci Bayne."

She walked toward him, her hand extended. Keefe remembered his manners at the last moment and accepted her hand. He'd been so mesmerized by her blue eyes, all the etiquette his mother had drummed into him flew out the window. "Ms. Bayne. It's a pleasure."

Her smile widened. "Marci, please. We're very informal here." She gestured toward the seating arrangement. "Let's get comfortable so we can talk. Would you like coffee or tea?"

"No, thanks. I'm fine."

He let her lead the way. She chose one of the armchairs and Keefe sat on the end of the loveseat closest to her. He watched her pick up a file from the end table and open it. Her birth certificate might say forty, but she certainly didn't look it. She looked young and sexy and very desirable.

"I've read through your file. Peggy always does a wonderful job hiring the perfect people, but I do like to meet all my employees." She gazed at something in the file, which Keefe assumed was his personnel record. "You recently moved here from Los Angeles?"

"Yes."

"Why Seattle?"

Keefe caught himself staring at her. *My God, her eyes are the most amazing blue.* Combined with her ivory complexion and blonde hair, they'd make any man take more than one look.

Clearing his throat, he casually rested one ankle on the opposite knee. "I came here a few years ago to visit some friends. I liked the area and thought it'd be a great place to live. When I found out about the job opening, I sent Ms. Sharples my resume."

"Your former boss highly recommended you. Peggy and I both spoke to him on the phone before your first interview with Peggy. He said he'd be sorry to lose you."

"I had a great job."

"So why leave it?"

Keefe wondered how honest Marci wanted him to be. He decided it would be best to be completely open with his new boss. "I needed to get away from a former girlfriend."

"Bad relationship?"

"You could say that."

He didn't elaborate, and she didn't push. Keefe appreciated that. He wasn't ready to talk about the woman he'd thought he would marry.

Marci flipped a page in his file. "Your starting salary is satisfactory? Peggy explained your benefits? If you have any questions or concerns, now is the time to voice them."

"Everything is great, except Peggy didn't explain the dress code."

"We do require you to wear clothes."

She grinned, and Keefe chuckled. He liked her sense of humor.

Her gaze passed over his body. He'd worn a white dress shirt, new jeans and a short gray jacket. He'd thought about wearing a suit, but the idea of putting on a tie made him gag.

"You look fine. Business casual is what most everyone wears. Friday is very casual. Faded jeans and Reeboks are cool." Closing the file, she laid it back on the end table. "I have a meeting with all my VPs Monday morning at nine. Sometimes they last ten minutes, sometimes four hours. I let my people do their jobs without interference from me, unless it's necessary. I'm always available if you need help or think of questions later."

Keefe nodded to acknowledge her comments.

"There will be travel involved with your position. Do you have a problem with that?"

"I'll do whatever I need to do to get the job done."

Her eyes widened slightly and her mouth slackened, as if his answer had surprised her. She quickly glanced away from him. When she looked at him again, her expression was once more neutral.

He wondered what had happened.

"If you change your mind and have something to ask me, please don't hesitate."

"I won't."

Keefe stood and followed Marci to the door. She held out her hand again. "I hope you'll be happy here at Marshall Media."

"I'm sure I will be."

He took her hand, holding it a few seconds longer than would be professional. He wanted to touch her. He wanted to take the clip out of her hair so he could see the length. He wanted to cradle her face in his hands and kiss her until neither of them could breathe.

Keefe hadn't felt such a strong, instant attraction since he met Jeania. He'd fallen so hard for her, he'd asked her to move in with him after their fourth date. Three years later, she'd not only broken his heart, she'd stomped on the pieces.

He left Marci's office and headed for the bank of elevators. The lovely president could be very dangerous.

He needed to remember that.

Chapter Two

I'll do whatever I need to do to get the job done.

That line repeated in Marci's mind again and again while she tried to work. It had been an innocent statement. She was sure Keefe hadn't meant for it to sound sexual. But as soon as he said it, an image of rumpled sheets and sweaty bodies had flashed through her mind.

It hadn't helped her overactive imagination that Keefe had those incredible Black Irish looks. There wasn't a trace of an accent in his voice, yet his black hair and blue eyes were excellent indicators that his ancestors had come from the Emerald Isle. Of course, the last name Donegan was about as Irish as a name could get.

Keefe had stood about three inches taller than she in her two-inch heels, so must be around five-eleven. The perfect height for dancing, kissing...making love.

Damn the man for being so handsome and having such a great body. He was her employee. Plus he was six years younger than she. Those two things meant he was completely off limits.

Still, she could enjoy looking at him, feel that flutter of desire low in her belly. It had been more months than she could count since a man had affected her so quickly.

Maybe she should fire him before he ever got started. No employee, no problem. She could ignore the age difference long enough for him to fuck her senseless.

With a sigh, Marci turned her chair and stared out the window at the Olympic Range. Mother Nature had blessed Seattle with a sunny day instead of the clouds that usually filled a September sky. Looking at the mountain range helped her relax so she could think. Marshall Media had no rule about employees dating. She knew several of the one hundred people in the company who dated now, or had dated, fallen in love and married. Marci thought that was wonderful.

It was different for her. As president of the company, she couldn't let her emotions rule her. Gossip ran rampant in an office. She knew that from her affair with Ben Windsor eighteen months ago.

The thought of what he'd done still made her cheeks flame with embarrassment.

A soft knock on her door drew Marci's attention away from the majestic Olympics. She swiveled her chair around to face her desk. "Come in," she called.

Peggy Sharples breezed into the room. Marci smiled. "Hi."

"Hi." Peggy crooked her finger in a "come here" motion to Marci and headed for the sitting area. "Time for a break."

Marci made a sweeping gesture across her desk. "Do you see all these piles? I don't have time for a break."

"Take one anyway." Peggy sank into a corner of the loveseat. "And bring me a Pepsi."

Sometimes Marci wondered if Peggy should be the president. She was certainly bossy enough. "Shall I order in donuts too?"

Peggy grinned. "Nah. Too late in the day for donuts. Cookies would work."

Chuckling, Marci rose from her desk. Only Peggy would tease her boss the way she did. Marci did her best to be kind and friendly to every one of her employees, but she called few of them her friends. She and Peggy had clicked the moment they met. Marci knew whatever she said to Peggy in this room would never be repeated.

She took two cold Pepsis from her small refrigerator and joined Peggy on the loveseat. She slipped off her heels and drew her knees up on the cushion.

Peggy popped the top on her soda. "So, what do you think of your new vice president?"

"I'll have a better opinion after I see his work."

Peggy rolled her eyes. "Stop being a president for a minute and be a woman. The man is a hunk. Surely you noticed."

“His looks don’t matter to me, Peggy. I want performance.”

“I’ll bet his performance is just fine.”

Marci chuckled at her friend’s double entendre. Peggy had married her high school sweetheart and was still madly in love with him after twenty years. “What would William say if he heard you raving about another man’s looks?”

“The day I stop raving about good-looking men is the day there’s nothing for William either.” She drew her knees up on the loveseat, copying Marci’s position. “A woman will melt after one look from Keefe’s eyes. Or spread her legs.”

“You’re terrible.”

“I’m honest. Don’t tell me you didn’t fantasize for a moment when you met him.”

To keep from commenting to Peggy’s statement, Marci sipped her soda. She should’ve known that wouldn’t keep her friend from jumping to her own conclusions.

“You *did* fantasize about him!”

“Okay, that’s enough.”

“Were you thinking about him when I came in?”

She was like a dog with a bone, refusing to give up. “You know, you can be replaced.”

“You can’t fire me. I’m indispensable.” The humor faded from Peggy’s expression. “Seriously, Marci, he’d be perfect for you. He’s gorgeous—”

“No.”

“Polite—”

“No.”

“Has a great sense of humor—”

“NO.”

“Don’t let some office gossip keep you from finding someone special. What happened with Ben—”

“Taught me a valuable lesson. If I find someone special, he’ll be from outside this company.” She took another sip of the cold beverage. “Besides, Keefe is too young for me.”

Peggy frowned. “Who made up that silly rule? Since when is six years too young?”

“Since I said it was. I don’t date employees. End of discussion.”

“He doesn’t officially start until Monday. That gives you five days before he’s an employee.”

Surely Peggy wasn’t suggesting... “You aren’t serious.”

“You have his phone number. Call him and ask him to meet you for a drink.”

“I can’t do—”

“But before you call him, get rid of the suit and buy a really sexy dress.” Her gaze passed over Marci’s body. “I know about a new lingerie store that opened Saturday. I haven’t been yet, but a friend told me about it. Lavender Lace. It’s on Sixth Avenue. I’ll bet you don’t have any sexy underwear.”

Peggy would lose that bet. Marci wore a professional suit every day, but that didn’t mean she had to wear plain lingerie. Every bra and pair of panties she owned were made of lace and satin. Her thigh-high stockings were the sheerest she could buy.

She was an executive on the outside. On the inside, she was very much a woman.

A soft rap on her door announced another visitor. Marci’s assistant, Lauren, peeked around the edge of the door.

“Tyler Wilson is on line two.”

“Thanks.” Marci turned back to Peggy. “I’ve been waiting for his call.”

“I know you have.” Peggy stood as Marci did. “Think about what I said about calling Keefe. A drink, maybe dinner, maybe a night at his place...”

“Goodbye, Peggy.”

Marci shook her head once her friend had left. She knew Peggy was trying to help. A drink and dinner and a night all sounded wonderful...if they could be with a man other than her employee.

Pushing thoughts of Peggy and Keefe from her mind, Marci hurried back to her desk and picked up the telephone receiver. "Mr. Wilson, thank you for returning my call."

* * * * *

Keefe wondered what Marci would do if he asked her out for a drink.

He didn't officially start work at Marshall Media until Monday. For the last three days, he'd gotten acquainted with some of the staff who would be working for and with him, and the layout of the building. He liked the open concept, the flow of the work spaces. He'd stood back and watched people for several minutes at a time. Everyone seemed to truly enjoy their work.

That would make his job a lot easier.

It might be casual Friday, but Marci Bayne hadn't worn jeans and Reeboks. She hadn't seen him, but he'd watched her interact with several of the employees today. She'd worn a suit, the same as she had every day since he'd met her on Wednesday. They were different colors and styles, but always a suit. Answers to some careful questions to certain young women who'd openly flirted with him let him know that she always wore a suit and her hair piled on top of her head.

What a waste. She should wear her hair down and clothes that showed off her curves.

Other carefully worded questions to those same women had informed him that interoffice dating happened a lot...except for Marci. She didn't date any employees, not after the scandal a year and a half ago. He couldn't get any more information about the "scandal". The women immediately clammed up and refused to say any more.

That intrigued him.

He noticed people begin to clean up their desks and close down their computers shortly after four o'clock. Apparently, casual Friday also meant go-home-early Friday. That meant he could have some alone time with Marci even sooner.

Someday, Keefe would like to meet that special someone...the one he'd be with for the rest of his life. For now, he had no interest in anything serious with a woman. Drinks, dinner, movies, sex...he wanted all those things. Especially the sex part.

Which brought his thoughts back to Marci Bayne.

He waited until the last employee had left the floor before he strolled to Marci's office. Her assistant had already left. Good. He wanted to walk into Marci's office without being announced.

Her door stood open. Keefe leaned against the frame, his thumbs hooked in the belt loops of his jeans, as he drank in the sight of her. With her hair on top of her head, that long, ivory neck was exposed.

What a perfect spot to start nibbling.

She frowned as she studied something on her computer screen. "Shit," she muttered.

Keefe chuckled. "Now is that any way for a president to talk?"

She jumped and released a soft squeak. "Keefe!" She placed one hand over her heart. "You scared me."

"Sorry." Pushing away from the frame, he sauntered toward her desk. It pleased him to see her gaze sweep down his body. She focused on his fly several seconds before looking at his face. "Problem?"

"An email I wish I hadn't received." She pushed a few buttons on her keyboard, then looked at him again. "What can I do for you?"

He sat in one of the two chairs before her desk, his knees spread, his hands linked over his stomach. Her gaze dipped to his fly again before quickly moving back to his face. So the lady found him attractive. He liked that.

"I've spent the last three days introducing myself, looking around the different offices. You have a lot of happy employees, Marci. I'm impressed."

Marci smiled. "Thanks. That's good to hear from someone new."

"I'd like to know more about the company." He started to ask her out for a drink, but decided he'd rather have dinner with her instead. That would give them more time together. "Will you have dinner with me and fill me in?"

Her smile faded. "Dinner?"

"Tomorrow. I have plans with my friends tonight."

She lowered her head and straightened some file folders on her desk. "I'm sure any of the vice presidents can answer your questions. Or Lauren, my assistant. She's been here six years."

"You know the company better than anyone."

Raising her head again, she intertwined her fingers on top of her desk and looked directly into his eyes. "I don't date my employees, Keefe."

"I'm not asking you on a date, Marci. This would be a business dinner."

At her skeptical look, he raised both hands, palms toward her. "Strictly business, I swear. Besides, I'm not your employee until Monday."

She stared at him for several moments. He imagined the wheels turning in her brain, trying to decide if she should believe him. It *would* be a business dinner. He wasn't lying about that. But what happened *after* dinner would be total pleasure.

"You pick the restaurant," he said, nudging her toward agreeing to his invitation. "Wherever you want to go. Steakhouse, seafood, Italian, Chinese. I'm not crazy about sushi, but I'll eat anything else."

She drew her lower lip between her teeth. Keefe almost groaned aloud. He imagined nibbling on that lip first, then her neck, then moving down her body...

"There are some incredible seafood restaurants in Seattle," Marci said.

"Seafood it is. I'll pick you up at, what? Seven? Seven-thirty?"

“No, that’s okay. I’ll meet you there. It’ll be easier.”

He understood her reluctance in not giving him her address. He was her newest vice president, but she knew little about him. “Okay.”

She picked up a notepad and pen and scribbled something on the top piece of paper. “Here’s the name and address of the restaurant. It’s right on the waterfront, so you won’t have any trouble finding it.” She tore off the paper and pushed it to the edge of her desk. “I’ll be there at seven.”

Keefe picked up the paper and looked at what she’d written. He knew the restaurant. His friends had taken him there the first night he was in town. “Tomorrow night at seven.” He stood and smiled at her. “See you then.”

Chapter Three

Strictly business, I swear.

Once again, Keefe's words played over and over in Marci's mind. She'd told him in his interview that she'd always be available if he had questions or needed help. He had questions about Marshall Media and his position. She could help Keefe, and enjoy dinner at her favorite restaurant at the same time.

Strictly business.

A business dinner meant she should wear a suit. Wearing a suit on a Saturday night didn't sound like any fun at all. Yet here she stood in Nordstrom, looking through the racks of wool and linen. She didn't know why she'd decided she should have something new to wear tonight. Business wear filled over half her closet.

"Marci!"

Marci turned to see Molly hurrying toward her, a huge smile on her face. "Hi! Shopping for a new suit?"

"Yes. No."

Molly arched one thin eyebrow. "You want to make up your mind before you answer me?"

Peggy had told her to buy a sexy dress. Maybe she should. Marci hadn't bought a new dress since she'd dated Ben.

She shouldn't even consider wearing a sexy dress tonight. This was a business dinner with her new employee. Okay, so he wasn't officially her employee for two more days. It had been so long since Marci had dressed up and gone to dinner with a man. She wanted to feel like a woman tonight, not the president of a corporation.

"I have enough suits. I'm thinking about dresses."

“Now you’re talking about my area. We have some *gorgeous* party dresses.”

“Not a party dress. I want something...” Marci stopped. She wasn’t sure what she wanted, so didn’t know what to tell her new friend.

Molly’s red curls bounced when she nodded. “You want something feminine.”

Marci smiled. That’s *exactly* what she wanted. “Yes.”

“Follow me.”

Leaving business wear behind, Marci followed Molly across the store. “You want a cocktail dress,” Molly said. “Not black. Maybe something in blue that’ll bring out your eyes. Ooh, yeah, I like that idea.”

Molly stopped by a round of soft, flowing dresses and quickly rummaged through them. Smiling broadly, she held up a dress for Marci to see.

“Ta-da! What do you think?”

Marci gasped. The dress was made of silk, or perhaps a silky polyester. A deep periwinkle blue in color, it would hug her curves to just above her knees. The cap sleeves would show off her arms, the square neckline would show a hint of her breasts.

Perfect.

“Do you want to try it on?” Molly asked. “This should be your size.”

Peeking at the tag, Marci saw that her friend had chosen the right size. “You’re good.”

“After six years, I should be.”

Marci also noted the price on the tag. The dress cost more than she would normally pay for one piece of clothing, but what the hell. This wasn’t a day to worry about her budget.

If she was going to blow her budget today, she might as well go all the way. “I want new underwear too...something as sensual as this dress.”

Molly glanced around the area, as if checking to see if anyone stood close by. “Don’t tell my boss I said this, but I suggest you go to Lavender Lace. It’s a new lingerie store

on Sixth Avenue. I haven't been there yet, but my sister said the selection is amazing. She was so impressed, she applied for a job there."

First Peggy, and now Molly had mentioned Lavender Lace. Since two people had told her about the store, Marci took that as a sign. "Okay, I'll check it out, after I try on this dress."

Molly grinned. "This way to the dressing room."

* * * * *

Llyr crossed his arms over his chest and leaned against the counter. He tried to keep his lips from twitching as he watched Ashlyn with her customers. Watching her always made him smile.

The lass loved helping people. He'd been with her two weeks, doing whatever he could to help in her store. With a snap of her fingers, she could have everything perfectly arranged and the store spotless. She preferred to do everything the mortal way. She said it gave her a lot of pleasure to unpack, sort and display the lingerie.

Whatever gave her pleasure made him happy...especially when they made love.

His lovely goddess turned into a tigress in the bedroom, or the living room, or the kitchen, or any of the rooms in her house. Ashlyn had never believed sex only belonged in the bedroom. She drew the line about sex in public, but little else was forbidden. Even after five hundred years, she made everything fresh and exciting.

His duties would require him to leave soon. He hated the thought of waking up in the morning without Ashlyn in his arms.

The front door opened and a lovely blonde entered the store. Llyr noticed she walked with her chin up, her shoulders straight. This was a woman of power, one who was confident and sure of herself.

She walked directly to the black display. Ashlyn had set up her store by color. Each section held all types of lingerie in that particular color. She'd told him black had been the most popular so far, followed closely by white.

Llyr still thought bare skin was better.

Tipping his head, he watched the blonde studying the panties. Black wouldn't look good on her. Her face would fade away if she wore such a dark color. Blue would be better, or maybe green.

He chuckled. Two weeks with Ashlyn and already she had him thinking of which color would best complement her customers.

He strolled toward the blonde. She was so engrossed in the lingerie, she didn't seem to notice his approach. "Do ye need some help, lass?"

She jerked and whipped her head toward him, her eyes wide. "I'm sorry. I didna mean to scare ye."

"No, it's fine."

"Do ye need some help?"

She blinked and her mouth slackened. "You're offering to help?"

"Aye. Is that a problem?"

"No. It's just that... I don't think of men as selling lingerie."

Llyr smiled. "Ah, but who better to tell a woman what a man likes?"

She returned his smile. "You have a point." She gestured at the display. "So? What do you think of black?"

"I think 'tis a grand color for many women. I donna think it works for ye."

Her smile faded. "Really?"

"Ye want to wear a color that'll show off those beautiful eyes."

Ashlyn walked up to them and slipped her arm through his. "Are you bothering my customer, Llyr?"

He saw the humor in her eyes, so knew she wasn't upset by his talking to the lovely blonde. "Not at all, lass. Just tryin' to help."

"How about if you ring up the two ladies at the counter and I'll help this customer?"

“Aye. That I can do.”

Marci watched the handsome man walk away. When she’d heard his voice and looked up, she’d thought for a moment that Keefe stood next to her. Both men had intense pale blue eyes and black hair that brushed their broad shoulders.

She admired the way his jeans fit him. Both men were blessed with great asses too.

“He is gorgeous, isn’t he?”

Heat climbed into Marci’s face to be caught staring at the man’s ass. She quickly looked at the blonde whose name tag said *Ashlyn*. “Yes, he is.”

Ashlyn smiled. “Don’t be embarrassed. I stare at him every chance I get.”

“He’s your husband?”

“No. Just a very good friend who’s helping me until I hire more salesclerks.” Ashlyn clasped her hands in front of her. “How can I help you?”

“I’d like a new bra and panties. I was thinking of black, but...” She glanced at Llyr. “He said that wouldn’t look good on me. I wear black a lot.”

Ashlyn smiled again. “You should wear whatever makes you feel good. But some colors do work better than others, depending on hair color, skin tone, things like that.” She tapped her chin with one finger, her eyes narrowed. “I agree with Llyr. You’d look better in dark gray than black.”

Marci wrinkled her nose. She hated gray. It made her think of her third grade teacher, Mrs. Jewel. She’d always worn gray or brown old-fashioned dresses that made her look frumpy.

“But not for lingerie. You want something very feminine and sensual. Perhaps something to match your new dress?”

“Yes, that would be per...” Marci stopped when she realized what Ashlyn had said. She’d left her new dress in her car. Ashlyn couldn’t possibly know about it. “How did you know I bought a new dress?”

Ashlyn shrugged. “Lucky guess.”

Before Marci could question her further, Ashlyn continued. "Let me show you the lavender and blue displays. I'm sure we can find something you'll love."

Marci followed Ashlyn across the store, nodding and smiling at women along the way. There must be at least twenty women in the store, ranging in age from late teens to mid-sixties. Lavender Lace hadn't been open long, but it was already a success.

The display made Marci stop and stare. The royal blue demi-bra and thong on the mannequin was the sexiest lingerie she'd ever seen. Ivory lace edged both items, making them look feminine as well as sexy.

