

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

THE
Morning
AFTER
J.K. COI

ELLORA'S CAVE
Quickies®

The Morning After

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Waking up naked in bed with a man's arms holding you close wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing...except when that man is your soon-to-be-ex-husband.

Leslie has tried so hard to put Leo's betrayal behind her – the ink was almost dry on the divorce papers. But when circumstances throw her in bed with her estranged husband one last explosive time, Leslie learns how quickly anger can turn to passion and hurt can turn to need, even while she knows there's no way she can ever trust him again.

What Leslie considers goodbye, Leo insists is only the beginning. But the damage between them runs too deep, and sometimes the only thing more devastating than the night before, is the morning after...

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The Morning After

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THE MORNING AFTER

J.K. Coi

Chapter One

Consciousness came slowly.

It started with a groan, a deep breath, and a fuzzy sense that all was not as it should be this bright new morning. Indeed, the fact that warm light penetrated her still-closed eyelids at all was worrisome, since her large bedroom windows should have been covered by the heavy, thick drapes she'd spent a small fortune to have custom made.

The sunshine wasn't her only reason for coming to the conclusion that this morning would offer a few extra challenges. The relentless pounding in her temples, and her pasty, dry throat was also a pretty big clue.

Being buck naked beneath the soft cotton sheet was another.

However, the biggest and most compelling sign that Leslie Stevenson was in serious trouble on this particular morning came courtesy of the heavy, even breaths raising gooseflesh on the skin of her nape. The warm, wide chest pressed up against her back. The thickly muscled arm draped over her waist. The hand cupping the weight of her breast. Especially when her memory of just how the as-yet-unnamed—and very naked—man might have ended up in this bed with her was proving to be an elusive one.

Daring to open her eyes, Leslie bit back an oath as a fresh spike of pain knifed through her forehead to the back of her skull. She didn't think she'd had *that* much to drink last night.

How did I get here? Why can't I remember?

Lifting her arm, she moved to push her hair out of her face, but stilled suddenly as the hand around her breast...*squeezed*.

She held a harshly drawn breath, waiting nervously. Was her mystery bedmate awake then, or just a grabby sleeper? Could she somehow slip out of here without

having to endure the awkward morning after, since it seemed she didn't even have the benefit of memories from the night before to make said awkwardness worthwhile?

She shifted her hips and started a slow shuffle out from under him, but didn't get very far. The arm tightened around her waist, pulling her back into the cradle of his solid, warm flesh. She gasped as bold evidence of a raging morning hard-on pressed intimately against her buttocks. The hand clutching her breast repositioned itself, a calloused thumb flicking across her nipple—which tightened beneath this stranger's bold touch. Her body betrayed her, sending a sharp thrum of intensity to her belly until she wanted to thrust her hips back harder against his erection.

She groaned and shut her eyes tightly as his hips pushed forward, as his cock slid deeper into the crack of her ass. *Damn.* There should be at least some small nugget of memory to tell her how she'd gotten herself into this particular tight spot, but the details of last night weren't becoming any clearer, even as soft lips dropped to the curve of her shoulder.

It shouldn't feel this good. To be held. To be touched.

She remembered her determination to go to the ritzy nightclub last night. Kind of a test. She also remembered forcing her feet to cross the threshold, and then making her way to the bar on the other side of the dark room. She'd ordered a drink in an attempt to numb her scrambled nerves. Leslie and crowds certainly didn't mix, but she'd been working so hard to overcome the irrational phobia that had made her feel like such a freak for so many years.

But last night she'd felt strong, even though her temples had ached and her fingers shook while she waited patiently for David. Then came the call on her cell phone to say that he was working late and couldn't make it. And she remembered all her hard-won strength falling away, proving that it had been nothing but a flimsy mask. She had lurched up from the barstool, desperate to be gone from that place.

Until...

He appeared across the dance floor.

With a gasp, Leslie clutched the bed sheet to her chest in a tight fist. She twisted around and glared into the face of the last person she should find herself naked in bed with...

Her husband.

"Leo."

"Morning, sunshine." His answering grin was evil, unrepentant, and blatantly sexual. With a sleepy moan and a catlike stretch, he leaned back into the mattress and bent both arms behind his head as if the two of them waking up together was the most casual, natural thing in the world.

Leslie scrambled backward to the edge of the bed, horrified. "What the hell are you doing here?"

He raised a brow and chuckled. "Me?" Leo looked her up and down in that slow, lazy way of his, and Leslie was made more aware of their matching nakedness beneath the plain white, practically see-through bed sheet. She felt her skin warm and tried to convince herself she was just blushing.

"Look around you, princess."

Grateful for any excuse to tear herself away from all that smooth, bronzed flesh and the twinkling, crystal blue eyes that still managed to tug at her heart, Leslie finally noticed the dresser and full-length mirror standing against the opposite wall. It was the same furniture that had been in their spare bedroom up until two months ago when she'd thrown Leo's lying ass out of their house.