"Would you like to try them on?" Ashlyn asked.

Marci dragged her gaze away from the mannequin and back to Ashlyn. "I, uh... I don't wear thongs or bras that low-cut. I mean, I do wear nice lingerie, but nothing like..." She waved one hand at the display. "That."

"Why not? You have a lovely figure. You should show it off to your special man."

"I don't have a special man."

"What about the one you're having dinner with tonight?"

"That's just a business dinner. He isn't..." Marci stopped again. Ashlyn couldn't possibly know about her dinner with Keefe tonight. She'd go along with the lucky guess about the dress. This went way beyond lucky guesses. "How did you know about my dinner?"

"I have sheer stockings in a beautiful taupe color that would be perfect for your skin tone. Thigh-high with lace around the tops. Very sexy with a garter belt."

Marci noticed that Ashlyn had ignored her question. "Are you psychic?"

Ashlyn smiled. "I'll be happy to take the lingerie into a dressing room for you. Would you like to look at the garter belts? I have one that matches this bra and thong."

Marci opened her mouth to respond, but shut it before speaking. She felt as if she'd stepped through a door into another land. Peggy was usually the only one who could confuse her so completely. "I don't wear thongs or garter belts."

“But you’d like to, wouldn’t you?”

Yes, she’d like to. Marci loved sexy lingerie, and had always yearned to wear as little as possible beneath her clothes. She’d never worn anything as sexy as the royal blue set.

“I can show you all types of bras and panties that would be the type you usually wear.” Ashlyn leaned a bit closer to Marci and lowered her voice. “Why not go for something different and daring?”

Different and daring sounded really good. It wasn’t as if Keefe would see her lingerie. This would be a business dinner only. But how delicious to know she was wearing little bits of nothing beneath her dress.

Her clit softly throbbed at the thought.

Marci pointed at the mannequin. “I want that set in my size.”

* * * * *

Keefe glanced at his watch again. 7:06. Marci was only six minutes late, yet it bothered him. Surely she would’ve called if she’d decided having dinner with him wouldn’t be appropriate after all.

He hoped that wasn’t the case. He wanted to get to know the lovely president better.

Getting involved with another woman wasn’t anywhere in his plans. There were still tiny pieces of his heart scattered around inside his chest. At least, that’s how it felt when he thought about Jeania. Commitment would be impossible until his heart completely healed.

That didn’t mean he couldn’t enjoy the company of a woman—having dinner with her, going to the movies, taking walks in the park. He liked waking up with a woman in his arms. All those things were important to him.

She could’ve gotten stuck in traffic, or had a last-minute phone call, or any number of things that would make her late. A few minutes doesn’t mean she’s stood me up.

Keefe glanced at his watch again. 7:08. He threw back the last of his bourbon and signaled to the bartender for another drink. He'd give her until 7:15 before he called her.

I can't call her. I don't have her phone number. Shit!

The bartender set a fresh bourbon on the rocks in front of Keefe. He lifted it to take a sip...and froze. A beautiful blonde stood in the doorway to the bar, her gaze slowly sweeping the room. He let his own gaze do some sweeping, admiring the way her dress clung to her curves. The square neckline gave a hint of the roundness of her breasts. The skirt flowed over her hips to expose her knees and sexy calves. She wore black high heels and carried a black clutch.

Damn, he did like a woman in high heels.

Her waterfall of hair swirled over her left shoulder to caress her breast. He imagined fisting his hands in it while he kissed her, over and over and over...

She stopped looking around the room when their eyes met. With a small smile on her lips, she started toward him.

My God! That's Marci.

He stood on legs that felt like rubber bands as she approached him. "Hi," she said, her smile widening.

Keefe swallowed. He hoped his tongue would work so he could talk. "Hi."

"I'm sorry I'm late."

"No problem." He gave her body a lingering glance. "You look amazing."

"Thank you."

"Donegan, party of two," the hostess said from the doorway.

Keefe held out one arm, indicating for Marci to walk in front of him. "Shall we?"

He placed his hand lightly on the small of her back as they followed the hostess to their table by the large windows. Keefe held Marci's chair, giving him the opportunity to see inside the bodice of her dress. He was blessed with an enticing view of her breasts. They were the perfect size to fill his hands.

He took a moment to admire the view and the flowery scent of her hair before he moved to his chair. "I'm glad you like this restaurant. The food is great."

"You've eaten here?"

Keefe nodded. "My friends brought me here right after I moved to Seattle."

"You should've told me. We could've gone somewhere else."

"I told you to pick the restaurant and this is where you wanted to eat."

Their waiter, Aaron, arrived to take their drink order. After asking Marci what she wanted, Keefe ordered a bottle of Chardonnay. He watched her pick up her napkin and place it on her lap, her movements fluid and graceful. He'd be happy to watch her the rest of the evening.

Other parts of his anatomy wouldn't be happy, but he didn't let anything below his belt rule him. Influence him, yes, but not rule him.

She raised her head and met his gaze. "You're staring at me."

"Yes, I am. The view is very nice from here."

Her lips twitched, her eyes crinkled at the corners. "You can look out the window and see Puget Sound. It's more majestic than I am."

"That's debatable."

"Keefe, this is a business dinner, remember?"

"What's wrong with mixing business and pleasure?"

"Because I don't believe in mixing them." The amusement faded from her expression. "You said strictly business. I'm holding you to that."

"I'll be a perfect gentleman." Keefe opened his menu. "I had the grilled salmon last time. What do you recommend?"

"I haven't had anything yet that wasn't delicious. The lobster bisque is incredible. I love the shrimp scampi. The steaks are tender enough to cut with a spoon."

"You're making it harder for me to choose."

The waiter came back with their wine. After pouring a bit into Keefe's glass and getting approval, he splashed the cold liquid into both their glasses. Keefe waited until Aaron left before lifting his glass toward Marci.

"To Marshall Media's success, and to our success as a team."

Marci touched her glass to his. "I'll drink to that."

He watched her while she sipped her wine. He would be a perfect gentleman during dinner, exactly as he had promised her. He'd ask her about the company, learn more about his duties at Marshall Media.

After dinner...

If things progressed from business to pleasure, he had no problem with that. He'd do everything in his power to make sure Marci experienced pleasure as intense as possible.

Chapter Four

Marci sat with her fork in her hand, her dinner forgotten, while she listened to Keefe talking about his last time on a movie set. Her mouth had dropped open in surprise a couple of times during his story. She couldn't believe some of the antics on the set by two famous stars. "Are you telling me the truth?"

"Absolutely." Keefe held up one hand, his fingers in the traditional "Scout's Honor" gesture. "I saw it with my own eyes. Right there in the open. Anyone walking by could see them."

"They were making love outside in the middle of the day? Wow." She laid her fork on her plate. "Nothing like that has happened on any of my movie sets. At least, not that I know about."

"This was the first time it happened while I was on a set. Pretty intense."

"And of course you turned and walked away as soon as you saw them."

"I didn't stand there any longer than thirty seconds. Forty-five, tops."

His eyes shone with laughter as he grinned. Marci laughed. "You're bad."

"Well, hell, I had my own personal porn show. I couldn't pass that up."

It took Marci several seconds to bring her laughter back under control so she could take another bite of her dinner. Keefe was bright, intelligent, witty, and completely charming. Marci had fallen under his spell by the time she'd finished her lobster bisque. She'd be in lust with him by dessert if she wasn't careful.

"Would you have watched?" Keefe asked.

She looked into those devilish blue eyes and knew he teased her. "Of course not."

One corner of his mouth tilted up in a rakish grin. "You're a lousy liar."

She returned his grin. "It's not nice to call your boss a liar."

Keefe chuckled, then dug into his prime rib again. "Speaking of movie sets, you mentioned in our meeting that travel would be involved. How often and where would I go?"

Marci chewed and swallowed her bite of shrimp before she answered. "Both depend on the project. My former Logistics VP rarely traveled. He preferred to do everything by phone or email. I don't agree with that, which is part of the reason he's no longer with Marshall Media. I think a personal meeting is important."

"I agree."

"I'm glad to hear that." She laid her fork on her plate. "Have you read *In the Mountain's Shadow* by Tyler Wilson?"

"No."

"I have an extra copy at the office. I'll give it to you Monday. Read it. It's *amazing*. The author lives out in the boonies in British Columbia and likes his solitude. I've talked to him on the phone and we've exchanged a few emails. I almost have him convinced to let Marshall Media produce a movie based on that book."

"Almost?"

"The email I was reading when you came to my office yesterday? It was from Mr. Wilson. He said he's still considering my offer, but isn't ready to give me a definite yes. A face-to-face meeting with him is essential."

"So I'll be heading to B.C. soon?"

"We'll be heading to B.C. soon. I don't sit at my desk and give orders. I get involved with every project." Marci picked up her fork and speared another bite of shrimp. "Do you have a problem with that?"

"Not at all. I like that you're a hands-on boss."

They'd talked over dinner about Marshall Media, the Seattle area, his former job. With that simple comment from Keefe, Marci forgot about business and thought about pleasure. His words caused an image to pop into her head, one of her hands caressing

his body. She imagined tunneling her fingers into that thick mane of hair, running them over his shoulders, down his chest. She'd wrap them around his hard cock as she took it in her mouth...

"Shall I take over the negotiations with Mr. Wilson, or would you prefer to do them?"

Keefe's question shattered her fantasy. Warmth crept into Marci's cheeks. She silently thanked the low lighting in the restaurant so he wouldn't see her blush. "I want you to take over, but keep me informed. If he's agreeable to a meeting, I'll make plane and lodging arrangements for us."

"I'll contact him Monday and introduce myself."

Marci liked that he was ready to jump right in and go to work. She'd always relied on her instincts. They'd never failed her. Those instincts told her Keefe would do his job, and do it very well. "He didn't say it, but I wouldn't be surprised if another studio has approached him and that's why he's hesitating to sign with us."

"I'll find out Monday."

Aaron arrived to take away their empty plates. Marci bit her bottom lip when he asked if they wanted to see the dessert tray. She loved their strawberry cheesecake, but had eaten every bite of her dinner and doubted if she had room for dessert.

"You don't have to count calories," Keefe said. "We're here to enjoy ourselves."

"I'm not worried about the calories. I don't know if I can eat anything else."

"We could split one."

That would work. If she ordered a whole slice for herself, she'd eat every bite and be miserable. "Do you like cheesecake?"

"I do."

"I love their strawberry cheesecake. It isn't plain cheesecake with strawberries on top, but strawberry flavored. Absolutely delicious."

"Then that's what we'll have. Do you want coffee with it?"

"Yes, please."

"You heard the lady," Keefe said to the waiter.

"Yes sir," Aaron said with a smile. "Strawberry cheesecake and coffee coming right up."

Keefe leaned forward and rested his forearms on the table. "I think you're the only woman I've ever known who said she isn't worried about calories."

Marci laughed. "I don't worry about them when it comes to my favorite dessert. After all this food tonight, I may never fit in this dress again."

"You fit in it perfectly." His gaze dipped to her breasts a moment. "You're a very lovely woman, Marci."

"Thank you," she said softly.

The space between them seemed to crackle with electricity. Anything to do with business disappeared with his compliment. They were no longer employer and employee, but a woman and man.

Marci felt the fluttering low in her belly...that delicious buildup of desire. Keefe's eyes flared with heat, as if he could sense her body's reaction to him.

Aaron's arrival with their dessert and coffee broke the spell. She focused on the waiter's hand while he poured her coffee. She didn't look at Keefe, but knew he watched her.

As soon as Aaron left, Marci picked up her dessert fork and scooped up a bite of cheesecake. Keefe's fork came into her line of vision as he, too, cut off a piece of the creamy dessert.

"I agree with you," he said.

She braved a look at his face. "About what?"

"You can't worry about calories when something is this good."

His joke dissolved the tension between them. Marci relaxed and smiled at him. "That's why it's a special treat. If I ate it every day, the way I'd love to, I wouldn't be able to fit through the front door."

Keefe forked up another bite. "There are a lot of ways to work off calories."

Just like that, the electricity crackled again. It had been an innocent sentence, yet it sent images through Marci's head of all the ways she and Keefe could work off calories...in bed, bent over a desk, on the loveseat in her office.

Determined to steer the conversation back to something neutral, Marci straightened in her chair. "We have a full workout area at Marshall Media. Any employee can use it at any time. I'll probably use it tomorrow to work off this cheesecake."

"You don't have to worry about working off anything." His gaze dipped to her breasts again. "You have an incredible body."

So much for a neutral conversation. She looked into Keefe's eyes and clearly saw heat flare again. "Keefe—"

"Why don't you date employees?"

That question she could answer without hesitation. "Because it isn't professional."

"You've never dated an employee?"

Now Marci hesitated. She didn't want to lie to Keefe, but also didn't want to talk about Ben. "I have, in the past."

Keefe forked up another bite of cheesecake. "What happened?"

She watched his tongue lap up the creamy confection from the tines of his fork and slide it into his mouth. She would swear she could feel the caress of his tongue between her thighs.

She wished that caress was real. It had been so long since a man had licked her pussy, she almost forgot how it felt.

Marci cleared her throat. "Things didn't work out."

“Just because one relationship with an employee didn’t work out doesn’t mean another would be bad.”

“I know that. But I feel very strongly that as president, I have to maintain a professional image for my employees.”

“You’re a woman first, Marci, then a president.”

Sometimes that was hard for her to remember. “I’m also older than a lot of my male employees.”

“You don’t look your age.”

“I appreciate that, but it doesn’t change the facts. I don’t think I could ever become seriously involved with a younger man.”

He stared at her, his eyebrows lowered, his nostrils flared. Marci waited for him to continue the argument. Instead, he picked up his cup and sipped his coffee. “That last bite of cheesecake is yours.”

The look in his eyes told her he’d backed down from saying more, even though he hadn’t wanted to. She scooped up the cheesecake as Aaron arrived with their check. Marci picked up the wallet as soon as the waiter set it on the table.

Keefe frowned. “What are you doing?”

“This is a business dinner. The company is paying for it.”

“I invited...” He stopped. “Okay. Thanks.”

It surprised her that he gave in so quickly. Most men she’d dated were usually so macho about paying the bill. She dug her company credit card from her purse and placed it inside the wallet. Aaron came by their table and picked up the wallet, along with the empty dessert plate.

“Will I meet the rest of your vice presidents Monday at your meeting?” Keefe asked.

Marci nodded. "I have a long agenda this time, so expect the meeting to run two to three hours. We order in lunch if it runs past noon. There will be coffee, tea, pastries, donuts, all the goodies to give you a nice sugar high."

His lips twitched. "Perfect for a Monday morning."

Marci opened the wallet Aaron had quietly left on the table again and scrawled her name on the receipt. She picked up her credit card and receipt copy and slipped them back in her purse. She'd enjoyed her time with Keefe, much more than she thought she would.

She hated to see the evening end.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked.

Marci nodded. She waited until Keefe rounded the table and pulled back her chair to stand. Her tummy fluttered again when he placed his hand on the small of her back. How easy it would be to step closer to him, let him slip his arm around her waist. She missed the closeness, the passion a man and woman could share.

Dessert was over, and she was definitely in lust with him.

Keefe collected her coat and held it while she slipped her arms in the sleeves. She started to pull her hair from beneath the collar, but he beat her to it. His fingers brushed her nape as he gathered her hair in both hands and gently pulled it from inside her coat. Goose bumps scattered over her skin.

She turned to face him. "Thank you."

He nodded. "May I walk you to your car?"

"I'd like that."

She waited until he'd donned his own jacket before stepping outside. The night was cool and clear, the stars shining brightly over Puget Sound. Marci turned in the direction of the restaurant's parking lot. Keefe stepped to the outside, placing himself between her and the street. She smiled to herself at the old-fashioned sign of courtesy.

“We aren’t that far from the office,” Keefe said. “If you aren’t in a hurry to get home, we could go by there and I’ll get that book you want me to read.”

“I can give it to you Monday.”

Keefe shrugged. “I don’t have any special plans tomorrow. I could start reading it during the football game commercials.”

It pleased her that he was so eager to get started on the project. “Okay.”

Marci pressed the button on her key fob to unlock the driver’s door. Keefe opened it for her and stood back so she could slide onto the seat. “I parked on the street in the next block.” He motioned with his head. “I’ll meet you at the office.”

Chapter Five

Keefe rounded the corner of Marshall Media and saw Marci standing by the front door. She smiled as he drew closer.

“I almost went in, then remembered you don’t have a key or the alarm code yet. I wouldn’t want you to get arrested for breaking a window before you even start working.”

“I appreciate that.”

She grinned, then unlocked the outer door. Keefe followed her into the entryway, and into the building when she unlocked the inner door. He watched her punch in a five-digit code on the alarm display.

“Will I get keys, code, whatever, from you or Peggy?”

“Peggy. She’ll take care of you first thing Monday morning, before my VP meeting.”

He let her step into the elevator ahead of him. The doors closed, leaving them cocooned together in the small space. Keefe leaned against the wall and watched Marci. She stood straight, her gaze focused above the doors at the small lighted numbers. He saw her fingers clench on her purse. He wondered if that meant she felt the sizzle in the air between them the same as he.

She’d made it clear more than once that she didn’t get involved with her employees. He respected that decision. He’d never believed in pushing a woman to do something she didn’t willingly want to do.

Yet he’d seen the interest in her eyes when she looked at him, heard her quick intake of breath when he’d pulled her hair from her coat.

She might not want to get involved, but that didn’t mean she didn’t feel desire.

He certainly felt desire. His cock had been half hard all evening.

The doors opened. She glanced at him before she stepped out on the sixth floor. Recessed nightlights spaced every few feet let Keefe easily see to follow Marci. She unlocked her office door and flipped the light switch.

"It's in my bookcase," she said. "Give me a sec to find it."

"No problem."

Keefe took off his jacket and draped it on the back of one of the chairs at Marci's conference table. The large windows drew his attention. He stepped behind her desk and looked out at the lights of Seattle.

"Great view."

"It's very soothing."

He turned his head and watched her peruse the books on her shelves. She'd removed her coat and laid it and her purse on the edge of her desk. Her blonde hair flowed down her back, almost to her waist. He could easily imagine fisting his hands in that long mane, bending her head back and nibbling on her neck. Then he'd make his way down her body until he swiped his tongue across her creamy pussy...

"Here it is." Marci pulled a hardback from the shelf and faced him. "I should never organize my stuff. I can never find anything when I put it where it's supposed to be."

Her eyes twinkled with laughter as she held the book out to him. Keefe laid his hands over hers. The humor vanished from her eyes. He heard that quick intake of breath again when he touched her.

"You feel it too, don't you?" he asked. "Something is happening between us."

"No." Her hair shifted on her shoulders when she shook her head. "It can't."

"I don't know what happened between you and your former employee, but I'm not him." Keefe tightened his hands on hers. "I feel something when I touch you."

"I think we'd better go."

"I don't want to go. I don't think you do either."

Still looking into her eyes, he took the book from her and laid it on the desk. With one finger, he tilted up her chin. "Do you?"

Her lips parted. That was the answer he needed to his question. Keefe lowered his head until his lips touched hers.

Those soft lips fit against his perfectly. The kiss lasted mere moments, but long enough for him to know he wanted more.

Much more.

Keefe ended the kiss. Marci opened her eyes halfway and licked her lips. Striking blue irises seemed luminescent with desire. Her lips were still parted, her warm breath coasting across his lips each time she exhaled.

He slipped his hand behind her neck and kissed her again. He didn't deepen the kiss. Not yet. Instead, he slowly slid his lips across hers, first one direction, then the other. He didn't touch any part of her body, other than her neck and mouth. If Marci wanted this to go further, she would have to show him.

The tip of her tongue brushed his lips. That was the sign Keefe needed. Cradling her face in his hands, he deepened the kiss...tickling the corners of her mouth with the tip of his tongue, nipping her full bottom lip, running his tongue along the seam to seek entrance into her mouth. She gave it with a soft moan. He thrust his tongue into her mouth as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

All the blood in his body rushed to his cock. Keefe let his hands slide down her back to her hips. He tugged her closer until he could feel her breasts pressed to his chest. She clutched handfuls of his hair and sucked his tongue farther into her mouth.

He knew Marci would be hot. He hadn't suspected she'd be explosive.

She pulled away from him and rested her forehead on his chest. "We have to stop."

"No, we don't." He arched his hips so she could feel how she affected him. "I want you."

Marci lifted her head and looked into his eyes. "You're my employee."

“Not until Monday.”

A frown drew her eyebrows together. “You’re being technical.”

“Okay, maybe I am, but I’m also being honest. I want you. The way you kiss me tells me you want me too.”

Gripping one buttock, he urged her closer until her mound cushioned his shaft. It grew even harder when he heard her moan and watched her eyes drift closed.

He kissed the side of her neck, scraped his teeth over the pounding pulse. “Let me make love to you,” he whispered directly into her ear.

He knew the moment Marci decided to give in to her feelings. Her body turned soft and pliant. Her arms encircled his neck once more when he kissed her again. She didn’t hold anything back, but kissed him as if she couldn’t get enough of his mouth.

He couldn’t get enough of her mouth either. He slanted his across hers, using the tip of his tongue to guide his way. She returned every kiss, each one more passionate than the last.

The need for air was the only reason he stopped kissing her. He moved his mouth to her neck and scraped his teeth across her pulse again. Marci threw back her head, giving him more room to nibble her neck. Keefe kept one hand on her buttock to hold her mound pressed to his cock while he kissed his way down her throat to the neckline of her dress. He licked the top of each breast.

Marci whimpered.

That sexy sound drove Keefe to kiss her again while lowering the zipper on her dress. He ran his hands up and down her back, enjoying the smoothness of her skin. Venturing lower, he felt the garter belt at her hips. He groaned. Keefe loved it when a woman wore a garter belt.

He continued his exploration and discovered the thong between her buttocks. There was nothing sexier on a woman than a garter belt, thong and stockings.

It took all his willpower not to push her back on the desk and take her. He had no doubt their first time together would be hotter than an August afternoon, but he didn't want it to be over in two minutes. That's exactly what would happen if he lifted her up on the desk, spread her legs and fucked her the way his cock wanted him to.

"Come here," he said.

His gaze locked with hers, he walked backward to the loveseat. He sat in the middle and tugged her down to straddle his lap. Her dress hiked up to her hips, exposing the lacy top of her stockings and the dark blue garters.

Beautiful and sexy, like the woman who wore them.

She shifted on his lap, rubbing her pussy across his shaft. Keefe hissed. He could feel the heat and dampness right through her thong. "Damn, that feels good."

"Yes, it does." She tunneled the fingers of one hand into his hair and tilted his head back to rest on the loveseat. With her other hand, she reached between their bodies and began to unbutton his shirt. "I want to touch you."

That worked for Keefe. He wanted to feel Marci's hands all over him.

Marci finished the last button and parted his shirt. A light mat of black hair covered his chest and tapered down his stomach to swirl around his navel. He didn't have a well defined six-pack, but his stomach definitely looked flat and toned.

Perfect.

"Very nice." She ran her hand down the center of his chest and stomach. "Just enough hair to play with."

His breathing became deeper, uneven. Marci continued her journey south until she reached his belt. She soon had it unfastened and shifted to the button on his pants. Keefe drew in his stomach when she released it. The zipper sounded loud in the quiet room. Before she had the chance to slip her hand inside his briefs, he pulled her back to him for another kiss.

The man definitely knew how to kiss. He didn't jam his tongue into her mouth, but eased it inside to tangle with hers. He stroked her lips, teased the corners. He didn't simply kiss her. He made love to her mouth.

Cool air brushed her shoulders as he lowered her dress. He kissed the valley between her breasts. Marci reached up to clasp his head, but her arms were held in place by the sleeves of her dress.

Keefe grinned up at her. "Gotcha."

Marci laughed. His cock was as hard as a lead pipe beneath her, and he could still tease. She liked that. "What do you plan to do with me?"

"I can think of all kinds of things." He tugged down the cups of her demi-bra until her nipples sprang free. "Mmm, yes. Like this."

One hard tip disappeared into the warmth of his mouth. Marci closed her eyes and sighed. She loved to have her nipples sucked and licked. Keefe did both, suckling the tip, then licking it and the surrounding areola. Her pussy throbbed with each tug of his lips.

"And like this." He cradled her other breast in his hand, his thumb rubbing back and forth over her nipple. She felt each pass of his thumb deep inside her pussy.

"Or maybe this." Releasing her breast, he slid his hand down her stomach and inside her thong. He groaned. "My God, you're wet."

Marci buried her face against his neck. She spread her legs wider, giving him room to touch her. His thumb circled her clit while he pushed a finger inside her channel.

"And tight." Another finger joined the first. "Am I hurting you?"

"No, no. Not at all. It feels good."

"What do you need me to do? I want you to come."

He pressed upward and hit her G-spot. Pleasure rushed through her body. "There. Right there."

"Like this?"

He moved his fingers inside her, caressing the sensitive spot. At the same time, his thumb rubbed her clit. Keefe not only knew how to kiss a woman, he knew how to touch her.

She couldn't think well enough to speak, so nodded her head. The pleasure climbed higher with each stroke of his fingers. She gripped his shoulders and moved her hips up and down, riding his hand.

"That's the way," he whispered, low and husky. "Take what you need."

Her clit pulsed with each beat of her heart. She panted to try to get more oxygen into her lungs. Perspiration formed in the small of her back and trickled down between her buttocks. She moved faster, took his hand deeper. The climax was *there*, so close...

Her orgasm peaked, sending wave after wave of pleasure flowing through her body. Marci wrapped her arms tightly around Keefe's neck and continued to ride his hand while her breathing slowed and her heart returned to a normal rhythm.

He kissed her neck, her jaw. "My wallet is in my jacket."

His comment reminded her that although he'd given her an earth-shattering climax, he hadn't had one. She slowly rose to her knees and inched backward until his fingers slipped from her body. Rising on shaky legs, she walked to the conference table to retrieve his jacket.

When she turned to walk toward him again, she saw him licking her juices from his fingers. Her pussy clenched in response.

He flashed her a naughty grin. "Better than strawberry cheesecake."

She handed him his jacket, shimmied out of her dress and tossed it on a chair. He located the condom in his wallet while she unhooked her garters and removed her thong. She straightened right when he pulled his cock from inside his briefs.

She gasped softly. He was magnificent. Long and thick with a slight upward curve. She watched him roll the condom over his hard flesh. He gripped it in one hand and held out his other hand to her.

“Ride me.”

Marci’s lips met his as she impaled herself on his shaft. She remained still for a moment, simply enjoying the feel of Keefe inside her. She’d missed this closeness, this sensation of being one with a man. She and Ben had made love almost every day when they were together, but their relationship ended months ago.

She raised her hips until only the head of his cock remained within her body, then sank back down and took him again. Keefe hissed.

“Shit!” He gripped her hips and surged upward, driving his cock into her channel. “So tight and wet. Fuck, you have a sweet pussy.”

He continued to hold her hips, but didn’t hinder her movements. Marci rode him, taking him deep, then shallow, then deep again. Each thrust brushed the sensitive spot inside her.

“Do you need more?” He released one hip and laid his hand low on her belly. “Do you need me to rub your clit too?”

He didn’t wait for her answer, but began to circle her clit with his thumb. Marci stopped moving and pushed her hips forward, wanting more of the direct stimulation.

“Yeah, you like this, don’t you? Your pussy is getting wetter.”

She squeezed her eyes shut and threw back her head. “I’m going to come. Keefe! God!”

Her body trembled, the walls of her channel pulsed around his rod. Keefe forced himself to stay still until she drew every bit of pleasure from her release. Only when she opened her eyes and looked at him did he begin to pump again. He clutched her buttocks as he picked up speed. Soon he was hammering into her. She met every thrust, slamming down on his shaft when he pushed up.

Sweat popped out on his forehead and upper lip. He wondered if his heart would gallop right out of his chest. The scent of her pussy flowed to his nostrils with each

thrust. He wanted to bury his face in those wet folds, eat her until she came again and again.

Imagining her reaction to having his tongue inside her pushed him over the top. Pleasure whooshed up and down his spine and into his tight balls. He arched upward, trying to push them into Marci along with his cock when his climax hit. Tugging her close, he wrapped his arms around her while his body slowly returned to normal.

“That was incredible,” she whispered.

“And then some.” Keefe kissed her, softly caressing her body as he did. He traveled over her back, her hips, those perfect breasts that he hadn’t touched nearly enough yet. “It could be just as incredible again. Come home with me.”

Regret flashed through her eyes. He placed one finger over her lips before she could say no. “I’m not through with you and I don’t have any more condoms with me. Unless you have some in your desk drawer.”

He moved his finger when he saw humor return to her eyes. She chuckled. “No, that’s one thing I don’t have in my desk.”

“Then we have to go to my place. I have plenty.”

“Planning on entertaining a lot?”

He could keep on joking with her, or he could tell her the truth. “I haven’t been with a woman since Jeania and I broke up four months ago. I’ve thought about it, trust me, especially first thing in the morning when a certain...body part is wide awake. But no woman has interested me...until you.”

He could tell by the tightening of her body that she was going to refuse. He hurried on before she could. “Marci, I’m not looking for anything permanent. You’re an incredible woman and I like being with you. Let’s take the rest of the weekend and enjoy each other. No strings, no promises. Nothing but making each other feel really good.”

She still looked uncertain. Keefe decided to sweeten the pot a bit. "I'll serve you breakfast in bed tomorrow morning."

"Can you cook?"

"I am a *phenomenal* cook." He cradled her face. "Come home with me. I want to make love to you again."

She leaned forward and kissed him. "Okay."

Chapter Six

Marci followed Keefe into an upscale residential area only a few miles from Marshall Media. The garage door opened as he pulled into the driveway. The interior light came on, showing room for one vehicle. The other side of the two-car garage contained stacks of boxes.

She stopped in the driveway and shut off the ignition. By the time she picked up her purse and opened the door, Keefe stood beside her car.

“Sorry there’s no room for you to park in the garage. I haven’t lived here very long and I’m still unpacking.”

“No problem.”

“At least it isn’t raining. If it was, I’d let you park in the garage and I’d park out here.”

She believed him. Keefe had proven himself several times this evening to be a gentleman.

He’d also proven himself to be an amazing lover, the best she’d had in a long time. She could become addicted to him very quickly. She couldn’t allow that to happen.

Keefe entwined his fingers with hers. “This way.”

He led her through the garage and a spacious laundry room, into a large kitchen. Marci noted the granite countertops, numerous cabinets and modern appliances that made her ten-year-old appliances look completely old-fashioned.

“I’ve unpacked some of my dishes,” Keefe said, sliding her coat from her shoulders. “Would you like a glass of wine?”

“Please.”

He tilted up her chin and kissed her softly. "I'll hang up our coats and be right back."

It had been a simple kiss, yet made her heart stutter. Her strong response surprised her, and worried her. He'd said one weekend of pleasing each other. That's all they could have. That's all *she* could have with an employee.

An image of Ben flashed through her mind...tall, blond, handsome. She'd melt when he flashed that cocky smile at her. She saw him leaning over her on his bed, a long blue scarf in his hand...

"White or red?" Keefe asked behind her.

Marci jumped, unaware he'd come back in the kitchen. Warmth flooded her cheeks. She couldn't believe she'd been so lost in her memories that she hadn't heard him.

He frowned slightly. "You okay?"

"Yes. Of course. Just thinking."

He ran one finger down her cheek. "No thinking allowed. Not tonight."

His touch made the warmth in her cheeks flow down her body and pool between her thighs. She'd come here for pleasure, not to think about a bad love affair.

That lone fingertip traveled down her neck and into her cleavage. "I think I should pour wine on your breasts and lick it off."

The idea was tempting, but Marci didn't want to take that much time. She wanted to see Keefe naked *now*. "I think we should forget about the wine and go to your bedroom."

Keefe smiled. "I do like the way you think."

He took her hand again. Marci followed him to a room at the end of a dark hallway. He flipped a switch on the wall. Lamps by both sides of a king-sized bed came on, illuminating the room with soft light. She noticed the bed, nightstands and lamps were the only furniture in the room. The bed was mussed, evidence that Keefe had thrown the covers over the pillows this morning when he awoke.

"I make the bed when I change the sheets." He shrugged. "Other than that, it's usually a mess."

"I'm not here to critique your housekeeping skills."

He wrapped a lock of her hair around his forefinger. "Is there anything you plan to critique?"

Marci shook her head. "You didn't have any problem figuring out what I needed in my office. You don't need any pointers."

Keefe's eyes turned hot and smoky. "I'm glad you were pleased."

"Almost unconscious, not just pleased."

He drew her into his arms, close enough that she could feel his hard cock against her mound. "I don't want you unconscious. I want you to experience everything I do to you."

His mouth met hers in a ravishing kiss. Marci willingly parted her lips at the first stroke of his tongue. His hands coasted over her back before he tugged down her zipper.

"I'm still hungry for you." He nipped her throat. "The first time will be hard and fast." A tug on her earlobe made her breath catch. "Then we'll slow down for the second round." The tip of his tongue darted into her ear. "How does that sound?"

Marci had to swallow before she could speak. His words and wicked movement of his mouth had stolen her voice. "It sounds perfect."

He pushed her dress over her shoulders as he kissed her again. Needing to touch bare skin, she tugged his shirt from his pants and began to unbutton it. Her fingers shook, she wanted him so much. Marci finally managed to get his shirt open. She jerked it down his arms and let it fall to the floor. By the time her dress was pooled around her ankles, she'd unfastened his belt and was working on his zipper.

His kiss turned hotter, more demanding. "I want you naked." She felt her bra tighten and loosen when he unhooked it. "Totally, completely naked."

“You too.” She pushed his pants past his hips. “Now.”

She reached for the waistband of his briefs, determined to get to his hard flesh as quickly as possible. Before she could reach her prize, he swept her up in his arms and carried her to the bed.

He laid her on the comforter and stretched out next to her. His shaft pressed into her thigh. “Do you have any idea how much I want you?”

“Hopefully as much as I want you.” She managed to get her hand inside his briefs and clasped that delicious cock. She smiled when she heard Keefe’s strangled groan. “I’ll take this as a yes.”

“Not only yes, but hell yes.”

Marci huffed out a sound of protest when Keefe pulled away from her. His fast, hard kiss silenced her. He’d told her this first time would be fast, but he didn’t want to come on her hand in only seconds. Things needed to slow down.

He rose to his knees and unfastened her garter belt. Belt, thong and stockings all came off at the same time and landed on the floor. He rose from the bed long enough to remove the rest of his clothing. Naked, he joined her on the bed again, nudging her legs apart so he could lie between them.

She placed her feet on the bed and let her legs fall open, creating a cradle for his hips. He kissed her mouth and each nipple before he moved away long enough to grab a condom from the nightstand. Marci sat up and took the packet from him. Keefe gritted his teeth to stay in control when her soft hands rolled the protection over his hard cock.

Marci lay back on the bed and spread her legs. “Now.”

One thrust and he was buried in her warmth. Her silky, hot channel grabbed his rod as he pulled almost out and thrust back inside her again.

He shivered when she scratched his back from shoulder blades to waist. “Do that again,” he said in a raspy voice.

She did, her nails going a bit deeper the second time. Keefe moaned loudly. "Oh, yeah. That's good."

He arched his back when she dug her nails into his buttocks. "Damn!"

"Too much?"

"No. It makes me want to fuck you harder."

She licked her lips. "Then fuck me harder."

Keefe hooked one of Marci's legs over his elbow so he could pump deeper and faster. Her gaze dropped to where their bodies were joined. She watched his movements for several moments, then looked into his eyes again.

"Kiss me," she whispered.

He did as she asked. With his mouth locked to hers, he turned their bodies so she lay on top of him. Now she could control their lovemaking and take what she needed to come again.

She sat up, straddling his hips, and propped her hands on his shoulders. Keefe watched her breasts bounce with her movement. He cradled the full globes in his palms. "These are beautiful." He squeezed them as he brushed his thumbs over the hard nipples. "They fit perfectly in my hands."

"Your cock fits perfectly inside me."

It certainly did. Keefe didn't think he'd ever been with a woman whose body complemented his so well.

He slid his hands around to her buttocks and held on while he thrust up into her pussy. She stared into his eyes as she moved, taking him completely, then lifting her hips and slamming them back down. His balls tightened as his climax drew closer. He couldn't come yet, not until Marci did.

Slipping one hand low on her abdomen, he caressed her clit with his thumb.

"Oh, yes." Marci sighed, then moaned. "Rub it harder."

Keefe obeyed her, moving his thumb back and forth over the sensitive nub. He listened to her breathing quicken, watched her skin glisten with perspiration. She had to be close to orgasm.

She suddenly stopped moving. Head back, body arched, she released a keening moan. The walls of her pussy contracted around his shaft. Three more thrusts and Keefe's balls tightened even further. Pulling Marci to his chest, he held her as his climax rushed through his body.

Keefe knew he wouldn't be able to speak with his heart pounding so hard. Marci didn't seem to be in any hurry to move. That was good since he didn't have the strength to raise an arm, much less move his body.

He brushed her hair from her face and kissed her temple. Her eyelids fluttered, then opened. She tilted her face on his shoulder and smiled.

"You weren't kidding about hard and fast."

"Are you sorry?" he asked, slowly caressing her back and buttocks.

"You've heard the cliché about an orgasm curling your toes?"

Keefe nodded.

"I think my orgasm blew off my toenails."

He almost choked, he laughed so hard. Grinning, Marci crossed her hands on his chest and propped her chin on them. "I haven't had my toenails blown off in a long time."

"I'm happy to please."

She outlined his lips with her fingertip, then kissed him. "I'm really comfortable, but I suppose you need to get up."

"Actually, I've already been *up*."

He grinned when she threatened him with her fist. Keefe held her wrist and kissed her closed fingers. "Yeah, I do need to take care of one little item."

"It might take me a minute to move."

“I’m in no hurry. I like holding you.”

Marci rose to her hands and knees, still straddling him. His softening cock slipped from her channel. She moved to his side, curling up with one arm beneath her head, and watched him rise from the bed and walk to the bathroom. She sighed at the view of his back and buttocks. He was a gorgeous man. More important than his incredible looks, he was a nice man. Great sense of humor, considerate, kind...exactly the type of man she could love.

If only he wasn’t her employee.

Keefe was so different from Ben. Her former lover had been the typical bad boy. Something about him had called to her, had made her go along with things she’d never imagined she would ever do in a bedroom. She hadn’t recognized herself while she was with Ben.

She hadn’t *liked* herself while she was with Ben.

She might not know Keefe that well yet, but she instinctively knew he would never ask her to do anything sexually that would make her uncomfortable.

He came back into the bedroom. Although no longer hard, his cock was still very impressive. A fluttering came to life low in her belly. Three powerful orgasms tonight and she still wanted him.

A cocky smile turned up his lips as he leaned over her, caging her between his arms. “You’re staring.”

She grinned. “You have something worth staring at.”

“I’m glad you approve.” He kissed her lips, then the tip of both breasts. “I’m gonna turn up the heat so you don’t get cold.”

“I can get under the covers.”

He scowled, but Marci could see the playfulness in his eyes. “That isn’t an option. I’m not through looking at you.” He kissed her lips again. “Be right back.”

Marci took advantage of his absence to look around the room. She studied the plain headboard and nightstands. They appeared to be of good quality, but weren't ornate or with any kind of design. They looked like functional furniture a man would buy simply to get by. Which could be the case. Perhaps Keefe had sold his furniture in California so he wouldn't have to move it and hadn't bothered to shop yet. She couldn't imagine not having a dresser or chest of drawers. Two louvered doors obviously led to his closet. Maybe there were drawers in it for his underwear and other clothing items.

She didn't know if he'd bought the house or rented it. She assumed he'd bought it. She liked what she'd seen of it so far. Her own house was small and cozy, but she longed for more room. Her long hours at Marshall Media didn't leave her a lot of time for house-hunting.

A movement in the doorway caught her attention. Keefe came back in the room, carrying two glasses of white wine. He didn't seem to be the least bit self-conscious about his nakedness. Marci didn't mind at all. She had no trouble watching him walk around nude.

"Thirsty?" he asked.

"Mmm, yes."

She sat up and accepted the glass he offered her. The cold liquid slid down her throat and warmed her tummy. "Very good."

"A housewarming gift from my friends."

"You have nice friends."

"Yes, I do." He sipped his wine. "They—Linsey and Davin—let me stay with them for almost a month. My house in L.A. sold a lot faster than I expected, and the new owners wanted to move in right away. I could've either moved into a hotel in L.A. or moved up here and done the same thing. There wasn't anything keeping me in California, so I came on up. I knew your VP hadn't left yet, but figured the extra time would give me the chance to drive around and learn more about Seattle. When I mentioned staying in a hotel to Linsey, she threatened to slap me."

Marci chuckled. "She sounds tough."

"She likes to think she is. She's about five-one and weighs maybe a hundred pounds." He took another sip of wine, then stretched out on the bed on his side and propped up on one elbow. "She helped me house-hunt until we found this one. I started moving in Thursday. That's why I don't have much unpacked. And I had no furniture. I sold it with the house. They loaned me this bedroom set and a couch until I can shop." His whole body shook with an exaggerated shudder. "God, I hate the thought of shopping for furniture. Can I pay you to do it for me? I'm really good at budgeting, so I have money."

Marci couldn't believe she was talking so freely to Keefe while she sat naked on his bed. What surprised her even more was how comfortable she felt doing it. He didn't stare at her breasts or pussy. He looked directly into her eyes while he spoke to her.

How refreshing.

She drained her wineglass and set it on the nightstand. "Do you want more wine?" Keefe asked.

Marci shook her head. "I want more, but not wine." She ran one finger down the center of his chest to his navel. "I believe you mentioned a round two."

His eyes changed from curious to hot in less than two seconds. "I believe I did too, but I'm not eighteen. I need a few minutes to recuperate."

"I see no reason why I can't play around while you recuperate." She took his glass and set it next to hers. "Do you?"

He grinned, slow and sexy. "No, ma'am."

Chapter Seven

She kissed him, ever so gently, barely brushing his lips with hers. She gave him sweet kisses over and over, softly caressing his chest while they kissed.

He cradled her jaw in his palm, tilted his head and parted his lips. She accepted his silent invitation and darted her tongue into his mouth. She withdrew, then ventured inside again. His tongue joined in the play, stroking across her tongue, her lips.

Marci worked her way down his throat and over his collarbone, dropping kisses along the way. She moved over his chest. Each small nipple received a nip with her teeth. She smiled to herself when she heard him draw in a sharp breath.

"Marci." His voice sounded choked. That encouraged her to continue. She wanted to make him so hot, he wouldn't be able to think.

A quick glance down his body showed her his cock was already hardening again. Apparently he didn't need as much recuperating time as he'd thought.

She dragged her tongue down his stomach, circled his navel. His hand tunneled into her hair and clasped the back of her head. "What are you doing?"

"What do you think I'm doing?" She slid one hand beneath his balls and squeezed.

Keefe arched his hips off the bed. Marci wrapped her hand around his shaft and started a slow, milking motion. It grew fully erect in only seconds.

"I found something to play with." She swiped her tongue across the crown. "Something big."

"You're wicked, do you know that?"

"It's fun to be wicked." She licked the crown again, then opened her mouth and took it inside.