Struck with a renewed sense of disorientation, Leslie blinked. She took a deep breath. It had been a long time since she'd slept in this bed – not since the beginning of their marriage, when this bedroom set and an old 70s-style couch and kitchen table with three mismatched chairs had been the only pieces of furniture they'd owned.

Another sharp pain sliced through her. Not in her head this time, but her chest. Those days were gone, like mist floating across the lake. Gone forever. She thought she'd accepted that already, but...

Leslie tightened the sheet under her arms and prepared to get up, but her movement dragged the cotton lower across Leo's lean hips. Her gaze was drawn there against her will, and her mouth went dry at the proof that his erection had yet to wane.

Pursing her lips, she decided against leaving the bed just yet.

Aware that she was still staring, Leslie blinked again in an attempt to regain control of her starved senses. *He still has a magnificent body.* Of course he did. He always had. Even after seven years of marriage, Leo hadn't aged a day, looking just as sexy as the first time they'd met. Her problem with this man had never been that she didn't find him sexy. Practically irresistible, in fact. Trouble was, the damage between them had eclipsed even great sex.

As she continued to watch, Leo shifted his hips forward and lowered his hand to the edge of the sheet. She thought he would lift the covers higher over his hips, cover those solid, too-tempting abs, but he didn't. He stopped, letting his hand rest atop his thigh, drawing more attention to the length of straining flesh beneath the sheet.

Leslie didn't know what her soon-to-be ex-husband was playing at, but so far she didn't think she was coming out ahead.

On a hard swallow, she forced her gaze up, back to his lying face. But even that didn't help stem the heat that pooled between her thighs, the acceleration of her heartbeat, the sizzle in her blood.

I will not let him do this to me. I will not fall into Leo's games.

Leslie was starting to recall a little more from last night—and what she did remember was both distressing and embarrassing as hell.

Seeing Leo walk through the doors of the trendy club had taken her completely off guard—although she really shouldn't have been surprised to find him there, since he'd spent most of their marriage out at one club or another.

She must have gone a little crazy because instead of leaving the club and going home like she'd planned, Leslie had taken one look at the gorgeous blonde hanging off her husband's arm like a slutty silicone leech and stubbornly turned back to the

bartender to order a double shot of vodka. With the alcohol to give her strength and steel her nerves, she had then proceeded to flirt shamelessly with the drop-dead gorgeous brown-eyed businessman standing conveniently beside her. When he offered to buy her another drink and asked her to dance, she'd thrown herself into his arms—with barely a third or fourth glance at Leo.

Did I even get that guy's name? For the life of her, she couldn't remember anything else after the dance, and was starting to think she deserved the pounding headache and faint sense of nausea that lingered this disastrous morning. Had she really been *that* drunk?

"Oh God," she said. "Did you... Did we... I mean—"

"Jesus, Les. What kind of asshole do you take me for?"

It would no doubt be prudent not to answer that particular question just now, although she glowered at him. "Then why am I naked in this bed? Why are we *both* naked in this damn bed?"

"Hm. You make it sound so sordid. Now I'm rather sorry that it wasn't." His eyes moved over her, gleaming with a distinctly proprietary air. Leslie couldn't hold back her responding shiver.

She forced a sneer of revulsion to cover up both the need and pain that churned in her gut. "Jesus, Leo. Just tell me how the hell I got here."

The expression on his face changed, turning hard as he sat up and rested an elbow on bended knee. He stared into her face, those blue eyes of his glowing dangerously. Gone was the casual, sleepy nonchalance she'd awakened to. A studied regard had taken its place, making it difficult not to squirm as he seemed to see deep inside her, beneath the shell she was trying to maintain. "You mean how come you didn't pass out in another man's bed?" He snorted. "Or how did you end up here in *this* bed, with your *husband*, and not some slick stranger whose name you probably can't even remember?"

Her fist clenched in the folds of the bed sheet, anger drawing her throat tight. How dare he insinuate that she was in the wrong, that *she* was the slut, when Leo was the one

slipping his cock between the scrawny thighs of every anorexic wannabe actress in town?

"*Husband?*" How she hated that word. "Trust me, that designation is simply an unfortunate technicality. One that is on its way to being remedied as soon as legally possible. Which means it damn well isn't any of your business whose bed I spend my nights in—or whether I bother to get *their* names. *All of them.*" She'd purposely baited him with that last bit, taking a sick satisfaction in implying that there had been many men to take his place since she'd kicked his vile, lying ass to the curb.

His gaze narrowed, that familiar tic working just under his left cheekbone. "Don't try me, Les."

Her turn to snort. "Try what? To take my life back and move on from this ridiculous farce of a marriage?"

"Farce? The only farce is that poor excuse for a lawyer you sicced on me."

"Leave David out of this." Leslie couldn't bear another minute. Despite her anger, and despite the headache she still couldn't shake, her pulse thumped madly in response to Leo's nearness. Her body melting toward him, her nipples aching to be touched. By him.

Damn the man.

Seeing him like this was too hard...

Her body knew him. Wanted him. Her skin remembered the brush of his lips, the feel of his coarse morning stubble trailing a path up the insides of her trembling thighs

—

But he'd lied to her. Their entire marriage had been a damn lie.

And being in this bed with him now was the worst lie of them all.

Screw modesty. Yanking the sheet and pulling it with her, Leslie jumped up and headed for the door.

But Leo came after her. He grabbed her, jerking her back around to face him. Gasping, she tried to avoid the intensity gleaming from his familiar eyes, but the only alternative was looking at his massive, sculpted chest—or lower, as he now stood before her without even the benefit of a bed sheet as cover for modesty's sake.

"Damn it, Les." His voice lowered with what sounded like frustration as his fingers wrapped around her upper arms. "Do you have any idea how much trouble you'd be in right now if I hadn't spotted you at the club?"

"Trouble? You're kidding me, right?" She glared right back at him. Anger gave her the strength to push aside the pain from the gaping wound his betrayal had left in her heart. "The only trouble I've ever had is because of you."

"Jesus. Is that what you think? Well, I think I saved your pretty round ass from that psycho creep last night."

"What creep? Not that it's any of your damn business, but I was having a perfectly wonderful time with a very nice—" Hell, she really should have gotten the guy's name, or at least his occupation.

"Nice? Damn it, Leslie. You really don't have the faintest clue what happened, do you?"

"What the hell are you talking about? Is this another one of your—"

Leo's grip on her arm tightened and he gave her a good shake. "I'm talking about the sleazeball who slipped some kind of drug in your drink and would have walked right out of the fucking building with you under his arm if it hadn't been for me."

Shocked, Leslie's mouth dropped open. "*What? A drug?*" Is that why she couldn't remember anything after being led onto the dance floor? Is that why her head ached so badly and she was feeling vaguely nauseous even though she was sure she hadn't had more than two—maybe three—drinks?

"No." Disbelieving, she shook her head, but horror penetrated her hazy memory as she carefully went over the events of last night and realized there were enough red flags

in what she did remember to make it more than possible that Leo was telling her the truth.

Truth from Leo. That would be an interesting concept.

Chapter Two

Leo tried to get a handle on his anger, to go back to the brief moment this morning when he'd awakened and thought that his world had finally come to rights because Leslie was asleep in his arms once again. But that was easier said than done now, when his mind's eye kept picturing her on the floor of the dance club, that bastard's hands all over her, one sliding up under the sinfully short hem of her skirt to cup her ass, the other gripping her waist, pulling her in close so he could grind his hips against her.

Leslie. His *wife* for God's sake.

It didn't matter that they'd been separated for two months—two endless, painful months—or that she'd gone and hired a scum-sucking lawyer from her father's firm to harass him. He couldn't be expected to stand by and watch as she let every loser and playboy in town touch what was his.

His. She was his.

Damn her for doing this to them.

As soon as he'd entered the club with Raven last night, Leo had *known*. His gaze had zeroed in on the woman sitting at the bar in moments. Stunned, he'd been unable to believe he was really seeing his wife. Especially in a place like that. *Acting like that*. His gut reaction had been to go to her, take her under his arm and protect her from the lights, smoke, and the crowds. To demand she give up all this craziness between them and come back to him where she belonged.

That's when his vision had widened and he'd seen the slick suit cozying up to her side with a slimy smile. It had been like a heavy sledgehammer to the gut—a pain Leo should have been used to after everything else.

As always, Leslie had taken his breath away. Unlike women of Raven's ilk. Women who were always "on", living for the public eye, soaking up all the attention and

blinking lights that came with fame and fortune like it fed right into her veins. His wife's elegant, effortless beauty was a breath of fresh air in the world he was forced to inhabit all too often—an artificial world that was quickly being smothered by dulled senses and depravity.

But instead of the easy, natural woman he was used to, who left the house only rarely and almost never wore make-up, this bold siren had looked like she belonged in that club surrounded by men, having been poured into a poor stand-in for a little black dress that displayed more of her considerably luscious assets than it hid.

She had seen him then, he could tell from the tightening of her expression. Leo moved to approach her, but she turned from him as if he were the incredible invisible husband, gazing up at the guy beside her with a fucking come-hither smile. Leo had ground his teeth so hard his jaw still ached from it this morning.

He couldn't believe she'd let another man touch her, had given another man that sexy, smoky look as the bastard whispered in her ear.

The same look that had once been reserved for Leo alone.

He should have turned right around and taken Raven to a different club—it's not like there weren't another twenty of them on that very street that his client would have been just as happy dancing the night away in. But no matter the dagger Leslie twisted in his heart as she curved her body closer to the playboy prick, Leo hadn't been able to bring himself to leave.

And it was a good thing too, because he'd been watching when the slimy little shit put the drug in her drink.

Still, he hadn't been certain, not until he'd watched Leslie being pulled onto the dance floor. It hadn't taken long. The effects of the drug were quick and obvious. As he watched, Leslie's movements turned slow and sleepy, her forehead had fallen forward on the guy's shoulder.

"What were you doing in a place like that anyway?" he demanded. "You know you can't handle those kinds of crowds."