His hand tightened on her head. "*Jesus, Marci.*"

He tasted like man and sex. She could smell herself on his skin. She inhaled deeply, drawing their combined scent into her lungs, as she took him farther into her mouth. The combination of the two of them smelled so hot.

Marci ran her tongue around the rim of his cock, up and down the bulging vein, took him in her mouth again. Keefe began to pump his hips. She lifted her head and frowned at him.

“No moving.”

The expression on his face made her think of a child who’d been told there would be no dessert after dinner. “What?”

“Lie still and let me play.”

Keefe closed his eyes and swallowed. “You’re cruel as well as wicked.”

“Careful what you call me. I do have teeth.”

To prove her words, she scraped them over his sensitive tip. He hissed and grabbed her head with both hands.

“*Fuck!*”

“Not yet. I’m not through playing.”

He barked out a laugh that held frustration instead of humor. “You realize you’re about five seconds away from me throwing you to your back and fucking you until you can’t walk.”

“I don’t think so.” She scraped her teeth over the tip again. “I think you like me playing.”

“Playing is one thing. Driving me crazy is another.”

Marci pressed her lips together to keep from laughing. Once she had regained control, she took the head of his rod back in her mouth. An inch at a time, she slid her lips down his hard flesh until she reached the base.

“God,” he whispered.

Up to the head, back down to the base, up to the head again. She swirled her tongue all over his cock, darted the tip into the slit. Keefe's breathing grew heavy and choppy. Marci quickened her movements, sliding her mouth up and down as she caressed his balls.

His body jerked, his warm essence filled her mouth. Marci continued to slowly move up and down his shaft until it softened and he lay still again.

She moved to his side, resting on one elbow. She rarely let a man come in her mouth. With Keefe, it felt right and natural.

He opened his eyes and looked at her. She saw satisfaction, with a trace of desire still present. He wrapped his hand around her neck and gently tugged.

"C'mere."

His kiss was tender and loving, so sweet it brought a lump to her throat. She went willingly when he urged her to her back and leaned over her. He cradled one breast, his thumb brushing the nipple, while he kissed her again and again.

Keefe ended the kisses with a final swipe of his tongue across her lips. He leaned back so he could see her entire body. He stared at the feminine beauty lying by him. Her neatly trimmed pussy had only a small amount of dark blonde hair on her mound, leaving her outer lips smooth. Her breasts with the hard pink nipples were the perfect size to fill his hands. He saw no markings from a swimsuit on her breasts, but he could see the faint outline of a very skimpy bikini bottom.

He ran one fingertip over her skin where pale met tan. "Whiter skin here, but your breasts are tan. You lay topless in the sun recently."

"I went to Jamaica in June."

He continued to trace the line of contrasting skin from hip to hip. "Alone?"

"No."

She didn't volunteer any other information, and he didn't ask. It was none of his business if she went alone or with five men. She was here with him now. That's all that mattered.

Keefe kissed her mouth again, made his way down her throat and chest to one pouting nipple. He circled it with the tip of his tongue, closed his mouth over it and suckled. Her low moan encouraged him to continue. He sucked the other nipple, nipped the center of her stomach. He darted his tongue into her navel. Each hipbone received a soft kiss.

He lay between her legs on his stomach and parted her sleek, swollen flesh with his thumbs. Her clit peeked out from its hood, begging for attention...attention he was only too happy to give.

"You smell incredible." He licked the full length of her pussy. "You taste even better." He licked her from anus to clit again, drove his tongue into her channel. She tunneled her fingers into his hair and gently tugged until his tongue touched her clit again.

"There," she said, her voice breathless. "Lick me there."

"You played with me." He dragged his thumb through her cream and spread it over her anus. "It's only fair that I get to play too."

Cream oozed from her sheath. Keefe gathered more and transferred it to her anus. Marci's breaths grew more ragged with each pass of his thumb over the sensitive area. She arched her hips, lifting her pussy closer to his mouth.

Obedying her silent request, Keefe caressed her anus as he licked and sucked her clit. She cradled her breasts, rubbing and tugging on her nipples. He lifted his head so he could watch her touch herself, but continued to caress her with his thumb. Her eyes were closed, her head thrown back, her back arched. She was obviously lost in her own pleasure.

God, she was beautiful.

He pushed his thumb into her ass and started licking her labia again. He could feel the tightening in Marci's thighs, a signal that her climax was close. Pushing his thumb farther into her ass, he licked her clit faster to try to drive her over the edge.

She gasped and her back bowed. "Oh yes! Yes! Right there. *Keefe!*" She grabbed handfuls of his hair and bucked against his mouth. The muscles in her anus contracted around his thumb. Her entire body trembled for several moments before she collapsed on the bed. Even after she stilled, he kept moving his tongue lightly over her creamy flesh, wanting to draw out her pleasure as long as possible.

Her fingers traveled through his hair. Keefe licked the length of her pussy one more time before raising his head. He smiled when he saw the drowsy, satisfied look in her eyes. "Hey."

"Hey yourself." She ran her fingers through his hair again. "I need a kiss."

Keefe rose over her body and covered her mouth with his. He kissed her as gently, as sweetly, as she'd kissed him a few minutes ago.

"I'm not sure if my legs will work, but I'll get you another glass of wine if you want it."

Marci smiled and shook her head. "I'm fine."

He kissed the tip of her nose. "Want to get under the covers?"

She nodded. "Sleep would be good."

He helped her slip between the sheets before he got up and turned off the lamps. Climbing into bed beside her, he wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her back against his chest. "Good night."

* * * * *

The last bit of Marci's dream disappeared as she came fully awake. She remembered something about passionate kisses and deep thrusts. Her pussy clenched when she realized she'd been dreaming of Keefe's incredible lovemaking.

Eyes still closed, she rolled to her back and stretched. Once she felt more awake, she turned her head on the pillow and opened her eyes.

Instead of seeing Keefe peacefully sleeping next to her, she saw a note on his pillow. She propped up on one elbow and picked up the piece of paper.

You're beautiful when you sleep.

I had to go to the grocery store. I promised you breakfast in bed and I always keep my promises.

There's a robe and slippers in my closet. The shoes will be too big for you, but they'll keep your feet warm.

Back soon.

P.S. Don't shower without me!

P.S. #2 Coffeemaker's all set. Just push the button to start it.

Marci reread the first line. She wondered how long he'd watched her sleep, and why he didn't wake her. Morning sex sounded perfect to her. For now, she'd have to settle for coffee.

Not exactly a perfect substitution.

She made use of the bathroom, then went in search of his robe and shoes. She stepped into a closet that was larger than her bedroom. Shelves and drawers filled one end. Railings ran down the full length on both sides. Keefe had hung his clothes on one side, what few clothes were there. Either he wore basically the same thing over and over or the rest of his clothes were boxed up in the garage.

The robe hung on a hook on the back of the door. Marci slipped into it and tied the belt, then began to explore. She found briefs and socks in two of the drawers, sweatshirts and sweatpants on one of the shelves. A pair of slippers sat next to beat-up

running shoes, and those sat next to black patent leather formal shoes. Definitely from one extreme to the other.

She found nothing else in any of the drawers or on the shelves, and she checked all of them.

“Find anything interesting?” Keefe asked behind her.

Startled, Marci screamed and whirled around. Keefe leaned against the doorjamb of the closet, ankles crossed and a grin on his lips.

“You have to stop scaring me.”

“I wouldn’t have scared you if you hadn’t been snooping.”

He had her there. Marci bit her bottom lip as warmth seeped into her cheeks. “I came in for the robe and slippers.”

“I see you found the robe.” His gaze slowly raked over her body. “You look good in it.” He tugged on the knot in the belt. Once it was loose, he parted the lapels. A wicked gleam filled his eyes. “You look even better out of it.”

Marci sucked in a breath when he brushed his thumbs over her nipples. If he wanted to take her right here in the closet, she’d say yes.

He cradled her breasts in his palms and brushed her nipples again. “If I start something now, I won’t stop.”

“Okay.”

Keefe chuckled. “I like a woman who’s horny all the time.”

She looked at his fly, where she could clearly see the outline of his cock. “I’m not the only one who’s horny.”

“True.” He released her breasts and closed the robe. “I’d better hide temptation or I’ll forget about cooking breakfast.”

“I don’t mind having breakfast later.”

“Breakfast now. Lovemaking later.” Tilting up her chin, he dropped a soft kiss on her lips. “Keep me company while I cook.”

Marci stepped into Keefe's slippers and followed him to the kitchen. The scent of brewing coffee greeted her as soon as she stepped into the room. She inhaled deeply of the delicious aroma.

"The coffee smells wonderful."

"I turned on the coffeemaker as soon as I got back. Sit down at the island and I'll get you a cup."

She could get used to all this service. Keefe had been wonderful so far, and not just in bed.

He set a thick mug full of coffee before her, as well as a spoon and container of liquid creamer. She'd had cream in her coffee last night and he must have remembered. "Thank you."

He winked at her, then began unloading the grocery sacks. "Can I help?" she asked.

"Nope. Just enjoy your coffee and talk to me."

"Any subject?"

"I'd like to hear more about you. Tell me your life story."

Marci laughed. "How boring."

"I doubt that." He took a knife from a drawer and chose three large potatoes to peel. "Did you grow up in Seattle?"

"No. I grew up in a small town outside Salem, Oregon."

"What brought you to Seattle?"

"My job. I started at Marshall Media a few months after I graduated from college."

She watched his arm and shoulder bunch as he grated the potatoes. She sighed. She didn't think she'd ever tire of looking at him.

"So you started at Marshall Media, determined to become president someday."

"Close. I started with the company when I was twenty-five. I had my sights set on a vice presidency before I turned thirty. I was sure I'd take over the company and make it the most successful corporation ever."

“And were you?” He picked up an onion and peeled off the outer layer. “VP before you turned thirty?”

“Nope. Didn’t make it until I was thirty-two.”

“And president two years ago.”

“Yes.” She sipped her coffee. “You did your homework.”

He picked up a green pepper, but put it back on the counter when Marci wrinkled her nose. She hated green peppers. “I was going to change my whole life. Yeah, I did my homework on the company. I wouldn’t have applied for the job if I had any doubts about Marshall Media. Plus I have friends here. That made the move easier.”

The potatoes and onions sizzled as soon as Keefe slid them into the hot skillet. Their scent made Marci’s mouth water and her stomach growl. She hadn’t realized she was so hungry until now.

He took a carton of eggs from the refrigerator and held it up so Marci could see it. “Eggs okay?”

“Just about everything is okay except green peppers.”

He set the carton on the island, then refilled her coffee mug. “You have family still in Oregon?”

Marci stopped with the mug raised halfway to her lips. It was a simple question, but one she didn’t want to answer. Talking about her family was never easy.

She decided a simple answer would be best. “I have a sister I haven’t seen in a long time. We don’t get along.”

“No parents?”

“They died ten years ago.”

She knew by the curiosity in his eyes that he wanted to ask more questions. To avoid that, she decided to ask him one. “What about your family?”

“Happy and healthy and spread all over the states. My folks live in San Diego. My brother is in L.A., one sister in Florida, and one sister in Texas.”

“You’re the only one who doesn’t live in the South.”

“A fact my mother quickly pointed out when I told her I was moving.” He cracked five eggs into a bowl and whipped them with a whisk. “She cried. My mom is the best and I hated that I made her cry. But she said I had to live my own life and do what I thought best.”

A pang of jealousy tightened Marci’s stomach. She missed the long talks she used to have with her mother. She and her sister should’ve drawn closer together when they lost their parents, instead of fighting and parting with no hope of ever getting back together.

Keefe added chunks of ham to the whipped eggs and poured them into another skillet. “We always get together at Christmas and July 4th, no matter what. We all make it back other times of the year for a visit, but not at the same time. Mom insists she has to have all her ‘babies’ with her at least twice a year.” He chuckled. “I’m thirty-four and the second oldest, but I’m still a baby to her.”

“All children are babies to their mothers.”

“I guess.” He dished up the potatoes and eggs on two plates and added a toasted English muffin. “Your breakfast, m’lady. I can serve you in bed or we can stay here.”

“I vote for here. It’s closer to the coffee.”

Keefe smiled. “I do like the way you think.”

* * * * *

Keefe pulled the afghan up to cover Marci’s shoulders. It was warm and cozy on the couch where she lay on top of him, but he wanted to be sure she didn’t get cold.

“You warm enough?” he asked.

She caressed his bare chest with her fingertips. “I’m great.”

“That’s for sure.”

Marci lifted her head. She arched both eyebrows, but he could see the humor in her eyes. “Are you talking about something other than my warmth?”

He shifted his hips, brushing her mound with his soft cock. "Actually, I like your warmth very much."

He grinned while she laughed. "I think you and I are talking about different things, Keefe."

"Are we?" he asked, trying to sound innocent.

She ran one finger over his lips. "You have a one-track mind when it comes to sex."

"Guilty as charged." He nipped the end of her finger and pulled it into his mouth. "I know I can't get enough of you."

He kissed her while thinking of the last five hours. They'd eaten a leisurely breakfast, then showered together. Keefe had dropped to his knees and brought her to an orgasm with his mouth. She'd made him climax with her hand, letting his cum splash on her belly. After that, he'd had to wash her body again...nice and slow, paying extra attention to her breasts and pussy.

By the time she'd stepped beneath the spray to rinse, he'd been hard again. They'd barely swiped the water from their bodies before he led her back to bed.

They'd talked. Keefe didn't think he'd ever opened up so easily with a woman. He'd been engaged to Jeania and hadn't told her some of the things he'd told Marci about his family and his life in California.

Now they lay naked on his couch, weak from making love again. A gentle rain had begun half an hour ago. Keefe could hear the patter of raindrops on the windows. The Seahawks game played in the background. He was warm, comfortable and satisfied.

Life didn't get any better.

"I probably should go," Marci said softly.

Keefe tightened his arms around her. He didn't want to let her go. "Not yet. It's barely three o'clock."

"I know, but I have things to do at home."

“Surely whatever you have to do can wait a few hours. Stay. I’ll give you some of my sweats to wear. We can make popcorn and watch the rest of the game. Then we’ll make love again.” He squeezed her buttocks. “How about it?”

She looked uncertain, so Keefe tried another tactic. He pulled her head closer so he could whisper in her ear. “I’ll make you come with my tongue again.”

She shook her head and chuckled. “You’re terrible.”

“That’s not what you said last night. Or in the shower. Or on my bed. Or here a few minutes ago.”

“Okay, I’ll admit you’re an incredible lover. But I have things to get ready for work tomorrow. Remember, I have a new VP starting in the morning.”

“Damn it. That new VP is messing up my plans.”

Marci kissed him gently. “I’ve had a wonderful time with you. But I need to get back to real life.”

Real life sucked a lot of the time. Here in his living room with Marci in his arms, Keefe could forget about the world outside his house.

“At least stay until the game is over. It won’t take five minutes to make the popcorn. Or I can fix us a sandwich or something if you’re hungry. I make a really good hamburger.”

Her stomach growled, and she blushed. Keefe laughed. “I guess that means a hamburger sounds good to you.”

“It’s been several hours since breakfast.”

“Yes, it has. Hamburgers coming up in a few minutes.”

* * * * *

Keefe sat on the edge of his bed and watched Marci slip into her dress. A knot formed in the pit of his stomach. He didn’t want her to go. She was the first woman he’d wanted sexually since he and Jeania broke up. When he’d invited her to spend the night with him, he’d assumed they’d have several rounds of sex and that would be it.

That's all he would want. He hadn't expected to enjoy her company so much, even while watching a football game.

"You could spend the night again."

She shook her head as she stepped into her shoes. "I can't. I have too much to do at home. Plus I plan to go in early tomorrow. I have some calls to make to the East Coast."

"So leave early from here." He took her hands and tugged her closer to him. "I want you to stay."

An apologetic look crossed her face and she smiled tenderly. "This was going to be one weekend of pleasure, remember?"

"The weekend isn't over. It's still Sunday."

Cradling his face in her hands, she leaned over and kissed him. "Walk me to the door?"

It appeared he didn't have a choice. He nodded. "Let's go through the garage. That's the shortest way to your car."

Keefe took her hand and led the way. At the open garage door, he looked out at the rain still falling. "You'll get wet."

"I won't melt."

"If you wait a while, it might stop."

"Now that the rain has started, it probably won't stop until May."

"I guess." Turning to face her, he took both her hands and raised them between their chests. "I had a really good time."

She smiled. "So did I."

"How about dinner tomorrow evening?"

Her smile quickly faded. "I told you I can't get involved with an employee."

"Dinner isn't involved. It's dinner."

"Keefe." She squeezed his hands. He could tell by the tone of her voice that he wouldn't like what she was about to say. "No strings or promises, remember? That's

what you said in my office last night. Nothing but pleasuring each other for the weekend.”

“What if I changed my mind and want more?”

“I can’t give you any more. I can’t risk stirring up any rumors.”

“Do you think your employees are going to believe I’m getting special treatment because I’m fucking the boss?”

“No.” She looked away from him and blew out a heavy breath. “It’s more complicated than that.”

“Marci.” He waited until she looked at him again before continuing. “I went through hell when Jeania and I broke up. Getting involved with another woman wasn’t anywhere in my plans, not for a long time. And I’m not saying I’m ready to get serious about a woman yet. But I enjoy being with you. I want to keep seeing you.”

“We’ll see each other at work. That’s all. I can’t be with you again.” She kissed him again. “Goodbye.”

Keefe stood with his hands in the back pockets of his jeans while she jogged to her car. Once inside with the windshield wipers going, she waved. He jerked his head to acknowledge her. She backed out of the driveway, looking at him once more before heading down the street. He watched until he could no longer see her car.

Loneliness seeped into every pore. He never would have believed he could feel something for another woman so quickly after Jeania. She’d been his whole world, until she tore that world apart. Loving another woman didn’t seem possible.

Until now.

He wasn’t in love with Marci. It was too soon for that. But he wondered if his feelings could grow into love if given the chance.

He wouldn’t give up on Marci until he knew for sure.

Chapter Eight

The gray, misty day fit Marci's mood perfectly. She listened to the *whoosh whoosh* of her windshield wipers as she searched for a parking spot close to Jennie's Java. Barely five hours of sleep last night meant she desperately needed a double shot of caffeine this morning.

Thoughts of Keefe had kept her awake until after one. She'd relived their time together, over and over, remembering every touch, every kiss, every thrust of his cock into her pussy. Her mind had continued to whirl with dreams of him and their lovemaking. She'd awoken before six, aroused and frustrated.

An SUV pulled away from the curb directly in front of her. Marci whipped her car into the space.

She stepped into Jennie's Java and glanced to her right. Molly sat at "their" table, pecking away on her laptop. The words must be flowing for her fingers were flying.

Marci ordered her double shot latte and made her way to Molly's table. The young redhead was so engrossed in her typing, she didn't notice when Marci sat down. Grinning, Marci reached over and tapped the lid of Molly's laptop with one fingernail. Molly jerked and whipped up her head.

"Good morning," Marci said, still grinning.

"Marci. Hi. Ohmigosh, how long have you been here?"

"Only a few seconds."

"I'm so sorry." She pressed a few buttons on her laptop and closed it. "I was lost in my own world."

"Apparently. Is the writing going well?"

Molly's smile could've lit up the entire room. "I'm having such a good time." She bobbed her eyebrows. "I'm in the middle of the first love scene."

"Hot?"

"Steaming."

Marci sipped her coffee. Molly's scene would be explosive if she patterned it after Marci's time with Keefe.

"How did the dress work?" Molly asked, breaking off a piece of her spice muffin.

"Perfectly. I'll definitely be back to buy more dresses."

She popped her bite of muffin into her mouth. "Did you make it to Lavender Lace?"

Marci nodded. "You were right. The store is incredible. I didn't take the time to really look around the whole store. I want to go back and do that."

"My sister is starting there next week. She's really excited."

The front door opened and Twyla swept in. She looked tall and regal, the same as last week. A smile broke over her face when she caught Marci looking at her. She waved, then headed for the counter.

"Twyla just came in," Marci told Molly.

"I see her." Molly sighed heavily. "I'd love to have her figure." She switched her attention to Marci. "Or yours. It would be so nice to have breasts."

"I'm not nearly as well endowed as Twyla."

"I'll take anything I can get. Two more cup sizes would be good."

Marci laughed. She really liked Molly. "Tell you what. I'll trade you some of my breasts for some of your curly hair."

"Deal."

Twyla walked toward their table, a coffee cup in one hand, a chocolate chip muffin in the other. "What's so funny?"

"I want some of your boobs," Molly said.

"You can have some." Twyla sat down and sighed. "I hate shopping for bras. I have to buy plain ones with lots of support. I'd rather buy lacy and sexy."

"Have you checked out the bras at that new lingerie store, Lavender Lace?"

"Never heard of it."

"Marci went there. Tell Twyla about it."

"It's a wonderful store, Twyla. Great selection, everything arranged by color. Even if you didn't find anything that works for you, it's worth the visit to see the hunk who helps the owner."

Molly's eyes widened. "There's a hunk in the store? Shawna didn't tell me that."

"A hunk in the store doesn't interest me." Twyla peeled the paper wrapping off her muffin. "I've sworn off men forever."

"Why?" Molly asked.

"I had the worst date ever Saturday night. I guess the guy figured he had the right to grope me since he paid for dinner."

Marci winced. She'd gone out with guys like that. She'd been tempted to break some fingers when they wandered where she didn't want them to wander.

"My friends mean well," Twyla said, tearing her muffin in half. "My divorce was final six months ago and they've been fixing me up with guys ever since. I say no and I get this 'but he's *perfect* for you' speech. Trust me, none of them has been perfect for me. That's why I've given up on men. No more blind dates."