Her chin lifted, tormenting him with a stubborn determination he was all too familiar with. "People change, Leo. You have no idea what I can or can't handle." She shrugged. "Anyway, why should you care what I was doing there?"

He cared too damn much. That was the problem. "When having to save your ass ends up disrupting my evening, trust me, I care."

She flinched at his purposely harsh tone, then squared her jaw and gave him a look filled with such ice his heart would have cracked if she hadn't already broken it months ago. "Nobody asked you to save me."

His temples pounded as he envisioned all of the ways she could have been hurt—or worse. "You little idiot," he growled. "And where do you think you'd be right now if I hadn't?" He shook her again. Need, desire, anger and pain all swirled together in his gut until he was afraid it would overflow and cause him to do something stupid—like kiss her.

Fuck. How many times was she going to be able to rip out his soul before there was nothing left of him? Why was he letting her?

"Let go of me, Leo."

Why couldn't he walk away? She obviously wanted him to do just that. Why did he keep trying so desperately to figure out what went wrong? To find a way of bringing Leslie home?

Her death grip on the sheet slipped as he came stubbornly closer, the folds of white cotton dipping low, showing off the deep valley between her breasts. Beautiful breasts that fit perfectly in his cupped hands, with responsive, rose-colored nipples that would pebble deliciously beneath his tongue.

She shook her head. The fall of long platinum hair over one shoulder mesmerized him as he remembered how soft it felt caressing his hips when she went down on him, the torment of her mouth closing around his cock.

He was so screwed.

Her nipples were tight and pointed beneath the thin sheet even now. Her breathing had turned shallow and her eyes were dark with hunger even as she continued to glare up at him in defiance. He wrapped his hand around the hot, pulsing shaft of his cock as he took another step forward, his eyes on her sweetly parted lips.

“Damn, baby.” Anger lurked closely beneath the surface, and he purposely injected a taunting mockery to his insolent drawl. “If you needed to be fucked that badly, you could have come to me instead of trolling the bars, and I would have taken care of you. I must be a glutton for punishment because even after all the shit you’ve caused in the last few months, I can’t seem to resist your tight little ass or—”

“You bastard,” she hissed, her voice husky and low with emotion as she lifted her fist against him. “You can’t resist anything, that’s the prob—”

Knocking her arm aside impatiently, he reached for her with a muttered curse before crushing his lips to hers. Finally, there were no more words from either of them.

He intended the kiss as a means of halting her furious recriminations, but he wasn’t kidding himself. It was much more than that. As he slanted his mouth hard over hers, he knew he was being too rough, but he couldn’t stop. He needed to kiss her, needed to taste her again, wondering if it would be the last time and determined to make sure it was just the first.

Fueled by desperation, anger and betrayal, Leo took her mouth beneath his own without any finesse. He curled a hand in her hair at the base of her skull to angle her head to the side so that she couldn’t deny him, re-familiarizing himself with the exotic taste of her, the shape and texture of her full lips.

She didn’t protest as he pressed his inflamed body closer. She didn’t start pounding her fists on his chest and screech her offended sensibilities. Instead, she closed her eyes and groaned.

And Leo was lost.

It must be madness that kept him pushing forward, forcing Leslie to stumble back three or four steps until she gasped, her shoulders slamming up against the closed

bedroom door. Leo planted his tight fists on either side of her head so there was nowhere for either of them to go. The cotton sheet slithered to the floor, forgotten as she arched her bared breasts into his chest and lifted her hands to grip him tightly. Her nails dug into the muscles of his forearms as her sweet lips opened under his once again. He didn't waste the opportunity he was being handed, and slipped his tongue inside the moist warmth of her mouth with a low growl.

Ah, fuck.

Home. This was home. And he'd been gone for far too long.

Chapter Three

Leslie ached. She burned.

And even while she pulled Leo closer, knowing it was a horrible mistake, her body didn't care. It was having nothing more to do with her rational mind's arguments, notwithstanding the absolute certainty that proximity to this particular man was only going to result in her being hurt worse than ever when all was said and done.

Proximity? You've gone miles past simple proximity this morning, Les.

Leo's tongue tangled with hers, his breathing harsh and hot as he ground his hips against her and palmed her breast in his hand. He plucked at her nipple, rolling it between his fingers until she cried out. His hard cock pressed into her belly and without the protection of the cotton sheet between them, she felt the slick wetness that coated the head.

No, proximity isn't the word for this.

Melting. Merging. Bursting.

"Leo." She gasped his name. A simple whisper. It created a link, bridging the hurt and pain that ran in rivers between them. He cupped her cheek in his hand and looked down into her face. His eyes burned through the layers of her soul while he waited.

Leslie knew perfectly well what he was waiting for. She knew she must say no to him and stop this thing before it spiraled further out of her control, so that she wouldn't hate herself later. She should push him away, get dressed, walk out of here without looking back, and tell David to serve the divorce papers as soon as they were ready.

But before she could do that, she wanted this. Needed this. Maybe they both needed it. One last moment comprising something besides harsh words and broken promises, to help them say goodbye to each other in a way that paid homage to the love they had shared before real life made a mockery of it.

Having made her decision, Leslie gave herself over to the sensations flooding her. The stabbing pleasure of his fingers pulling at her nipples and the drugging effect of his kiss. She dragged a leg up until she could hook her knee over Leo's hip, opening herself to him. She should have felt vulnerable before this man who had already hurt her so deeply with his betrayal, but from the look on his face, Leslie believed that in this, at least for the moment, the two of them were in perfect accord.

Leo's jaw clenched as he grasped the underside of her knee and hoisted it higher, his cock hard and thick between her thighs. He paused. "This isn't what you think it is." His voice rasped. His teeth nipped her lower lip sharply as he kissed her again before pulling back to look deeply into her eyes as if he could read her mind. Shifting his hips, he prodded the slippery entrance of her pussy. "This isn't goodbye."

She squirmed against him, opening her mouth to object, but he was already thrusting forward, sliding inside of her—and oh God, it felt so good. In one smooth glide he was sheathed so deep she wanted to weep from the incredible sense of fullness, the sense of *rightness*.

With her arms around his neck, she lifted her other leg to his waist as well. Leo supported her weight, forcing her spine hard against the solid wood of the bedroom door. With both hands cupping the cheeks of her ass, he slowly lifted her along the thick length of his cock. "Oh fuck." He groaned. "How could you give this up, Les? How could you just walk away from this? From us?"

She wanted to tell him how delusional he was, tell him that she hadn't walked away from anything, only refused to let him tear her to pieces with his damn lies. "Shut up, Leo," she muttered breathlessly. "Shut up and fuck me."

He set his teeth to her nipple and she let out a high-pitched shout as pleasure speared through her right to her core, words becoming impossible as he filled her once again.

Clutching a fistful of his hair, Leslie held his face between her breasts. She tightened her thighs around his waist and rolled her hips over him as best she could, wanting more of what only he could give.

A groaning laugh rumbled from his chest. He lifted his head and stared down at her with a mocking tilt to lips that were full and reddened from kissing her. "Christ," he sneered, cynicism glittering from his eyes as his gaze raked over her exposed body. "At least now I know there's *something* you still want from me."

Seated deep inside Leslie's pussy, he watched her face with an intensity that frightened her, and she knew that he was gauging her reaction to every one of his long, controlled thrusts. Slow thrusts to drive her crazy. Slow thrusts until she completely lost control. He'd always been relentless when it came to sex, driving her until she fell apart, mind, body, soul. There was something inside him that needed to dominate her responses until she begged him to let her come.

Well, he could try all he liked, but she wasn't going to give him the satisfaction this time.

Biting her lip to keep from making a sound, Leslie clenched her muscles around his cock until he swore and leaned over her again, taking her mouth in another of his scorching kisses, the kind that never failed to light her whole body on fire for him.

With both hands tight on her ass, he shifted away from the door and back toward the bed.

Still buried to the hilt, he laid her down on the plush mattress but remained standing himself, holding her legs tight around his waist. The vulnerability of the position became very obvious as he looked down at her. He had his feet planted firmly on the floor, giving him all of the leverage while Leslie lay open before him, vulnerable and waiting on his pleasure.

"Please," she whimpered.

He gripped her waist, tilting her hips up to him instead of bending down and over her. "Oh yeah, baby."

She moaned as he slowly withdrew until only the broad head of his cock continued to penetrate her. "What do you need?"

"You. You're what I need." *Only you.*

But that was a truth she never planned to tell him...not ever again.

"That's right, baby. And who is it making you whimper and moan? Who is it fucking you?" His voice was hoarse, sounding as strained as she felt. She knew he was as hungry for the release as she, that he burned with the need to let go. He ached to lose himself inside her just as much as she wanted him to.

Yet he suddenly stopped, held maddeningly still, torturing her. He wasn't giving her what they both wanted. "Tell me, Leslie, who am I?" he demanded.

"Who am I?" he repeated.

Damn him. More games. She couldn't take more of his games. She was already on the verge of shattering apart—in more ways than one.

"Leo." His name came out of her on a gasp as he slowly rubbed himself between her slick folds. "God, Leo. Please."

"That's good baby, but not nearly good enough." His hand replaced his cock, two fingers sliding into her and scissoring deep while his thumb circled her clit. "Les, you're so ready for me. I want you so much."

"Then take me, Leo. God damn you, just do it." She hated herself for needing him so badly.

"I will, baby. As soon as you give me what I want." His jaw tightened. His fingers drove in and out of her in a furious, taunting rhythm. "Say it, Leslie. *Who am I to you?*"

It hit her then, just where he was going with this prolonged, rapturous torture. She shook her head. She closed her eyes. No. Forget it. He didn't deserve the title of *husband*. The man had given up all rights to it when he betrayed her with another woman.

"No." Leslie opened her eyes, glaring up at him. "Never again."

His eyes glittered with a raw, savage intensity, and he leaned over her, putting a fist in the mattress beside her head as he kissed her. Long. Hard. Stealing her breath. Stealing her reason.