"What about you, Marci?" Molly asked. "Did you have a date Saturday night?"

Marci took her time draining her cup, mostly to avoid Molly's question. "I...had a business dinner."

Molly's eyebrows disappeared into her curly bangs. "You wore that sexy dress to a *business* dinner?"

"What sexy dress?" Twyla asked.

“Marci came into Nordstrom Saturday, looking for a special dress. I helped her find one. Then I told her about Lavender Lace.” She looked back at Marci. “You said you went to Lavender Lace. Did you buy something to go with your dress?”

“A bra and thong set, stockings and a garter belt.”

Molly grinned. “Sexy!”

Marci looked from Molly to Twyla and back again to Molly. She had friends and acquaintances, but few she could talk to about anything. Peggy was one of her special friends, Anne Marshall another. Although she’d met these two women only days ago, she’d had coffee with them three times and instinctively knew she could trust them.

“My business dinner turned into more than a business dinner. We spent the night together.”

“And?” Molly prompted.

“And it was amazing. The best sex I’ve had in a really long time.”

“You say that as if it’s a bad thing,” Twyla said.

“It is.” She started to pick up her cup before she remembered it was empty. “I wasn’t totally honest with you when I said I work at Marshall Media. I not only work there, I’m the president.”

Molly’s eyebrows shot up again. “Wow.”

“And the guy you had dinner with is an employee.”

Marci nodded at Twyla’s comment. “My newest vice president. So you understand my dilemma.”

“I don’t,” Molly said, frowning. “So he’s a VP. What does that have to do with anything?”

“It’s unprofessional for Marci to date her employee.”

“Who made up that stupid rule?” Molly’s frown deepened. “If you two had a great time, what does it matter if he works for you?”

“Things are different in the corporate world, Molly. My employees look up to me. I can’t do anything that might destroy their trust or make them think I’m playing favorites.”

Molly wiggled her lips back and forth. “Yeah, I guess I can see that. Still, it’s the pits. A gal can’t always get great sex from a guy.”

“Amen to that,” Twyla muttered.

“I had a wonderful time with Keefe, but it’s over. I can’t be with him again. I have to accept that.”

“Sometimes that’s easier said than done,” Molly said softly.

* * * * *

The view outside her office window of the Olympic Range usually raised her spirits. Not today. Marci stared out the window, holding her coffee mug with both hands. The coffee had grown cool since she hadn’t drunk any of it.

She had to be professional when she saw Keefe today. She didn’t know how she’d do that.

“Good morning,” Keefe said behind her.

The sound of his voice made her heart skitter in her chest. Taking a breath for courage, Marci turned to face him. Her tongue almost fell to the floor. He wore navy pants and a blue sweater that brought out those icy blue eyes. He was clean shaven, unlike yesterday when he’d worn a day’s worth of whiskers. He’d told her he never shaved on Sunday. That was his day to be a bum.

The dark whiskers had made him look devilish and sexy.

“Good morning,” she said, her voice barely a whisper.

He stared at her, his gaze dipping briefly to her breasts before returning to her face. “You look lovely.”

She stopped herself before she smoothed her skirt. She’d worn a suit, as she always did to work, but had picked out the one that flattered her figure the most. “Thank you.”

He glanced around her empty office. "First one here, huh?"

"Yes. Most of my VPs straggle in here right at nine."

"I didn't want to be late my first day."

"I appreciate that."

End of small talk. Marci wanted so badly to step into his arms, lift her lips for his kiss. She cleared her throat and motioned toward her kitchenette. "Would you like coffee? Peggy brings the donuts and pastries, so they aren't here yet."

"Coffee sounds good." He nodded toward her mug. "Need a warm-up?"

"I let this cup get cold. I need a fresh one."

"I'll get it for you."

He stepped closer and reached for her mug. Their fingers touched. Marci sucked in a sharp breath. Keefe's fingers slid over the top of hers, his thumbs gently caressing.

"Marci."

"Good morning," Peggy said in a singsong voice.

Marci jumped back from Keefe as if he'd suddenly turned poisonous. Peggy stopped in her tracks, looking from Marci to Keefe and back again.

"Am I interrupting something?"

Marci knew her cheeks had to be flaming. "Of course not. Keefe and I were about to have coffee." She hurried on before Peggy could ask any more questions. "You brought the donuts. Good."

"I always bring the donuts. You know that."

"I hope you brought lots of chocolate. I'm in a chocolate mood today."

"Any reason why?"

Keefe moved to the kitchenette. Marci watched him turn over a thick black mug that bore Marshall Media's logo and fill it with regular coffee. He leaned against the cabinet and looked at her while sipping the hot brew.

Marci forced herself to turn away from him. Her gaze clashed with her friend's. Peggy continued to look between Marci and Keefe, a smirk touching her lips. "So, how was your weekend?" she asked Marci.

"Great."

"Anything...unusual happen?"

Her friend might suspect Marci had been with Keefe, but there was no way Marci would admit it. "No. Everything was great."

Peggy looked at Keefe. "How about you? Are you getting settled into the area?"

"I am. I even unpacked some boxes yesterday afternoon after the game."

"Moving is such a hard job. You should put out a call for help. I'm sure there are a lot of people on staff who would be willing to lend a hand."

"I might do that. Thanks."

"How about you, Marci?" Peggy asked, that smirk back on her lips. "Would you be willing to help Keefe?"

Two more of her vice presidents entered the room. Marci sighed with relief. The distraction meant she didn't have to answer Peggy's question. She hurried forward to greet Cierra and Leo. Dara, Harold and Larry entered the room moments later. They all wandered to the kitchenette for coffee and donuts. Marci knew from previous meetings that it would take everyone a good ten minutes to get settled into their chairs so she could start the meeting.

She stepped up to her place at the conference table and perused her agenda. It would be a long meeting, probably running into lunchtime. She jotted down a note to have Lauren order lunch around eleven-thirty.

Keefe joined her and held out a full mug of steaming coffee. "I hope I put enough cream in it."

He remembered how she liked her coffee. For some silly reason, his thoughtfulness brought a lump to her throat. "It's perfect. Thank you."

"You're welcome." He gazed at the conference table. "Which chair is mine, boss?"

"That one." She pointed to the chair to the left of hers.

"Okay." He glanced over his shoulder at the group of VPs huddled by the coffee area, then leaned closer to her. "I wish I could bend you over the table and lick your pussy."

He moved away from her before she had the chance to respond. That was good, because Marci had lost the ability to speak with his comment.

Peggy wandered by on the way to her chair. She stopped at Marci's side long enough to whisper, "'Don't even *think* about leaving today until we talk."

She took her place at the foot of the table, her hands folded on top of the agenda, her face set in the stern don't-mess-with-me expression Marci recognized as the one Peggy usually reserved for her husband. Or her children.

Marci caught herself before she twisted her hands together. That would be a dead giveaway to her friend that she had something to hide.

The rest of her vice presidents slowly made their way to their chairs. Marci waited until everyone was seated and settled before she spoke.

"Good morning. As you can see by my agenda, we have a lot to discuss today. You might as well think about what you'll want for lunch, because I promise you we'll be here a while.

"First, I want to introduce all of you to our newest vice president, Keefe Donegan."

Keefe nodded his head when everyone applauded.

"Keefe comes to us from Los Angeles and I consider us very lucky to have him. Keefe, the lady seated next to you is Cierra Adkins, VP of Marketing. Next to her is Larry Bagby of Public Relations. You already know Peggy. On the other side of Peggy is Dara Nash, in charge of Finance, Harold Pape of Legal and Contracts, and seated to my right is Leo Whitaker, our incredible IT guy. There isn't anything on a computer this man can't find or repair."

“So when do I get a raise?” Leo asked, humor shining in his eyes.

“Sorry, raises aren’t on the agenda today.”

The group laughed, and that helped Marci to relax. She was back in president mode, in charge of her employees. No more thinking about how Keefe’s sweater made his eyes look so blue, no more remembering his touch on her skin, his mouth on hers. Professional only.

If she told herself that at least fifty times today, she’d eventually believe it.

Chapter Nine

She was a total professional on the job. Keefe knew that ten minutes into the meeting. Marci controlled every aspect of Marshall Media, but relied heavily on her vice presidents' opinions and advice. She listened when someone spoke, wrote down what he or she said. She didn't put down anyone's ideas or overrule them simply because she was the boss.

His respect for her grew with each hour that passed.

His desire for her grew too. She'd worn her hair down today, held with a clip at her nape. Soft tendrils fell over her left shoulder. If he reached out, he could twirl a tendril around his finger and pull her closer for his kiss.

Keeping his mind on business hadn't been easy. Images from Saturday night and yesterday would flash through his mind without warning. His cock swelled when he remembered the way Marci had taken it in her mouth, the way she'd ridden him here in her office and in his living room. Those perfect breasts had bounced with her movements, her nipples hard and begging to be sucked.

He was thankful the table hid his lap.

Shortly after two o'clock, Marci adjourned the meeting. Keefe gathered up his paperwork, Marci's handouts and the legal pad on which he'd made copious notes. A gentle touch on his left arm made him turn his head. Cierra smiled at him.

"I want to personally welcome you to Marshall Media, Keefe."

"Thank you."

"I think you'll be an asset to the company." She slowly ran her fingertips up and down his arm. "If there's anything I can do to help you, just let me know."

He couldn't mistake the interest in her eyes. Cierra was a beautiful woman with shoulder-length dark hair and a curvy body. He didn't doubt she'd say yes if he asked her out. Two weeks ago, he might have considered that. Now, after being with Marci, dating another woman held no appeal at all.

"I appreciate that, Cierra."

She gathered up her own paperwork, then gave him a seductive smile. "Remember if you need anything, anything at all, my door is open."

"I'll remember."

He watched her saunter toward the door. She glanced at him over her shoulder before leaving the office.

Peggy walked up to him, a teasing grin on her lips. "Looks like you made a conquest."

"She was being friendly."

"Ha! Cierra doesn't do friendly when it comes to men. Cierra does conquest. Unless you want her claws in you, I suggest you stay away from her."

"I'm not interested in Cierra."

Keefe looked at Marci. She stood by the window, speaking to someone on the phone. If he hung around until she was through, maybe he could convince her to have dinner with him.

"Do you need to speak to Marci?" Peggy asked. "I have some things to go over with her."

No matter how much he wanted to be with Marci, he wouldn't interfere with her job. "It isn't important. I'll catch up with her when she isn't busy." He smiled at Peggy. "See you later."

He stopped in the doorway and looked back at Marci. She was still on the phone, but gazing at him. He dipped his head and left.

* * * * *

Marci drew out her phone conversation as long as possible. She knew Peggy would pounce as soon as she hung up. She'd never been able to lie to her friend, and didn't want to admit she'd broken her rule about getting involved with an employee and slept with Keefe.

Luckily, Anne Marshall was in a talkative mood today. Marci called the owner of Marshall Media every Monday after the meeting to give an update. Anne always listened, praised Marci for her good work and said she'd talk to her next week.

Peggy approached her desk as Marci hung up the phone. "Anne okay?"

Marci nodded. "She's going to Arizona tomorrow to visit her son. She said she hasn't decided yet how long she'll be gone."

"With her money, she doesn't have to worry about budgeting a trip."

"That's true."

"So." Peggy sat in one of the chairs before Marci's desk and crossed her legs. "Did you have a good time with Keefe?"

Denying she'd gone out with Keefe would be useless. Marci sat in her own chair behind her desk. "We had dinner together Saturday."

"And?"

"And what?"

"I saw the way you two looked at each other. Don't try to tell me the evening ended with dinner."

Marci clasped her hands together on top of her desk. "I went home with him."

Peggy grinned. "Was he good?"

"Amazing."

Peggy's grin widened. She snuggled down in the chair as if she had no intention of leaving for a long time. "Details. Tell me *everything*."

"I'm thirsty. How about you?"

Marci stood and walked to the small refrigerator before Peggy had a chance to answer the question. Assuming it would be yes, she took out two Pepsis.

"You do realize I'm not leaving your office until I get answers."

"Yeah, I realize that." She handed Peggy one of the cold sodas. She popped the top on hers and took a long drink. "I really screwed up."

"Why? You said he was amazing."

"He was. He is. He's an amazing lover and a wonderful man. Kind, charming, funny, considerate." She sat in the chair next to Peggy. "He said he wants to keep seeing me."

Peggy opened her can of soda. "I fail to see the problem."

"I *told* you the problem."

"You told me some bullshit about not getting involved with an employee."

"It isn't bullshit, Peggy. It isn't professional for me to date an employee." She laughed without a trace of humor. "I shouldn't talk to you about my personal life. That isn't professional either."

"That's even more bullshit, Marci. You and I were coworkers and friends before you ever became my boss. You know you can tell me anything and it'll never be repeated."

"Yes, I know that. You're a very special friend." She ran her thumb through the condensation on the can. "I can't get involved with Keefe. You know what happened with Ben. Everyone in the building knows what happened with Ben."

"That's because he was an asshole and made sure everyone knew. He never should've told anyone what the two of you did in private."

Marci looked down at the can of soda resting on her thigh. Heat filled her cheeks to remember how humiliated she'd been by Ben's betrayal...and how hurt.

Peggy squeezed Marci's arm. "Keefe isn't Ben. I doubt if he would ever publicly embarrass you the way Ben did."

"He's six years younger than I am."

"So what? That sounds like a bonus to me. You're at your sexual peak right now. A younger man can satisfy you a lot better than an older one."

"William is two years older than you. You told me he's an incredible lover."

"He is, but I've had twenty-one years to train him. It wasn't easy at times, believe me. Men can be *really* dense when it comes to what a woman needs in bed."

Lauren stepped through the doorway. "Marci, Tyler Wilson is on line two."

"Thanks, Lauren," Marci said over her shoulder. She looked back at Peggy. "I need to get that."

"I know you do." She gave Marci's arm another quick squeeze. "We'll talk more later."

Once Peggy left, Marci took a deep breath and blew it out slowly. Pushing thoughts of Keefe out of her mind, she picked up the telephone receiver.

"Mr. Wilson, this is Marci Bayne. How can I help you?"

* * * * *

Keefe shook his head in amazement as he gazed at the figures on the spreadsheets fanned out over his desk. "And you do all this for every project?" he asked Dara Nash.

She nodded. "I compute every cost, right down to the paper clips."

"I'm impressed. This is a lot of work."

"Marci has no problem with a generous budget, as long as we stick to it. If costs start going over, she wants to know why and what we can do to get back on track."

"Do projects go over budget a lot?"

"Not a lot, but it does happen. So many factors go into making a movie. Some we have no control over, like the weather. Sometimes Mother Nature likes to show us she's still boss."

Keefe chuckled. "She can be a bitch, huh?"

“And then some. Plus there’s always the chance that people won’t like the movie. Not even huge stars stop the box office flops.”

“Like *Genius Takes All*?”

Dara winced. “Don’t remind me. That one barely paid for the paper clips, much less anything else. Luckily, that’s a rarity. Marci is wonderful at spotting a hit. She’s an incredible president.”

Finally, Keefe had found someone willing to talk about Marci. He knew he had to be subtle with his questions, though, or Dara would wonder why he was so curious. “You’ve worked with Marci a while?”

“Almost ten years. I was so glad when she became president. No one has cared more about this company or the employees than Marci. Anne—Conrad’s widow—pretty much handed the company to Marci and said to run it the way she wanted. Profits have steadily risen the last two years since she became president. Morale is high, employees are happy. It’s a great place to work.”

He glanced at Dara’s short silver hair. A few laugh lines fanned out from her eyes. He guessed her to be in her mid-fifties. “Do you have any plans to retire soon?”

“No way.” She grinned. “I like the bennies too much.” Her grin faded and she shrugged. “I’m a widow. My children are grown with children of their own. I kill anything I try to grow, so gardening is out. I have no patience with sewing or needlework. What would I do if I didn’t work?”

“Write the Great American Novel?”

She laughed, a melodious sound that warmed Keefe. Her laugh reminded him of his mother’s. “I’ll stick with numbers.”

He looked up at the rap on his open office door. He caught himself before he smiled when he saw Marci.

“Keefe, I just got off the phone with Tyler Wilson. Please come back to my office when you’re through with Dara.”

“Sure.”

Once she left, Keefe ordered his heart to slow down. He didn't want to give Dara any hint of the way he felt about Marci.

“These are copies,” Dara said, “so I'll leave them for you.”

“Thanks. I appreciate it.”

She smiled and stood. Halfway to the door, she turned back to him. The smile had disappeared from her face.

“You might hear some talk about Marci regarding...personal things. Please don't judge her on gossip.”

“I would never do that.”

“Good.” She smiled again. “I like you, Keefe. I think you'll be an asset to Marshall Media.”

Keefe remained in his chair, thinking about what the accountant had told him. Whatever gossip had traveled around the office about Marci must have been very hurtful to her.

He didn't want to do anything to cause her further pain.

She'd been honest with him from the beginning about not getting involved with an employee, yet he'd pushed her until she'd given in to him. He had no doubt she'd enjoyed their lovemaking. So had he. Sex with Marci had been intense and beautiful. But a relationship had to be based on more than sex. There had to be thoughtfulness and consideration too...something he hadn't given her.

He wouldn't push her again, no matter how much he wanted her.

Keefe straightened the spreadsheets and stuck them back in the folder Dara had brought, then headed for Marci's office.

She was pecking on her computer keyboard when he tapped on her open door. She motioned for him to come in with one hand while she continued to tap with the other.

“I'm almost done.”

“No problem.”

He sat in one of the chairs before her desk and waited for her to finish. She gave a final click of her mouse and swiveled her chair to face him.

“I spoke to Tyler Wilson a few minutes ago. He wants to meet in person to discuss a movie made from his book. I just made our plane reservations. We leave Thursday morning at nine from Sea-Tac and come back early Sunday. I haven’t made hotel reservations yet. I’m not sure if there’s a hotel near Wilson. He lives out in the boonies of B.C. close to Prince George.”

“There might be lodges in the area instead of hotels.”

“I didn’t think about that.” She scribbled something on a notepad on her desk. “I’ll have Lauren check on it.”

“Is there anything you need me to do before we leave?”

“Have you read the book yet?”

“I started it last night. I’m on the third or fourth chapter.”

“What do you think?”

“It’s great. He’s a talented writer.”

“I’m glad you like it.” She sounded relieved, as if it meant a lot to her for him to like the book the way she did. “Do you think you’ll finish it by Thursday?”

“Probably. If not, I’ll bring it with me and finish it on the plane.”

“Bring it with you anyway. We can discuss plot points and location. He set the book close to where he lives. It’s possible we might want to shoot in B.C. That’s why I want to stay an extra couple of days, to look over the area.” She jotted something else on her notepad. “I’m going to be in and out of the office tomorrow and Wednesday. If you think of something important, make a note of it.” She tore off the paper she’d written on and wrote something on a fresh piece. “Here are my home and cell numbers. Call me any time if you have questions.”

She slid the paper across the desk to him. Keefe picked it up and glanced at the numbers before folding it in half. "Will do."

"I need to talk to Cierra, unless you have questions now."

"I'm good."

"Great. I'll forward all the flight and lodging info to you as soon as I know it."

"Okay."

Keefe stood and started to turn and leave but hesitated, unsure whether or not to say what he wanted to say to her.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

"Yes. I owe you an apology."

Her eyebrows drew together in a small frown. "For what?"

"For the comment I made earlier about bending you over the table. I never should've said that. I'm sorry."

Her frown faded and a gentle smile touched her lips. "Thank you," she said softly.

"You told me you only wanted a professional relationship and I crossed the line. I won't do it again."

"I appreciate that."

He gazed into her beautiful blue eyes and thought of how badly he wanted to kiss her, hold her. Instead, he tilted his head in goodbye and left.

Chapter Ten

Marci checked another item off her list. She and Keefe would be leaving tomorrow morning for British Columbia, so she had to finish all her errands today. Only three things left and she could go home to pack.

She rounded the corner, and saw the sign for Lavender Lace. Her mind flashed to Saturday night in her office. Keefe's eyes had flared when he'd seen her sexy lingerie. He'd told her later at his house that he didn't think there was anything sexier on a woman than a garter belt and stockings.

She needed more stockings. The ones she'd bought at Lavender Lace were so silky and sheer, she couldn't tell she was wearing any stockings. She should go in the store while she was here and buy more. She didn't have to buy anything else, even though she'd love to have more of the demi-bra and thong sets.

Not that she planned to show them to anyone.

Keefe was off limits. She knew that, and so did he. She'd always bought pretty lingerie for herself. Just because a man wouldn't see it didn't mean she couldn't wear it for herself.

Folding her list in half, she tucked it into her pocket and pushed open the door to Lavender Lace.

* * * * *

"Wasn't the blonde lass in here Saturday?" Llyr asked Ashlyn.

She looked up from her pad where she was jotting notes and gazed at Marci. "Yes. She bought stockings and the lace-trimmed royal blue set."

"Aye. Now I remember."

"Her name is Marci Bayne. She had a dinner date Saturday night."

"It must've been a success if she's back for more of yer frilly things."

Ashlyn reached out to Marci, but couldn't get an exact read of her feelings. "Not exactly. I sense she's upset. I could tell more if I touched her."

"Go to her. I'll help the other two ladies."

Ashlyn smiled. Llyr had been a huge help to her the last three weeks. He'd never complained once, even though she knew he'd enjoy many things more than helping her in a lingerie store. She laid her hand on his arm. "Thank you."

"Anything for ye, lass. Ye know that."

Yes, she did know that. She also knew he would leave her soon. He'd stayed longer this time than he ever had. They'd spent days here in the store and nights in each other's arms. She'd grown used to waking up beside him every morning. She didn't know how she'd cope when he left.

Marci was at the red display when Ashlyn walked up to her. "Looking for something more daring?"