"Yes," he insisted. His ragged whisper teasing her ear. "Always."

Relentless, he fingered her to the brink of ecstasy, only to pull back and demand her surrender once again. Leslie cried out, her head thrashing back and forth as she fought the words. Fought her desire for the man she both loved and hated with every piece of herself.

The world fell away. In this moment, there was only the two of them in a silent, slippery battle of wills and heat. She was desperate to have him filling her, pounding away inside of her. But still, she stubbornly held on to the one word he wanted to hear.

"Damn you, Leslie." With a muttered oath, he buried his face in the curve of her neck, his heaving breaths raising gooseflesh on her skin. Finally, he repositioned himself between her thighs.

Finally. There was no stopping now. She wouldn't let him. Leslie dug her nails into the thick muscles of his back and lifted her hips as he thrust forward. *Oh, God.* "Yes."

In the space of one of her shattered heartbeats, Leslie was flying over the edge of the world, Leo right behind her. She opened her eyes and watched as he threw his head back, his guttural shout echoing between them.

* * * * *

Leo was the first to move. He shifted until they lay together side by side on the bed. He wasn't touching her anymore, and there were no words between them. Nothing but a thick silence that brought Leslie back to her senses too quickly.

Too late.

"Oh, crap." Horror over what she'd allowed to happen churned deep in her belly as she opened her eyes. "Condom."

Leo's head turned toward her and he lifted a brow. "What did you say?"

"We forgot to use a damn condom." *Hell*. She was so angry with him. With herself. How could she have been that ridiculously stupid?

"You're still on the Pill, aren't you? I thought you used it to regulate your periods." His low-voiced inquiry was too intimate in this room, with the smell of sex still lingering on their sweaty bodies. It shouldn't have been. It should have just been one of those things that a husband and wife discussed together easily, comfortably.

But nothing was easy between her and Leo. Nothing would be comfortable ever again.

"Believe me, getting pregnant is just the least of several concerns that come to mind after sex with *you*," Leslie sneered, but she wasn't fooling anyone. If she dared look in the mirror, she knew she'd see a woman working hard to hide her vulnerability, hide the fact that she was on the verge of crying, but a woman who'd also just been so well fucked, the memory of it was burned into her soul.

She smoothed her hair back from her face, but after running her fingers through it a few times, was forced to concede it would be a wasted effort trying to tame the long length at this point. Just like it wasn't going to do any good to pretend she wasn't in serious danger of falling apart right now, but she did anyway. That was something she'd die before she let happen in front of Leo.

Leo growled, leaning up on an elbow to stare down at her. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

His indignation spurred her to action. She sat up, her gaze darting around the room. Spotting her dress resting over a chair in the corner, she jumped out of bed, disregarding the telling quiver of the muscles in her upper thighs.

Leslie no longer cared about shielding her body from Leo as long as she put as much distance between them as possible...as quickly as possible.

"Les, where do you think you're going?"

Already slipping the black silk sheath over her head, Leslie ignored his stupid question. After smoothing the dress down her hips, she stopped. Without facing him, she said, "Where are my panties?"

"Hm. You mean that tiny black thong you were barely wearing last night? Yeah, that was really nice. You do some online shopping, or something? I don't remember seeing that one before."

With a sharp hiss she turned, only to find him sitting on the edge of the bed. He bent to pick up a pair of faded jeans from the floor and stood to pull them on.

She waited impatiently, glaring at him with what she could only hope was a face hewn of stone. He dragged his zipper up before glancing back at her with a shrug, completely unrepentant. "Oddly enough, I got a little distracted and didn't pay a lot of attention to where your clothes ended up." Stuffing a hand into his back pocket, he grinned. "But I'm sure they'll turn up...somewhere."

Whatever was left of her post-coital afterglow bled away to nothing as Leslie's temper rose. "Why you — I can't believe — *Oh!*"

With a growl of frustration and swiftly returning need, she gritted her teeth against the sizzling image of Leo laying her on the bed and stripping her of her dress, playing with her nipples and sliding the soft black lace of her thong down her legs. Had he touched her last night? Spread her thighs wide and put his mouth on her?

Just leave. Get out of here. Get away from him before you lose your nerve and your mistakes repeat themselves. Again.

Over and over again.

Giving up on the expensive lace thong, Leslie took a deep breath and bent to retrieve her strappy sandals and the small clutch purse she'd brought with her to the night club.

She moved toward the door, but Leo stepped in her path, once more blocking her way, making her want to scream.

"You're not walking out of here until we get a few things straight between us," he said.

"Let me pass, Leo." Her voice shook. "I'm leaving and you can't make me stay."

"Damn it, Leslie. I want to know what the hell is going on. You throw me out my own fucking house without good reason, and in the last two months, you haven't returned any of my calls. Instead, you've got your goddamned father running interference on me and your bloodhound of a lawyer sending me threatening letters." He ran a hand through his already spiky hair. "You can't just up and leave me without any kind of explanation. You're my *wife* for God's sake. I deserve better than this from you."