A hint of pink filled Marci's cheeks. Ashlyn pressed her lips together to keep from smiling. "No. I mean, red isn't a good color for me."

"Red is a good color for every woman. It depends on the shade and hue." She tapped her chin as she studied Marci. "Cerise would look beautiful on you. Or maybe fuchsia."

"How do you keep track of so many colors?"

Ashlyn smiled. "Because I love doing it." She touched the small of Marci's back and pointed at the display to their right. "Let's look over here."

Sadness flowed from Marci to Ashlyn. Whatever had happened on her date hadn't pleased Marci. Or perhaps whatever had happened *after* her date hadn't pleased her.

"I didn't come in for more underwear," Marci said. "I came in for stockings. I love the ones I bought here."

"I'm glad to hear that. But as long as you're here, you might as well see some of my newest items. They're guaranteed to make your guy crazy with lust."

"I don't have a guy."

"I find that hard to believe. You're a lovely woman."

Marci remained silent, which prompted Ashlyn to push a little more. Her entire reason for opening the store was to help women find love. She could sense the turmoil inside Marci. "There isn't anyone who would love to see you in sexy lingerie?"

Still silent, head lowered, Marci fingered a pair of fuchsia panties. Women usually opened up to Ashlyn after a few minutes of conversation. For some reason Ashlyn didn't understand, Marci was holding back and not saying how she felt.

She took a step closer, mentally pouring her energy over Marci in hopes she'd begin to talk. "You had a dinner date Saturday night. It didn't go well?"

Marci shrugged. "It was okay."

Ashlyn sensed it had been much more than okay. She decided to try a different tactic. "I'm sorry you were disappointed. Sometimes the guys we think will be wonderful turn out to be idiots."

Marci jerked up her head. "No, that's not it. Keefe isn't an idiot. He's..." She stopped and bit her lower lip.

Now that she'd opened up a little, Ashlyn wouldn't give up. Marci cared far more for Keefe than she wanted to admit. "Keefe? That's a good Irish name."

"His father is Irish."

Ashlyn leaned closer to her. "If he's as lusty as Llyr, you're a lucky woman."

"You told me you and Llyr are friends."

"We are. Very special friends."

"Oh."

Silence again. Ashlyn didn't think she'd ever had as much trouble getting a woman to open up. Usually, simply standing next to a woman would make her pour out her

heart. Ashlyn couldn't help Marci if she didn't know the problem. "If Keefe isn't an idiot, then what's wrong?"

"It's complicated."

"Nothing is too complicated where love is concerned."

Marci couldn't have looked more surprised if Ashlyn had thrown water on her. "I don't love Keefe. I barely know him."

Ashlyn picked up the pair of panties Marci had been touching. "Wearing something like this will let him get to know you in a hurry."

She felt better when Marci chuckled. "That's true."

"Or maybe you'd like something the shade of an Irish hillside."

"Or maybe both."

Ashlyn smiled. It pleased her to feel the sadness fade away from Marci's body. "There you go. A woman should always pamper herself."

"I agree with that."

"Then let me show you the green display. Okay?"

Marci nodded. "Please."

* * * * *

The sun shone in a brilliant blue sky when Keefe drove his car into the parking garage at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. He'd always believed that it rained constantly in the Pacific Northwest, despite Linsey and Davin telling him that wasn't true. He'd quickly learned after moving here that his friends had been right and he'd been wrong.

He took the elevator to the fourth floor. Marci had said she'd meet him at the main terminal, right inside the entrance. Hefting his carryon higher on his shoulder, he exited the elevator and walked across the skybridge into the terminal.

He found her exactly where she said she'd be. He stood still for a moment and admired her. It was the first time he'd seen her dressed casually in slim jeans and a light brown v-necked sweater. She held several sheets of paper in her hands, apparently engrossed in whatever was on them...so engrossed she didn't see the men giving her a second glance as they walked past her.

She lifted her head and looked directly at him, as if she felt him watching her. It took her a few seconds longer than Keefe thought it should have for her to wave. Grabbing the handle of her small rolling suitcase, she met him halfway.

"Good morning," she said.

Marci smiled, but Keefe thought he detected a hint of trepidation in her expression. Perhaps she was nervous about the plane ride. Keefe knew a lot of people didn't like to fly. "Good morning."

"I printed out our boarding passes so we can go straight to the gate, unless you need to check your bag."

"No, I'm taking it on the plane. I learned a long time ago to pack light."

"I try to. Mr. Wilson told me not to dress up for him and suggested jeans and sweaters." She glanced down at herself and grinned. "I took his advice."

Keefe hadn't spoken to Mr. Wilson, but had opted for jeans and a sweater too. He believed in comfort when he flew.

He fell into step behind Marci to the security checkpoint. After they were standing in line, Marci handed him his ticket and boarding pass. Keefe glanced at both, noting it would be a six-hour flight with one stop in Vancouver.

"Long flight. I didn't realize how far Prince George is from Seattle."

"We'll be working a lot of that time." She patted the tote bag on her shoulder. "I asked Mr. Wilson if he'd be willing to email me a copy of his book so I could print it out and make notes. He did. Lauren made two copies for us."

"Smart idea."

"I went through some of it last night and made several notations. I want your opinion on them."

"I'm good at giving my opinion."

He grinned, and she returned it. "I haven't met a man yet who wasn't willing to give me his opinion."

"That's because we believe we're always right."

Keefe followed Marci through the metal detector and picked up his bag from the conveyor belt. "Which way, boss?"

"Are you hungry? I didn't have breakfast."

"Me either."

She glanced at her watch. "We have ninety minutes until our flight, so that's plenty of time to eat."

"Lead the way."

Keefe followed Marci to a full-service restaurant a few yards from the security checkpoint. He waited until she sat, then slid into the booth opposite her. He nodded when the waitress offered coffee. Several cups and he might wake up. He'd tossed and turned most of the night...partly in anticipation of this trip, and partly in dread.

Sometimes he'd get a gentle whiff of Marci's flowery perfume, and his gut would tighten with the need to take her in his arms. Spending the weekend with Marci and knowing he couldn't touch her wouldn't be easy.

"I am ravenous this morning," Marci said, opening her menu. "Flying always makes me hungry."

No matter how much he wanted her, he'd promised her he wouldn't cross the line between professional and personal. He meant to keep that promise.

He opened his menu and located the breakfast items. "Yeah, me too."

"I think I'll have ham and eggs." Marci closed her menu and laid it on the end of the table. "Of course, the eggs won't be nearly as good as the ones you made..." She stopped. Her gaze flew to his, her eyes wide. "I didn't mean... That is..."

She stopped again, obviously at a loss as to what to say. Keefe tried to ease her discomfort by smiling. "Hey, it's okay. We had a wild weekend together. We both enjoyed it. Now it's time to get back to work." He gestured toward the tote on the seat next to her. "Why don't we look at Mr. Wilson's book while we wait for breakfast?"

A look of relief crossed her face. "Okay."

* * * * *

Marci liked to fly, but more often than not fell asleep during the flight. Something about the constant hum of the engines lulled her to sleep. Not this time. She and Keefe talked practically nonstop for the entire trip.

They'd spent so much time discussing plot points of Tyler Wilson's book at breakfast that they had to hurry to catch their plane. Once onboard and settled, she and Keefe took out their copies again and got back to work.

A passage in the book often led to a memory of something in one of their lives. The heroine in the book had a ditzy sister who reminded Keefe of his younger sister. Whenever the heroine's sister did something dumb, Keefe would tell Marci another story about his sister. She'd study him while he talked, noting the way his eyes would light up when he spoke about his family. He obviously loved them very much.

How lucky he was to be close to his siblings. She wished things could've been different for her and Mary.

Her sister had made her decision ten years ago when their parents died. She could've done the decent thing, or the selfish thing. At a time when they should've leaned on each other, comforted each other in their loss, Mary had chosen selfish.

The landing announcement came over the speaker. Marci quickly pushed all thoughts of her sister from her mind. Dwelling on the past wouldn't solve anything.

Keefe began to gather up his paperwork. "What's the plan?"

"Mr. Wilson lives about an hour's drive outside Prince George. We'll pick up our rental car at the airport and drive to his house. He gave me detailed instructions in an email. The lodge where we'll stay is about fifteen miles from him."

"We're in Canada. It isn't miles, it's kilometers."

"I can't compute miles to kilometers in my head."

"Fifteen miles is about twenty-four kilometers."

Marci frowned. "How did you do that so fast?"

He grinned. "Because men are always right."

She rolled her eyes and tried not to laugh. "The next thing you'll want is for me to call you Mr. Knowledge."

"Now there's an idea."

"Forget it."

"You're no fun."

It was getting harder for her to hold back her laughter, especially when she saw the humor in his eyes.

He was so much fun.

He stepped into the aisle when the plane stopped and reached up to take their bags from the overhead bin. She was blessed with a glimpse of his hair-dusted belly before he lowered his arms again. She glanced toward the front of the plane. The young stewardess stared at Keefe with lust in her eyes.

An emotion surged inside Marci, one she hadn't felt in a long time—jealousy. She wanted to scratch out that stewardess's eyes for daring to look at Keefe.

"You okay?" Keefe asked.

"Yes. Of course." Marci quickly picked up her tote and stepped into the aisle in front of Keefe.

They were forced to stop next to the galley when someone retrieved something from a closet close to the door. The stewardess inched closer to Keefe and turned her brightest smile on him.

“Did you enjoy your flight?”

“It was great. Thanks.”

“Will you be in Prince George long?”

Marci turned her body so she could see Keefe’s face. He wore a polite smile, not one of interest.

“Until Sunday. We’re here on business.”

The stewardess gave Marci a haughty glance, the same kind she might give a bug she was about to squash, then turned her attention back to Keefe. Her smile clearly said she’d take him right there in the galley if he said yes. “If you’d like to know more about the area, I’d be glad to help.” She pressed a small piece of paper in his hand.

Marci curled her fingers into her palms to keep from snatching the paper away from Keefe. He seemed to be embarrassed by the woman’s forwardness, but he didn’t refuse the paper.

“Thanks, but like I said, we’re here on business.”

“If you change your mind, I’ll be happy to give you a tour.”

Yeah, probably of your bedroom.

He gave her another polite smile, then fell in step behind Marci when she moved forward. She shouldn’t be surprised at the stewardess. Some women at Sea-Tac had literally stopped in their tracks and stared at Keefe as he walked by. Marci couldn’t blame them. If there was such a thing as a hotness scale, Keefe would be rated way at the top.

At the first trashcan they came to, Keefe threw away the paper with the stewardess’s phone number.

“Are you sure you want to throw that away?” Marci asked.

"I'm sure."

"She's pretty." Saying that made Marci's stomach turn. "She seemed very interested in you."

"This is a business trip. I'm not here to pick up women. Or have them pick up me."

She hiked her tote up on her shoulder and waited for him to say more. He didn't. Apparently it was time to change the subject. "Let's find the rental car place."

Chapter Eleven

Keefe accepted the rental car keys and paperwork from the clerk behind the counter. He moved aside so the next person in line could be helped. Leaning on the end of the counter, he watched Marci talking on her cell phone. She took a few steps, looked up at the ceiling, retraced her steps. She frowned. Whoever was on the phone must be telling Marci something she didn't want to hear.

Still frowning, she slapped her phone shut. She took two steps toward him when it rang again. Rolling her eyes, she opened the cell and turned away from him.

The life of a corporate president couldn't be easy. Keefe was happy in his VP position. That was as high as he wanted to go up the corporate ladder.

This call didn't upset her as much as the last one. She wasn't smiling when she ended the call, but at least she wasn't frowning.

"Trouble?" he asked when she walked up to him.

"A delay in filming of our current project. One of the major co-stars went to the hospital with appendicitis."

"Ouch."

"Yeah. I'm sorry he's ill, but we're already running behind schedule due to some equipment failure and this doesn't help." She tossed her hair behind her shoulder. "And speaking of ill, the second call was from Tyler Wilson. He's better now, but was throwing up earlier today. He asked if we could postpone our meeting until tomorrow. I told him that wouldn't be a problem."

"No, of course not." So that meant they had an entire evening to themselves. "What do you want to do?"

"I think we should check in at the lodge first. Then maybe we could drive around a bit and scout out the area."

"We only have a couple of hours of sunlight left."

"That's a couple of hours we can look."

"Okay." He jiggled the car keys in his hand. "Do you want me to drive or would you rather do it?"

"You drive. That'll let me look and take notes."

* * * * *

The sun had dropped behind the horizon when Keefe once again pulled into the parking lot of the lodge. As per Marci's suggestion, they'd checked into their rooms first. With map in hand and suggestions from the lodge's manager, they'd driven off to get a feel of the area.

Keefe had fallen in love with the beauty of the Pacific Northwest the first time he'd visited his friends in Seattle. It wouldn't be any hardship for him to spend time in British Columbia while scouting out places to shoot Wilson's movie, if Wilson agreed to the movie.

Marci met Keefe at the hood of the vehicle. Her eyes sparkled with excitement. "This is perfect! We'll definitely shoot a lot of the exterior scenes in the area."

"Interior shots locally or on the set?"

"I don't know yet. We'll have to check out more of the area. I thought we'd take Saturday and explore."

"Sounds good to me."

He fell into step beside Marci as she walked toward the lodge's entrance. "Why aren't we talking to Wilson's agent instead of meeting directly with him?"

"He doesn't have an agent. He's an attorney, or was until a couple of years ago when he started writing full-time. He represents himself."

Keefe pushed open the front door and let Marci enter before him. "Might not be a smart thing for him to do. Just because he's an attorney doesn't mean he knows the ins and outs of publishing."

"He hasn't done badly for himself. He negotiated a high five-figure advance for the book he's writing now."

She took her room key from her tote, opened the door and stepped into her room. She left the door open, as if she expected Keefe to follow her. He hesitated a few seconds, then entered her room and closed the door behind him.

A quick glance showed him her room had a small seating area and fireplace that his didn't. Otherwise, the furnishings were the same.

"How about if we order room service?" Marci asked, laying her tote on the table close to the fireplace. "We could eat while we work. Unless you're sick of looking at Wilson's book already."

"I'd better not be since I'll be looking at it for a while. Yeah, eating in is fine."

"Thank you," Marci said, the relief evident in her voice. "I don't feel like going out again, not even to the restaurant here in the lodge."

She located the room service menu on the small desk in the corner. "There isn't a huge selection, but what's available looks good." She walked back to stand next to him. "What are you hungry for?"

You, he wanted to say, but he didn't think she'd appreciate that. This was business, not pleasure. He had to remember that. "A steak would be good. Medium rare."

"Baked potato with the works and a nice red wine?"

"Perfect."

"I'll order it while you get your printout of Wilson's book."

Keefe crossed the hall to his own room. Closing the door behind him, he leaned against it and blew out a deep breath. He'd known being close to Marci wouldn't be easy.

He hadn't suspected it would be torture.

There had been casual touches all day—a hand on the small of her back to guide her, a bump of their shoulders on the airplane, a brush of their fingers when they both reached for the same thing. Twice, he had to stop himself from entwining their fingers and bringing her hand to his mouth to kiss.

Marci was a very lovely woman and he wanted her in his bed, but his attraction was so much more than sexual. He liked talking to her, listening to her. She was bright, intelligent. She had to be strong to run a large corporation, yet he saw her vulnerable side too. She'd told him she didn't have any family in the area. He wondered who she leaned on when times were rough for her.

He wanted to be that man.

As long as he worked for Marshall Media, he couldn't have a relationship with Marci. She wouldn't allow it.

Keefe located his printout of Wilson's book and headed back to Marci's room. He found her sitting at the table, her printout and legal pad in front of her. She looked up as he walked toward her.

"Dinner will be here in about half an hour."

"Great." He took the chair opposite her. "All that clomping around in the woods made me hungry."

"Speaking of the woods, look on page 209 of your printout. The area with the creek we looked at would be perfect for the chase scene."

"I agree." He flipped to the page she'd indicated. "You're doing a lot of work for a project that isn't finalized yet."

"Tyler Wilson is going to love our ideas. All this work will be a great head start for the script, and the director. He'll make changes, of course, but he'll know the vision I have for the film."

"You believe in positive thinking."

"Always."

"Did your parents instill that sunny outlook?"

A tender smile crossed Marci's lips. "My mom. She was the eternal optimist."

Keefe laid down his pen and leaned back in his chair. "I rambled about my family on the plane. Tell me about your folks."

He wasn't sure if she'd open up to him since it took her several moments to speak again. "They were the best, and died much too young."

"What happened?"

"They were flying back from a trip to Georgia with two friends in a small plane. It went down in the mountains of Colorado. Everyone on board was killed."

Keefe winced. How horrible for her to lose both parents at once. "I'm sorry."

"They died upon impact, but they must have had time to realize what was happening. For months and months, I thought about how scared they were before the crash."

"Hey." He reached across the table and squeezed her hand, wanting to chase the sadness from her eyes. "They were together. They drew strength from each other. That's what you should remember." He rubbed his thumb over the back of her hand. "Tell me a happy memory about them."

"I have so many, I wouldn't know which one to pick."

"How about...best birthday present?"

Marci smiled. "That's easy. I got a red bike for my sixth birthday. I rode that puppy all day and was back on it first thing the next day."

Keefe chuckled. He could easily picture a six-year-old Marci with long braids tooling around town on her red bicycle. "Best Christmas present?"

"That one is tougher to answer. Mom and Dad always went all out at Christmas."

"Okay, you can skip that one. How about first boy you ever kissed?"

"Rodney Duncan." She wrinkled her nose. "He had the worst breath ever."

Keefe cleared his throat to keep from laughing out loud. "How old were you when ol' Rodney laid one on you?"

"Thirteen. We were in the school library, working on an essay for history class. I had no idea he was going to kiss me. I don't think *he* had any idea he was going to kiss me. He turned every shade of red after it happened."

"Did you like it?"

"Nope. Other girls raved about kissing. I didn't understand the big deal."

"Maybe those other girls didn't kiss guys with bad breath."

"Maybe." She smiled tenderly as she looked across the room, obviously lost in a pleasant memory. "I liked kissing the next guy. Of course, I was older and wiser by then."

"So you were...?"

"Fourteen." She looked back at Keefe. "Rodney's older brother, Gerald. He was sixteen. I learned that kissing was pretty cool after all."

The opening couldn't have been more perfect for Keefe to tell Marci how much he enjoyed kissing her. He knew that would be a very stupid thing to say.

"How old were you when you first kissed a girl?" Marci asked.

"Eleven."

Her eyes widened in surprise. "*Eleven?* Did you even know what kissing was at eleven?"

"I didn't have to know. *She* did."

A knock on the door stopped Marci before she said anything else. "Hold that thought. I want to know more about the *she* who initiated you in kissing."

She slipped her hand from beneath his and rose. That's when it registered to Keefe that he'd been holding her hand the entire time they talked. It had felt so natural, he hadn't realized that she never pulled away from him.

He moved their work to the side of the table while Marci opened the door for their dinner. She chatted with the waiter while he transferred their meal from the tray to the table. He'd noticed how friendly Marci was with everyone they were around. She wasn't the least bit snobbish, which she could easily be in her position of power.

His admiration for her grew the more time he spent with her.

Once the waiter left, Keefe opened the bottle of Pinot Noir. Marci removed the metal covers from their plates. The food's aroma made Keefe's stomach growl.

"Yeah, me too," Marci said, covering her stomach with one hand. "I didn't realize how hungry I am."

He splashed wine into their glasses. "A toast." He held out his glass toward her. "To a successful venture. May *In The Mountain's Shadow* earn millions for Marshall Media."

"I'll drink to that."

She touched her glass to his and took a sip. "Very good. I've never had wine produced in British Columbia. I thought as long as we're here, we should try it."

"I'm always willing to try something new."

"What's the weirdest thing you've eaten?" Marci asked, breaking her roll in half.

Keefe swallowed his bite of steak and washed it down with a sip of wine. "I'm not sure about weird, but maybe out of the ordinary. Davin is a huge hunter. He's always out in the woods the first day of hunting season. I've eaten all kinds of meat at his house – venison, elk, moose, bear."

"I've had venison, but none of that other stuff."

He could tell by her tone and the way her nose wrinkled that she had no intention of ever trying them either. "Where's your sense of adventure?"

"I've tried just about every kind of chocolate available. My sense of adventure is fine."

Keefe chuckled, then returned to his meal. They ate in silence for several moments before Marci spoke again.

“You were going to tell me about the girl who kissed you when you were eleven.”

“I was?”

Keefe tried to sound innocent. Marci’s frown proved he didn’t succeed. “What girl would kiss an eleven-year-old boy?” she asked.

“A sixteen-year-old babysitter who was showing off to her girlfriend.” Keefe wiped his hands on his napkin and laid it next to his plate. “I was a homely kid. Glasses, crooked teeth, skinny. Guys picked on me, girls made fun of me.” He shrugged one shoulder. “The usual story for a kid who didn’t belong to the ‘in’ group.”

He splashed more wine into each of their glasses. “My folks went out to dinner with friends, my other brother and sisters were all at their friends’ houses. Belinda and her girlfriend—I don’t remember her name—stayed with me. Belinda rammed her tongue down my throat, then made stupid gagging noises like I’d poisoned her.”

“What a little bitch.”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. I got back at her though. The next time I saw Belinda, I was eighteen. She was in the process of her second divorce. Thanks to braces, contacts and football, I wasn’t a nerdy kid anymore. She tried really hard to get me into bed.” He grinned. “I kissed her, then made stupid gagging noises. End of seduction.”

Marci laughed and saluted him with her wineglass. “Revenge can be sweet.”

“It certainly can.”

She swirled the wine in her glass before taking a sip. “How old were you when you kissed a girl you wanted to kiss?”