"Don't you dare try to tell me what *you* deserved, Leo." She laughed. A harsh, broken sound. "You know what I deserved? I deserved a husband who wasn't lying to me. I deserved a husband who wasn't going behind my back fucking everything with two legs in a skirt."

"*What?*" His look of surprise seemed so real. *The bastard*. If Leslie hadn't seen the disgusting video for herself –

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about." He reached for her hand. She jerked away, pushing past him to yank open the bedroom door.

He let her go, but was close on her heels as she made her way down the short hallway. "Les, don't do this. Don't go without at least giving us a chance to figure this thing out."

"There's nothing to figure out." She stopped at the front door. With the clutch purse in one hand, she braced herself against the wall to slip on her shoes. "And I'm not going to be made a fool of again. I won't stick around and listen to any more of your lies," she said.

"Damn it, Leslie. I love you. I haven't been with anyone but you. How can you believe otherwise?"

She shook her head, rejecting the words, rejecting him. "Leave me alone, Leo. You can send your explanations to my lawyer."

Chapter Four

Leslie came home to her empty house.

After she'd learned of Leo's infidelity and made the decision to leave him, her father, the high-powered attorney, had advised her to force *him* to be the one to leave the house in order to cement her claim on the jointly owned property. Leslie hadn't much cared about the intricate legal issues when her heart was broken and bleeding, but she'd allowed her dad to change the locks on her home, and he had also been the one to face Leo and tell him that Leslie would be filing for divorce as soon as possible.

Her father had never given her the details of that particular conversation, only that Leo had argued and slammed a few things around, but eventually he'd made arrangements to remove a few pieces of furniture and some of his clothes. And when Leslie had returned a few days later, it was to find that Leo really had taken only the basic necessities. The rest remained, as if he expected to be ensconced back at home shortly.

Locking the door behind her, Leslie's heart felt heavy. She had loved this house once. The two of them had put all their dreams into this house, dreams for a marriage filled with love, laughter – and eventually children.

The last two months, Leslie hadn't been able to stay here, preferring her old room at her parent's estate on the outskirts of town, where every nook and cranny didn't have Leo's mark stamped all over it. Being here was too much of a reminder of what she'd lost, from the few clothes still hanging in the closet with his scent on them, to the furniture they had picked out together, and the photos on the wall.

She should take those down. They only made it harder.

She dropped her keys and her bag on the table in the foyer and flipped off her shoes. A glance at the blinking light on the answering machine told her she had six

messages. She ignored it, not wanting to risk having to listen to Leo's slick voice making excuses.

But she couldn't keep him from invading her head. Couldn't keep his shattered expression when she'd accused him of cheating from penetrating her sorrow. *He should have been an actor, instead of just representing them.*

God, this morning had been such a disaster.

With a sigh, she slowly went upstairs to the master bedroom and straight through to the en suite bath. She turned on the water in the shower before pulling her wrinkled dress over her head and dropping it into the garbage can. There was no point in having it cleaned. She was never going to wear it again.

Standing directly beneath the blistering hot spray, the cracks in Leslie's armor finally ruptured. The hot tears pouring down her face mingled with the water and were washed away. She ducked her head. Her chest heaved, the violent sobs torn from her heart and soul.

After everything, she still loved him. So damn much.

What does that say about me? What kind of idiot am I?

She hadn't cried before now. Hadn't let herself. When her father had come to her with his accusations about her husband, she'd laughed in his face, certain there was some mistake. Rick Jordan had never liked Leo and wouldn't have thought twice about jumping to conclusions about the disreputable bad boy her daughter had married against his wishes. But he was a lawyer to the core, and he'd brought proof. A video.

Against her better judgment, Leslie had agreed to see what was on the disk, but she'd been sorry. There had been absolutely no doubt who was playing the starring male role in the grainy, homemade film, or that the "other woman" was undeniably her husband's newest, prettiest client, a client Leslie happened to know he had spent the night with two weeks before, "hashing out the contracts".

She'd never felt like such an idiot.

That damn video had played over and over again in her mind every time she'd closed her eyes since.

Leslie closed her eyes. As her soapy hands slid over her body and washed Leo's scent away, her thoughts drifted to the way he'd touched her this morning, as if she were the only woman in the world for him. The pleasure he'd given her, as if he read her mind and knew exactly what she needed. As if they were two halves being reunited into a whole.

This morning she'd almost forgotten that the two of them had no future together anymore, forgotten that she had been saying goodbye.

Her fingers trailing a light path down her neck and chest, Leslie hesitated. She cupped her breasts in her palms, testing their humble weight and wondering if they were too small. Too small to be sexy, too small to keep the attention of a man like Leo.

She pinched and pulled at her nipples until they puckered into tight points that ached for the rougher touch of another. She cupped and squeezed, but it was Leo's darker, calloused hands she pictured fondling her, his hands that continued down over her hips and her belly. It was his fingers sliding between the wet lips of her pussy to circle and tease her sensitive clit and delve deeper, into the creamy warmth.