“Fifteen. That’s when my braces came off. I took full advantage of my new look.”

“I’m sure you did.”

“I had to make up for lost time.” Picking up his wineglass, he leaned back in his chair. “Sixteen.”

A look of confusion crossed her face. "Sixteen?"

"That's how old I was the first time I had sex."

She blew out a disgusted breath. "I wasn't going to ask you that."

"But you were wondering."

Guilt flashed through her eyes. "Okay, I was wondering."

"I knew it."

Marci frowned at him. "Don't gloat. It's rude."

He chuckled and swallowed the last of his wine. "How old were you?"

"Seventeen. An experience I would forget if I could."

"As lousy as that first kiss?"

"Worse. Neither of us knew what we were doing. I decided right then that sex was highly overrated and not worth the trouble."

"Who changed your mind?"

"My first boyfriend in college." She grinned. "He knew what to do."

Keefe laughed while Marci popped the last bite of her roll into her mouth. She sighed in pleasure. "Delicious. I feel like a human again."

"All energized and ready to get back to work?"

"Yes. Unless you'd rather quit for the night."

He didn't want to say good night to Marci yet. He'd use any excuse to stay close to her a little longer. "We still have a lot to do. I don't mind working another couple of hours."

"I think we can finish what we're doing in a couple of hours, so that would be perfect."

"Okay." Keefe stood and picked up the tray the waiter had used to carry their food. "Let's get the table cleaned off and get back to work."

"Would you mind if we sat on the loveseat? It's softer than these chairs."

And they'd be closer to each other. That was a plus in Keefe's mind. "No, I don't mind at all."

Chapter Twelve

Marci sat on the loveseat next to Keefe, their bodies mere inches apart while they continued to work. It was almost midnight. She should call it a night and tell him to go to his room.

Marci didn't want the evening to end.

He'd lit a fire in the fireplace. They'd worked, but talk had also drifted to family and friends again. She enjoyed listening to him so much, she had to force herself to return to working.

She'd never felt so comfortable with a man.

She'd never desired one so fiercely either. Her gaze would wander to him over and over while they worked. She admired his broad shoulders, wide chest, flat stomach. The nice bulge at his fly drew her attention many times, as did his sensual lips and that glorious mane of black hair.

He'd said he was a homely kid. He'd definitely grown out of the homely stage and into a hunk.

Her mind flashed back to when they'd made love in her office. It had been fierce, hot, passionate. He'd made her body sing with his kiss, his touch.

"Do you have actors in mind for the leads?" Keefe asked.

His question jerked her back to the present. She cleared her throat and pushed her hair behind one ear. "I'd love to have Thomas Reitman for the male lead, if he's available. He'd be perfect to play Ivan."

"Yeah, I agree with that. What about the female lead?"

"I haven't decided on her yet. There are a lot of wonderful actresses who could play the part of Judith."

“Did you see the movie *Five Times Two*?”

Marci scrunched up her nose while she tried to remember. She saw a lot of movies, but that one didn't sound familiar. “I don't think so.”

“I'm not surprised. It came out about eight months ago and bombed. The only good thing about it was an actress who played a small supporting role. She was incredible. I think she'd be the perfect actress for Judith.”

“What's her name?”

“Tina Fournier.”

“Make a note to contact her agent as soon as we have a screenplay for Tina to look at.”

“Will do. I'll contact Reitman's agent too.”

Marci loved that she could bounce ideas off Keefe and he gave her intelligent responses. Her last Logistics VP was happy to let Marci handle as much as she would.

Perhaps she was depending too much on Keefe. He was brand new to the company and had barely learned the names of the people directly under him, much less the normal routine of Marshall Media. He didn't know her favorite directors, her choice of screenwriters and her costume designers. “Am I throwing too much at you too quickly?” She gestured toward the printout on his lap. “I've given you a lot of tasks.”

“Aren't they part of my job?”

“Well, yes, but—”

“Then you haven't thrown too much at me. I enjoy working with you. We're a good team.”

She couldn't argue with that. “Yes, we are.”

With those three simple words, the atmosphere in the room turned from business to pleasure. She watched the play of the firelight on his face, the reflection in his eyes. She looked at his lips and imagined them pressed to hers.

Keefe stretched his arm along the back of the loveseat. He twirled his finger into her hair. "We're good together in a lot of ways," he said, his voice low and raspy.

"Yes, we are," she whispered.

Marci swallowed as he leaned closer to her. If she said no, he would stop. If she said no, they'd go back to work and she'd pretend she didn't feel the tempest brewing inside her body.

She waited, breath held, to feel his lips touch hers.

A bare brush of flesh against flesh. A tease of tongue in the seam of her lips. His warm breath on her cheek. So many sensations bombarded her at once. His scent, male with a hint of woody aftershave. His taste, the wine he'd drunk mixed with his own unique flavor. His touch, lips moving over hers and his palm cupping her cheek so tenderly.

Marci somehow held back a moan when he deepened the kiss. His lips slid over hers...smooth, soft, seeking.

Asking for more.

Marci parted her lips when she felt Keefe's tongue again. She couldn't stop the moan this time. His tongue dove inside her mouth to play with hers. He withdrew, licked each corner of her mouth, kissed her again.

Printouts, legal pads and pens fell to the floor. Marci went willingly when Keefe lowered her to the corner of the loveseat. He continued to kiss her while he pulled her legs over his lap. Wrapping her arms around him, Marci returned every kiss he gave her.

He kissed her jaw, the sensitive area beneath her ear. His teeth tugged on her earlobe. "I want you, Marci." Taking one of her hands, he dragged it down to his fly. "Feel how much I want you."

She closed her eyes and squeezed his cock. He was already hard and full. She moved her hand over him, caressing the firm flesh and tight balls through the denim.

Another kiss made her head swim. Her clit began to gently throb. She shifted her hips, trying to ease the emptiness in her pussy.

It didn't work. She needed Keefe on top of her, inside her.

He cradled her jaw and tilted up her chin with his thumb. "If you don't want this, it stops now and I leave."

She couldn't lie, not to Keefe. "I don't want you to leave," she said in the barest of whispers.

Heat flared in his eyes before a pained look crossed his face. He buried his face against her shoulder. "I didn't bring any condoms. Shit!"

She tunneled her fingers into his hair and lifted his head. "Do I have anything to worry about?"

"No. I swear I'm clean."

"So am I, and I'm on birth control."

"Then there's no reason why we can't make love."

Still holding his hair, she tugged his mouth to within an inch of hers. "No reason at all."

She pulled him that final inch until they kissed. She'd sensed Keefe had been holding back in their earlier kisses. He didn't hold back now. He kissed her hungrily, desperately, stealing her breath and her ability to think.

His hand covered her breast. He caressed her, squeezed her, thumbed her nipple. Each pass of his thumb over the sensitive nub sent her desire soaring. She pumped her hips, searching for more.

A strangled sound came from her throat when he slid his hand between her thighs. He cupped her mound, his fingertips pressing against her clit.

"I want you to come." He moved his fingers backward, forward, in a circle. "Tell me what you need to come."

She couldn't speak, not when her body was on fire. Marci spread her legs wider, giving him more room to touch her.

"Yeah. Do what you need to get there."

"I need... I need you inside me."

"Come for me first."

His touch felt wonderful, but it wasn't quite enough for her to reach the peak. There was too much fabric between his fingers and her flesh. Marci unfastened her jeans and pushed them and her panties past her hips. Taking Keefe's hand, she placed it between her thighs.

He growled low in his throat. "I love how wet you get."

He caressed her again, his fingers moving over her creamy flesh. He didn't watch his hand, but stared into her eyes while he touched her.

The pleasure began to slowly build, starting at her toes and traveling through her entire body. Marci closed her eyes, threw back her head and trembled.

"I love to watch you come."

It took an effort, but Marci managed to open her eyes. Keefe still had his hand between her legs, softly rubbing her swollen folds. A zing flashed straight to her core when his fingertip passed over her clit. She lifted her hips to get closer to that glorious sensation.

"I don't think you're through," Keefe said. "I think you need to come again."

"Not alone. With you this time."

"Yeah," he said before kissing her. "With me this time."

Keefe stood with Marci in his arms and carried her the short distance to the bed. Laying her in the middle, he straightened and quickly removed his clothes. Naked, he knelt on the bed next to her. She sat up to remove her sweater while he took off her shoes and jeans. He grabbed her hands before she unhooked her bra. Holding her

hands out to her sides, he gazed at the dark green bra and tiny pair of panties. He had to swallow the lump in his throat before he could speak.

“You have the sexiest underwear I’ve ever seen.”

“I discovered a new lingerie store in Seattle.”

He leaned forward and kissed the top of each breast. “I approve.”

She lay back on the bed. Keefe removed her bra and panties and stared at Marci’s body, all golden in the soft lamplight. Her blonde hair lay on the pillow beneath her head. Her lips were puffy from his kisses. Her nipples were hard, her pussy wet and open.

She looked like a goddess.

He ran one hand between her breasts and down her stomach. Her skin felt silky and damp beneath his palm. He continued his journey until he ruffled the soft hair on her mound with his fingertips.

“Do you have any idea how much I want you?” Still on his knees, Keefe moved between her legs. He cradled her hips, slid his hands up to her breasts. “I think about you during the day and dream about you at night.” He squeezed her breasts, circled her nipples with his thumbs. “I remember how your body feels against mine, how right it seems to be a part of you.”

“Keefe,” she whispered, her voice hoarse.

“Tell me you want me too.”

“I want you. So much.”

Hooking one of her legs over his hip, he entered her with one smooth glide. She gasped. That gasp soon turned into a long moan of pleasure. She closed her eyes and gripped his shoulders.

“Look at me,” he urged.

She opened her eyes again and stared into his. Keefe saw desire in the blue depths, but he also saw tenderness...and an emotion he wanted to call love.

He kept his strokes slow and easy. He pushed his cock all the way inside her, then withdrew to the head and repeated the movement. With every movement, he kept his gaze locked with Marci's. Her breathing quickened, her body tensed beneath his. Her eyes began to drift closed.

"No, keep looking at me. I want to see your eyes when you come."

He'd barely finished his sentence when the walls of her pussy squeezed his shaft. She bit her bottom lip and arched her back, but kept her eyes open.

Feeling her channel grip his cock sent him to the heavens with her. The pleasure raced up and down Keefe's spine and into his balls. "Yeah. Oh, yeah. *Fuck!*"

Weak and sated, Keefe stretched out on top of Marci, resting his weight on his elbows so she could breathe. He kissed her once, twice. "Am I too heavy?"

She shook her head. Her hands drifted up and down his back and over his buttocks. "No."

"Do you want me to move?"

An impish grin turned up her lips. "Depends on how you plan to move."

"You had two orgasms and you want more?"

"Orgasms are like shoes. A woman can never have too many of either."

Keefe laughed, then rolled to his back, taking Marci with him. "I take that to mean you have a lot of shoes."

"I do. But I wouldn't mind having more." She pushed herself to a sitting position. "It's the same with orgasms. I wouldn't mind having more."

She gave a little wiggle with her hips and grinned again. Gripping her waist, Keefe lifted his pelvis to be sure his softening cock stayed inside her. "I'll do my best to give you more."

"That works two ways, you know."

"It does?"

She nodded her head. "I like it when you come too."

It surprised Keefe that his shaft began to harden. That wasn't supposed to happen yet, not until he had more time to recuperate.

She must have felt his reaction, for her grin widened and she wiggled her hips again. "Something's happening."

"It certainly is."

"Goody."

Keefe didn't know whether to laugh or groan. She affected him like no other woman ever had, not only physically but emotionally too. Getting involved with another woman so soon after his breakup with Jearia wasn't in his plans, yet he had no doubt he was falling in love with Marci. And falling fast.

She shifted, lifting her hips a few inches and lowering them. Her warm, wet channel cushioned his rod. He thrust up and was rewarded with her soft moan.

"That's nice." Marci pulled his hands from her waist and interlocked their fingers. She raised her hips again, lowered them, raised them. He gripped her hands and met every movement. His cock became harder with each thrust.

Sweat beaded on his forehead, his chest. Marci picked up the rhythm, taking him deeper and faster. His jaw clenched, his pulse pounded in his neck. She forgot about her own pleasure, wanting only to have him come again.

"Damn, I love fucking you." He moved faster, pistoning his shaft into her channel. "I'm gonna come, babe. Right...*now!*"

He closed his eyes and arched his hips. Marci watched the pain-like pleasure flash over his face. His body jerked beneath hers, and he released a long, low growl.

The buildup in her body fizzled, but Marci didn't mind. This time had been to please Keefe.

He slowly opened his eyes and looked at her. "I think you're trying to kill me."

"No way. I'm not through with you yet."

"That's good, 'cause I'm nowhere near finished with you."

He tugged on her hands until she lay on top of him. He gripped one buttock, held her head with the other hand while he kissed her.

“You’re amazing,” he whispered against her mouth.

She would’ve told him the same thing, but he kissed her again. And again. He kneaded her buttock, ran one finger down the crease to her anus. He circled the sensitive area with his fingertip, over and over.

Marci’s breath hitched when he pushed his finger into her ass. She lifted her hips, driving his finger farther inside her.

“You like this?” he asked, pumping his finger in and out of her body.

“Yes.”

He shifted their positions so she lay on her back with him leaning over her. Cradling her breast, he gently kneaded it as he kissed her again. He journeyed down her body, stopping long enough to suckle each nipple until Marci was on the verge of coming again. She moaned in protest when he moved away from her breasts.

She didn’t protest when he darted his tongue into her channel. He slipped his hands beneath her buttocks, lifted her pussy to his mouth and feasted. Marci grabbed handfuls of the bedspread beneath her. Her clit, her labia, her anus...they all received the expert attention of Keefe’s tongue.

Her orgasm didn’t build slowly this time, but rushed through her body like a wildfire on a windy day. Marci held Keefe’s head and bucked against his mouth. He kept licking her folds, bringing her back down from her peak.

She hadn’t remembered how to breathe again when Keefe turned her to her stomach. Holding her hips, he lifted her to her knees and plunged inside her.

Marci gasped. “Oh God!”

He gripped her tighter and began to pump. After a moment, he crawled over the top of her, his chest pressed to her back, his hands cupping her breasts. Marci couldn’t

move, but she didn't care. She clutched the pillow and accepted his hard thrusts, the firm tugs on her nipples.

She felt him tense around her mere seconds before her climax zipped through her body. Her legs gave out and she collapsed on the bed. Keefe followed her down, his body warm and damp against hers.

"My legs are dead." He kissed her nape, her shoulder. "And everything else."

"I know what you mean."

"I told you I'm not eighteen anymore."

"Could've fooled me." She pushed her hair out of her face. "I desperately need a drink."

"Yeah, me too."

Groaning loudly, Keefe pulled out of her body. The combination of his juices and hers trickled from her channel. He gathered the juices on his fingers and spread them over her pussy. She flinched when he grazed her sensitive clit.

"Did I hurt you?"

"I'm a little tender."

"Yeah, me too. I guess round four is out tonight."

Marci rolled to her back and pointedly looked at his soft cock. "Round four? With what?"

He grinned. "Hey, a guy can dream." He kissed her softly. "I'll get your water."

She sat up and leaned against the headboard. She enjoyed watching him, working with him, talking with him. Everything he did gave her pleasure, even something as simple as preparing two glasses of iced water.

Her relationship with Keefe had gone way beyond employer and employee. And she had no idea what to do.

"Here." He handed one glass of water to her, then sat beside her. "Damn, woman, my legs are still weak."

“Mine too.”

“Between the plane ride, the hiking, the food and the sex, I won’t have any trouble sleeping tonight.” He drained his glass and set it on the nightstand. When he looked back at her, Marci could see tenderness in his eyes. “The sex was amazing.”

“Yes, it was.”

He picked up a tendril of her hair that lay over her breast and twined it around his finger. “I didn’t want a one-time thing with you, Marci. This meant a lot to me.”

It meant a lot to her too, but she couldn’t say that. She shouldn’t have surrendered to her feelings, no matter how much she’d wanted him. “Keefe—”

“What did the bastard do to you that hurt you so badly?”

Her body went from relaxed to tense in a moment. She hadn’t expected him to bring up Ben. “I don’t want to talk about him.”

“Don’t you think you should?” He touched her chin, ran his thumb over her lower lip. “I don’t want a man from your past coming between us. Tell me about him. Please.”

Chapter Thirteen

He thought at first she would refuse to talk to him. She stared down into her glass, her lips pressed together. Keefe waited, not wanting to push her but knowing they couldn't go any further in their relationship unless she was honest with him.

She set her glass on the nightstand, then drew her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. She didn't look at him. That was fine with Keefe. Sometimes it was easier to talk without looking at someone.

"His name is Ben Windsor. He worked in Legal under Harold. He was intelligent, charismatic, handsome. I doubt if there was a woman at Marshall Media who didn't lust after him."

"Including you?"

She nodded. "He'd worked for the company about three months when I went to Harold's office to speak with him about contract negotiations on a project. Harold wasn't in, but Ben was. He asked me out for a drink. I refused since I didn't believe in dating an employee. He said it wasn't a date, only a drink. When I still refused, he told me where he'd be that evening in case I decided to drop by."

"Did you?"

"Yes." She pushed her hair behind her ears. "We had a great time. He made me laugh." Finally, she turned her head toward him. "That's something I like so much about you, your sense of humor. I like when a man makes me smile."

Keefe didn't comment. He didn't want to say anything that might cause Marci to stop talking.

"That was on a Friday night. He called me at home Saturday and invited me out to dinner. I accepted. Two weeks later, we became lovers."

She lowered her head and fell silent. Keefe waited for her to speak again. When she didn't, he cupped her chin and turned her face toward his. "What happened?"

He saw her throat work as she swallowed. "It was great. Ben was a really good lover. A little...dominant, but I didn't think anything of that. I mean, his holding my hands down when we made love was kind of...exciting."

Keefe sensed there was more to this "dominant" thing, but didn't ask. Marci needed to tell him at her own pace.

"It progressed from there. First he held me down, then he tied my hands. Then it was my hands and feet. He added blindfolds and dildos and..." She closed her eyes. "Paddles."

She said everything with such disgust. He couldn't imagine his strong-willed Marci letting a man do things to her she didn't want. "You didn't like that?"

"I did." She opened her eyes again. Tears swam in them. "I liked everything he did." Propping her elbows on her knees, she dug her heels into her eyes. "I kept going back for more. Whatever he wanted, I did it."

"Hey." He pulled her hands away from her eyes. "There's nothing wrong about whatever a man and woman do together sexually, as long as both partners agree to it." He rubbed his thumbs over the back of her hands. "I've played around with bondage. It can be very hot when your partner is as turned-on as you are."

"We never did the heavy BDSM stuff, like whips and collars. I couldn't do that."

"Did he want to?"

Marci nodded.

"Sounds like he was really into the dominant thing."

"He was, but I didn't suspect that until we'd been involved for several weeks. He got a bit...rough one night and insisted I call him Master. That's when I knew he'd gone too far."

Keefe narrowed his eyes. "What do you mean by 'a bit rough'?"

“He...pushed me against the wall and...slapped me.”

Rage boiled up inside Keefe. If the bastard was here right now, Keefe would have no problem giving the man a taste of what he'd given Marci. “A true Dom takes care of his sub. He doesn't hurt her. It's all about her pleasure.”

“I know. I mean, I have a friend who's in that lifestyle and that's what she told me.” She looked at their clasped hands a moment, then back at Keefe's face. “I broke up with him that night. He told me I belonged to him and couldn't leave until he gave me permission. That's when I kicked him in the balls and ran out of his house.”

Keefe snorted with laughter. “Good girl.”

“I'd thought about firing Ben before we got together because I wasn't completely happy with his work ethics. In fact, Harold had given him a mediocre evaluation only a month before all this happened. I spoke to Harold about firing Ben. He said I had every legal right to do so, and he had the paperwork to back me up. I went to Ben's cubicle with two security guards behind me and told him he had fifteen minutes to clean out his desk. I slapped an envelope on his desk that held a check with one month's pay and told him to get out.”

“Which didn't make him happy.”

“He made it a point to yell out as he was leaving about how I liked being tied up during sex, and how I loved having a plug in my ass while I was getting fucked.”

“That son of a bitch.” He brought her hands to his lips and kissed each one. “I'm so sorry, sweetheart.”

“I was mortified. I had to stand there while he said those horrible things and feel my employees looking at me. It was only on one floor since he was quickly hustled into the elevator, but I know it spread all over the building. People would be talking and stop as soon as I came up to them. Men would give me that nudge-nudge-wink-wink look. It was horrible.”

“Surely the talk didn't last very long.”

“No, it stopped after a few days. At least, I didn’t hear anything else or get those looks. I don’t know what happened behind my back.” She shifted to her knees and clasped his hands. “I broke my rule about getting involved with an employee and I became a joke.”

“I’m not Ben Windsor, Marci. I would *never* hurt you like that.”

“I can’t take the chance of losing my employees’ respect.” She turned his hands so their palms touched. “I can’t be their boss if they’re snickering at me.”

“It wouldn’t be that way with us.” Keefe released one of her hands and cradled her cheek. “I don’t want to give you up.”

“I don’t want to give you up either.”

“So what do we do?”

“We can be together this weekend. We’re away from the office and everyone who knows us. We don’t have to hide from anyone.”

“Are you saying we *do* have to hide once we get back to Seattle?”

She bit her bottom lip. That simple gesture told him more than any words. “Marci, I don’t—”

Her kiss stopped him. “Let’s enjoy our time together, okay? I don’t want to think about anything but talking to Tyler Wilson tomorrow, then spending the rest of the weekend with you.”

Keefe didn’t want to argue with her. Once they got back to Seattle, they’d have a long talk about where their relationship was going. For the weekend, he’d do what she wanted. He nodded. “Okay.”

* * * * *

Marci hung up the telephone and sighed. It had been a very busy Friday with call after call. She would be so glad when this day was over and she could escape with Keefe.

For the last two weeks, ever since she and Keefe returned from their successful trip to British Columbia, she'd been in heaven. She saw Keefe during the day at work. Keeping up a professional image around him wasn't easy when she wanted to drag him to the loveseat in her office every time she saw him. Sometimes, when no one was looking, he'd wink at her and give her a sexy smile. Her knees grew weak every time.

The evenings belonged to them. She'd arrange it so they never left Marshall Media at the same time. She'd go to his house after work, or he to hers. They'd talk, cook dinner together and make love.

He wouldn't tell her what he had planned for this weekend, only that she'd love it. He'd taken her to the ocean last weekend. They'd made love to the sound of the waves breaking on the beach. She didn't know how he could top that.

The *snick* of her door closing drew her attention. She looked up to see Keefe walking toward her desk, his expression serious.

A ball of fear formed in her stomach. Something had to be wrong for him to close them in her office. "Why did you shut the door?"

"Because I don't want us to be disturbed."

Marci looked at the closed door. It wasn't unusual for her to have private meetings with her vice presidents, or any number of her employees. She'd meant it when she told everyone she'd see them at any time. She'd avoided meeting alone with Keefe because she didn't want to make anyone suspicious.

"Come out from behind the desk, Marci."

She'd never heard Keefe speak in that serious tone. The ball of fear in her stomach grew. She rose on legs that weren't quite steady and rounded her desk to stand in front of him. "Can't we talk later? It's almost four. We'll be leaving in an hour."

"I don't want to wait. I'll get distracted when I see you in your sexy underwear and my brain will drop between my legs."

She would've laughed if she'd detected any humor in his comment. The fact that he remained serious scared her. "You said you like my sexy lingerie."

"I do. I love it. I love seeing you in it and I love taking it off you. That's the problem. I can show you how I feel about you when we're alone, but not here at the office."

She was afraid this would happen. She'd hoped it wouldn't be this soon. "I thought you understood why we have to keep our relationship a secret."

"I thought I did too, but I don't like it. I don't like hiding the fact that we're lovers. I don't mean I want to take you on top of your conference table where anyone can see us, but touching you when we pass, or kissing you... I'd like to be free to do that." He took a step closer to her. "I'm turning in my resignation."

If he'd said a fifty-foot dragon had been spotted in downtown Seattle, she wouldn't have been more surprised. "What?"

"We can be together without breaking your rule if I'm not your employee."

"Keefe, no. I don't want you to give up your job."

"I don't see where I have another choice. I love you, Marci. I don't want to hide that anymore."

It was the first time he'd told her he loved her. His sweet words melted her heart. She couldn't resist touching his cheek, caressing his jaw.

Before she could comment, her door swung open. Marci was shocked to see Anne Marshall sweep into the office. She quickly jerked her hand away from Keefe's face.

"Hello, Marci." Anne walked up to Marci and hugged her. "I'm sorry for dropping in unannounced."

"No, that's fine." She glanced at Keefe, then back at her boss. "Anne, this is Keefe Donegan, your new Logistics Vice President. Keefe, Anne Marshall, the owner of Marshall Media."

"It's an honor, Mrs. Marshall."

"Anne, please. Calling me Mrs. Marshall makes me feel old."

Marci quickly glanced over Anne's attire. No one would call Anne Marshall old, despite being in her mid-sixties. She wore black slacks, a gray sweater with several strands of silver chains over her full breasts, and black boots. A long gray leather coat completed the outfit. Her silver hair was styled perfectly, her makeup generous but not gaudy. She was a striking woman, one who drew the attention of men much younger than she. Marci had seen that first hand during the many lunches she and Anne shared.

"Would you like coffee or tea?" Marci offered.

"No, thank you, dear." She slipped off her coat and laid it on the conference table with her purse. "Let's sit down so we can talk."

"I'll leave you two ladies alone—"

"No, Keefe, stay. What I have to say to Marci includes you too."

"Excuse me?" Keefe said before Marci had the chance. Anne had just met Keefe. Whatever she had to say to Marci couldn't possibly include him.

Anne smiled. "You both look confused. Let's sit down and I'll explain."

She led the way to the seating area. Anne sat in one corner of the loveseat, Marci to her left, Keefe in the armchair on her right. "I just flew back from visiting my son in Arizona. As I get older..." She grimaced. "What an ugly thing for a woman to have to say. Anyway, as I get older, I find I'm enjoying the warmer temperatures more and more. I love the natural beauty here, but there's natural beauty in Arizona too. Plus my son is there, and my grandchildren. I want to be closer to them."

"You're moving?" Marci couldn't imagine not having Anne close to talk to whenever she needed her. They went to lunch at least once a month. Marci would miss the talks she shared with Anne. "When?"

"I have an appointment with a Realtor Monday to put my house up for sale. And..." She looked from Marci to Keefe and back again. "I'm selling Marshall Media."

Chapter Fourteen

The whole world fell out from under Marci. Not only was she about to lose a good friend who'd been a substitute mother, but her job too. "What?" she asked weakly.

"My son has no interest in the business. My grandson or granddaughter might be interested, but I doubt it. They're still teenagers and have no idea of their future careers. So I think it'll be better if I sell the company."

Marci didn't know what to say. She looked at Keefe for help. He sat with one ankle resting on the opposite knee, watching her. She couldn't tell what he was thinking from his expression.

"Wow." Marci swallowed. "I don't know what to say."

"Tell me you want to buy it."

Again, Anne had said something to completely floor Marci. "What?"

"You've done an outstanding job of running Marshall Media since Conrad died. I think you should buy the company and continue to run it." She glanced at Keefe. "Maybe with a partner to help you."

"A...partner?"

"I know all about you and Keefe. Peggy told me."

"Peggy?" Marci couldn't believe one of her best friends had betrayed her.

"Don't be angry at her, Marci. She didn't mean to tell me. But I'm glad she did." Anne glanced at Keefe. "I'm glad you found someone special." She looked back at Marci and winked. "And good for you to hook a younger man."

Heat climbed into Marci's cheeks. She gazed at Keefe to see his eyes twinkling. He winked at her too.

"So. Let's talk about you buying the company."

“Anne, I can’t. Marshall Media is worth millions. I don’t have that kind of money, or the resources to *get* that kind of money.”

Anne tapped one finger against her chin. Marci could see the light in her eyes when she’d apparently made a decision. “Get your wallet.”

“My wallet?”

She made a shooing motion with her hand. “Just do it.”

Marci had no idea what Anne was up to, but did as she requested.

“Give me fifty cents.”

“What?”

Anne held out her hand and wiggled her fingers. “Give me fifty cents.”

She still didn’t know what Anne was doing, but opened her wallet and removed two quarters. She laid them in Anne’s palm.

Anne turned to Keefe and held out her hand. “Give me fifty cents.”

Keefe’s eyebrows drew together. He looked at Marci, but she couldn’t help him since she didn’t know any more than he did. She shrugged.

He dug two quarters out of his pocket and gave them to Anne.

Anne smiled. “Sold! I’ll have my lawyer draw up the contract.”

She rose from the loveseat and walked toward the conference table. Marci stared at Keefe and he stared back at her. “What happened?” she asked him.

“I think Anne sold us Marshall Media for a dollar.”

Marci jumped up and hurried over to Anne, Keefe right behind her. “Wait! You can’t do that.”

“I believe I just did.”

“The IRS will never believe you sold a multimillion dollar company for a dollar.”

“It’s my company. I can sell it for whatever I want. The contract will state that.” She gathered up her purse and coat, then faced them. “Marci, I’m filthy rich. That’s not

bragging, it's fact. I don't need any more money. This company was Conrad's pride and joy, the most important thing in his life other than his family. I'll go to my grave a happy woman knowing someone who cares about Marshall Media is running it."

Marci didn't know what to say. She'd never been so shocked in her life. Or touched. "I-I'm speechless."

"Well, there's a first." Anne smiled and touched Marci's cheek. "You're like the daughter I never had, Marci. I don't think I could love you more if you *were* my daughter. I know you and Keefe will make this company even more successful than it already is."

Tears filled Marci's eyes. This woman had been such an important person in her life. She would miss Anne terribly.

Frowning, Anne shook one finger back and forth. "None of that. No tears. You aren't rid of me. I have many, many friends here and will visit a lot. I'll always pop in and say hi when I do."

"Yes, please."

Anne smiled again. "Well, I'd better get out of here and let you two go home. Let's do lunch next week, all right?"

"Absolutely."

She hugged Marci fiercely and swept out of the room as quickly as she'd entered it.

Marci felt as if she'd been through a tornado. Her mind was whirling. "I don't believe what just happened."

"Mind boggling, huh?"

"Very."

Keefe slipped his thumbs in the pockets of his jeans. "I'll still quit, Marci, if that'll make things easier for you. I didn't expect Anne to do something like this. I wasn't looking for more power or prestige. I'm happy with things the way they are. You're a great boss."

She appreciated what he said, and had no doubt he spoke the truth. “No, I don’t want you to quit.”

“I guess we have a lot to talk about this weekend.”

“Tons. So let’s get out of here and start our weekend.”

* * * * *

Marci moaned long and low as her orgasm flashed through her body. Keefe gripped her hips tightly, thrust his cock all the way inside her channel. His body tensed beneath her and he groaned out his release.

With a contented sigh, Marci lay on Keefe’s chest. She smiled at the memory of Keefe coming in her bedroom while she packed for their trip, and finding her in nothing but her latest purchase from Lavender Lace. The pale pink demi-bra and thong set was the sexiest—and skimpiest—lingerie she’d bought. His reaction had been to immediately jerk off his clothes, toss her on her bed and take her.

He kissed the top of her head. “I told you my brain drops between my legs when I see you in your sexy underwear.”

“I don’t mind.”

“You’re so easy.”

“With you I am.”

He hugged her tightly. “What do you want to do this evening? We could go out to dinner instead of cooking.”

“Or order a pizza so we don’t have to get dressed again, and watch a movie.”

“Mmm, I like the way you think. Any time I can keep you naked works for me.”

She lifted her head and looked at him. “You want me to watch the movie naked?”

“Sure. We’ll cuddle up in a quilt and I can cop a feel whenever I want.”

Marci laughed while he grinned. She did love his sense of humor. And everything else about him.

She circled his lips with one finger. "Do you have any idea how much I love you?"

He smiled tenderly. "If it's a fraction of the amount I love you, it's a bunch."

She kissed him ever so softly. With their lips and bodies joined, Keefe rolled her to her back. She could feel his cock hardening inside her. She wrapped her legs around his waist as he began to thrust.

She gasped when he slid one hand beneath her buttock and slipped a finger in her ass. He pumped it in and out with the same rhythm that he pumped his rod into her pussy.

"Faster." She darted her tongue into his ear. "Fuck me faster."

He pushed a second finger into her ass and quickened his thrusts. Another orgasm built inside Marci, more powerful than her first. She gripped Keefe's shoulders, threw back her head and keened.

He kept pumping as his body shuddered. Marci held him tightly until he stilled. His heart pounded against her chest, his breath fell hot and heavy on her neck. She tightened her arms and legs around him, happy to hold him like this for the rest of the night.

"You know," he said between heavy breaths, "I've had more orgasms...since I've been involved with you than...in my whole...life."

"I'm a good influence."

His laugh tickled her ear. "You're dangerous." He lifted his head and smiled at her. "And incredibly sexy."

His kiss was so sweet, it brought tears to her eyes. "I love you."

"I love you too." One more kiss, then he slowly withdrew from her body. "I'll order the pizza. What kind do you want?"

A shrill ringing came from his jeans pocket. "Just a sec. Let me see who that is." Climbing from the bed, he scooped up his jeans and located his cell phone in the pocket. He smiled when he looked at the display. "It's my brother."

“You talk to him. I’ll order the pizza.”

He leaned over and kissed her. “Thanks.” He flipped open his phone as he walked out of the bedroom, his jeans in his other hand. “Hey, man, what’s up?”

A pang of longing tightened her stomach. The joy in Keefe’s voice when he talked to his brother made her wish she could pick up the phone and call Mary.

Shaking off the bad feeling, she called the pizza place instead of her sister. After ordering a large pepperoni and sausage, she donned a robe and left her bedroom in search of Keefe.

“I can’t wait for you to meet her either,” Marci heard Keefe say as she neared the kitchen. “I don’t know if we’ll get there before Christmas. We haven’t talked about any trips... Throwing Marci over my shoulder isn’t the way to handle her...” He laughed. “Well, yeah, there is that.”

He glanced at her when she stepped into the kitchen. “We don’t have any problem in that department.”

Marci’s mouth dropped open. “Are you talking to your brother about our sex life?” she whispered.

He winked at her. “I just got busted... Making it up to her is always fun... You too, man. Bye.”

He shut his phone and laid it on the cabinet, then slipped into his jeans. “Did you order the pizza?”

“Were you talking to your brother about our sex life?”

“Now would I do something like that?”

His innocent expression didn’t fool her for a second. “Don’t answer a question with a question.”

“Do you know you’re beautiful when you’re angry?”

She pressed her lips together and scowled at him. Instead of making him back off, he laughed. “Siblings tease each other. Didn’t you ever tease with your sister?”

That pang tightened her stomach again. "Whatever teasing we did ended a long time ago."

The humor in his eyes disappeared. Afraid she'd see it replaced with pity, Marci turned away from him and reached for the coffee carafe to fill it.

His hands cradled her waist before she could pick up the carafe. "What happened with your sister?"

She wiped at a dried drop of coffee on the cabinet with her thumb. "It was a long time ago."

"It's still eating you up inside." He slipped his arms around her waist. "Talk to me."

Keefe stood behind her, holding her close, ready and willing to share her burden. Tears filled Marci's eyes that she'd found such a wonderful man.

"C'mere." He took her hand and led her to the living room. He sat in the corner of the couch and tugged her down to sit beside him. Wrapping his arms around her, he drew her against his chest, her head on his shoulder. "Tell me about it."

Marci wiped away a tear from her cheek. "I went home when my parents were killed to help with the funeral details and get everything settled that has to be done when someone dies. I'd never realized how much there is to do. Bank accounts and credit cards and insurance policies and..." She stopped when she realized she was rambling. "Mary and I were close growing up. We had our share of fights, as any sisters do, but we loved each other."

"I'm sure you did."

"She got married right out of high school to her long-time boyfriend. She was in the middle of a nasty divorce when our parents died. It changed her. She was bitter and selfish and... I don't know, just different. She wasn't the sister I remembered."

"The day after the funeral, our parents' attorney read their will to us. Mom and Dad believed in hard work and saving for the future. Their estate was worth almost a million dollars. They'd arranged for Mary and me to split everything equally."

“But that wasn’t good enough for your sister?”

“No. She said since I’d moved away, I had no right to expect anything from our parents. She was the one with the bastard husband who’d left her with a son to raise on her own. She deserved everything.” Marci straightened and shifted on the couch to face Keefe. “All she had to do was ask and I would’ve helped her any way I could. But she demanded that everything go to her. I was so angry by her attitude. And hurt.”

Keefe stroked her hair. “Sometimes people get really stupid when money is involved.”

“That’s for sure.” She swiped at another tear that escaped her eye. “I told the attorney to draw up whatever legal papers necessary so I could sign my share of our parents’ estate to Mary. He could overnight them to me because I was driving back to Seattle that afternoon. I went to our parents’ house to pack my suitcases. I’d already shipped some personal items home, things I wanted to keep of my Mom and Dad. Mary didn’t come home. I didn’t see her again before I left.”

“You haven’t seen or talked to her since then?”

Marci shook her head.

“What about your nephew? Have you seen or talked to him?”

“No. He was ten the last time I saw him. He’s a man now and probably in college. He might even be married.”

The doorbell rang. Keefe squeezed the back of her neck. “That’s probably the pizza. I’ll take care of it.”

Marci pressed her fingertips against her eyelids. Her eyes always burned when she cried. She heard Keefe speaking to the pizza delivery guy and shutting the front door. After that, silence.

“Here.”

She opened her eyes again, expecting to see Keefe holding plates of their pizza. Instead, he held out his cell phone to her.

"Why are you giving me your cell?"

He sat beside her. "Call your sister."

She blinked, certain she hadn't heard him correctly. "What?"

"Call her." He pressed the phone into her hands. "Ten years is long enough, Marci."

"Why should I call her? *She's* the one who pushed me away."

"She did that at a bad time in her life."

"No. If she'd wanted to talk to me, she would've called me a long time ago."

"Maybe she was too embarrassed to call you. Maybe she didn't know how to apologize. Maybe she was afraid you wouldn't accept her apology." He laid his hand on her thigh. "Don't let something that happened a decade ago keep you from your family."

Her hands shook as she stared at the phone. She wanted to call Mary, get to know her sister again. But the odds were good that Mary wouldn't want anything to do with her. Marci couldn't take a second rejection. "I-I don't know her number," she said to stall a little longer.

"Don't you?"

She looked back at Keefe. He was entirely too smart. "She moved into our parents' house, but I don't know if she's still living there."

"Try the number and see. If someone else answers, maybe that means you aren't meant to find her."

Marci slowly opened the phone and punched in the number she'd always remember. She heard two rings, three.

"Hello?"

Her heart slammed into her throat at the sound of her sister's voice. "M-Mary?"

"Yes. Who's this?"

She swallowed back the lump of tears. "It-it's Marci."

Marci heard a gasp, then Mary's voice again, softer now. "Marci?"

“Yeah.”

“Oh my God, Marci.” She could hear the tears in her sister’s voice. “Is it really you?”

“It’s really me.”

“I can’t believe... I’ve wanted to call you so many times and apologize. I was so stupid when Mom and Dad died.” Her voice broke on the last word. “I’ve missed you so much.”

“I’ve missed you too.”

“Where are you?”

“I’m still in Seattle.”

“Can you come down? Things are a little crazy for me right now with Patty’s classes and band lessons—”

“Patty?”

“My daughter. She’s seven.”

Marci had a seven-year-old niece she’d never met. Tears flowed down her cheeks at all the things she’d missed in her sister’s life. “You have a daughter?”

“Yes. She’s wonderful, the light of my life. J.D. and I didn’t plan her, but she’s—”

“Wait a minute. J.D.? You two got back together?”

“Two years after the divorce. We’re so happy now, Marci.” Mary sniffed. “You and I have so much to talk about.”

“Yes, we do.”

She looked at Keefe...at the mane of hair she loved to touch, his intense blue eyes that seemed suspiciously moist right now, the lips that thrilled her when they turned up in a smile. He was her rock, her anchor.

The man who made her complete.

Keeping her gaze locked with his, she picked up his hand from her leg and entwined their fingers. "I have someone for you to meet too." She kissed the back of his hand. "Someone very special."

Epilogue

Ashlyn shivered when the cold air settled over her. She knew before she turned around to face Llyr that he was leaving her.

His face was solemn when she looked at him. "It's time, isn't it?"

He nodded. "I have to go, lass."

"Can't you stay a little longer?"

"Ye know I canna do that. I've already stayed longer than I should've."

Yes, she knew he couldn't put off leaving when he was summoned. Every god and goddess left immediately when they were called. She twisted her hands together in front of her. "I've gotten used to having you around. You've been such a help to me in the store and with the women who've come in here. A man's opinion has meant a lot to some of my customers."

"I've enjoyed helpin' ye." A hint of a wicked grin curled his lips. "I've enjoyed the private shows ye've done of yer frilly things."

With each new shipment that arrived, Ashlyn had picked out her favorite items and modeled them for Llyr. He'd always shown his appreciation by making love to her over and over until she lay in an exhausted heap.

"When will you come back?"

"I donna know." He stepped up to her and cradled her face in his hands. "But I *will* be back, darlin'. I promise ye that."

His kiss sealed that promise. Ashlyn clung to his waist and kissed him back. It hurt every time he left. This time, it was harder to let him go since he'd been here five weeks. She'd never had him all to herself for such a long period of time. It had thoroughly spoiled her.

Llyr ended their kiss and rested his forehead against hers. "I love ye, Ashlyn."

He'd never said that to her. Ashlyn had always known he cared for her, but he'd never used the word *love*. "I love you too," she said, her voice breaking from the tears she tried not to shed.

He released her and stepped back. She folded her arms across her stomach and watched as he slowly faded from her view. Before he disappeared completely, he blew her a final kiss.

Ashlyn covered her mouth with one hand. She felt as if her heart had been ripped out of her chest. She and Llyr couldn't be together the way mortal couples could. That knowledge didn't stop her pain.

She heard the tinkling of the bell above the store's entrance door. She plucked a tissue from the box by the register, wiped her cheeks and blew her nose. Llyr had his duty and so did she. Every woman she helped to feel more attractive about herself, to find love, made Ashlyn happy. She had to concentrate on that and not on how much she'd miss Llyr.

He would be back. He'd made a promise to her, and he'd never broken a promise in five hundred years.

Forcing a smile, she stepped from behind the counter to greet her two thirty-something customers. "Hi, ladies. I'm Ashlyn. Welcome to Lavender Lace."

The End

About the Author

Lynn LaFleur was born and raised in a small town in Texas close to the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Writing has been in her blood since she was eight years old and wrote her first “story” for an English assignment.

As well as writing at every possible moment, Lynn enjoys reading, scrapbooking, photography and learning new things on the computer. She’s a software junky and loves to try out new programs, especially anything to do with graphics.

After living on the West Coast for 21 years, Lynn now lives 17 miles from her hometown in Texas. She’s a romantic at heart and can’t imagine ever writing anything but romances. A full-time writer, she spends her days creating stories of people who find their happily ever after, sometimes with the help of an alien or psychic or vampire.

Lynn welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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