Bracing herself with one fist against the tiled wall of the glass-enclosed shower stall, Leslie stroked herself to a softly cresting orgasm that left her feeling relaxed and warm...and sad. Leo shouldn't have the power to get so far under her skin. She had worked too hard to shut him out of her heart just as surely as she'd shut him out of her life. And he was supposed to stay out.

But perhaps she should have agreed to talk this thing over with him after all, because obviously the silent treatment wasn't helping her deal with her lingering closure issues.

No. She refused to give him the satisfaction of listening to his excuses and lies. This was better. She should call David and see what he could do to put a rush on the paperwork for the divorce.

Leslie had finished drying her hair and was dressed in a comfortable pair of flannel pajamas—she had no intention of going anywhere today but her bed—when the telephone rang. She hesitated before answering, afraid it would be Leo.

“Leslie, where have you been?”

“Hello, Dad.”

“Sweetheart, what’s wrong with your cell phone? What are you doing *there*?”

Good morning to you, too. She sighed. “You mean my home?” For some reason, her father’s usual overprotective concern wasn’t sitting well with her this morning.

“You know what I mean.” His crusty, always-serious voice echoed, telling her that he was on the speaker phone from his office. “It’s been weeks since you stayed there. Why didn’t you come back to the house last night?”

She hesitated. “I didn’t want to wake you and Mom, coming in so late.”

“Why were you out at that time of night in the first place? I tried your cell phone and you didn’t answer. I saw David at the office last night about ten thirty, and he said you should have been on your way home. So what were you doing?”

“Why so much interest in my nightlife, Dad?”

“I worry about you, you know that.” He didn’t pause or pretend to feel guilt for his overbearing tendencies. Rick Jordan would do whatever it took to keep his daughter safe, and Leslie had long ago learned to accept that and even appreciate it—most days.

“I know you do, Dad, but I’m fine. I *was* fine. If you must know, I was supposed to meet David at a club last night, but after he called to say he’d gotten tied up at the office, I saw...an old friend...and decided to stay awhile longer.”

“A nightclub? With all those people? What was David thinking?”

“Don’t sound so surprised. I told you I was fine.”

“Are you taking that new medication the doctor prescribed for you?”

“I tried it for a few weeks, but those pills made me drowsy all day long and gave me terrible headaches. I’ve been managing my symptoms with some new meditation

techniques and breathing exercises that my therapist researched for me. They have helped with the panic attacks quite a bit, actually.” In fact, Leslie was rather impressed with herself. There had been a time when she could barely leave the house without feeling strangled by the congestion and noise of the hundreds of thousands of people sharing the city with her. As the wife of a prominent businessman who represented the rich and famous and was obligated to spend a great deal of time attending crowded social events late at night, she’d felt guilty and ashamed of herself every time Leo had been forced to go out without her.

Until she learned he wasn’t really going alone.

“That’s my brave girl.” Her father was trying to sound positive, but Leslie picked up a note of caution in his voice. On her side of the line, she hoped he couldn’t hear the clenching of her teeth. She’d long ago accepted his need to shield and protect his fragile only daughter, but refused to let his concern take away from her recent accomplishments.

Suddenly too tired for words, Leslie just wanted to say goodbye. “Dad, I obviously got in later than I’m used to, so you’ll have to forgive me but I’m going to let you go and crawl back into bed for a few more hours.” *Alone.*

“Will you be coming back to the house later then? I don’t like you being out there all by yourself.” *Because of Leo.*

“You changed the locks on him, Dad,” Leslie sighed.

“For someone like *him* that won’t make any difference if he decides he wants inside.” Cringing at her father’s derisive emphasis on the “him”, Leslie knew she had to quickly put an end to the degenerating conversation.

“Sure Dad, don’t worry. I’ll come over in a little while.”

“Wonderful. Your mother will be pleased. Besides, David will be coming by to prepare for the Lancaster trial with me. If I let him know you’ll be home, he might just stay for dinner.”

Leslie knew her father's greatest wish would be for his daughter to ease the pain of her failed marriage by "getting back on the horse" with a man of *his* choosing – namely, the newest junior partner of Jordan, Maxwell, Palmer. She hated to tell him that she not only wasn't ready for a relationship with David, but especially after last night, she might never be able to see anyone without Leo's memory clouding her judgment.

* * * * *

When Leslie turned onto her street again three days later, it was with a renewed determination to put her life back together. She was going to start by making her home her own again.

She'd spent the last few hours trying to explain to her father why it was necessary that she do this on her own. He hadn't agreed – of course – but he'd finally let her go and promised not to check up on her...more than three or four times a day, anyway.

Leslie had laughed, but she wasn't going to underestimate the lengths her father would go to protect her. In the weeks she'd spent at her parents' home, Leo had shown up there once, and called countless times. Her father had "run interference" and Leslie hadn't been forced to talk to him, but that didn't mean she wouldn't have to do it sometime. Soon. Neither of them could continue to go on like this.

The decision to return to her marital home had been a difficult but necessary one. Leslie's new techniques for managing her agoraphobia had helped her feel stronger than she had in a long time. She was ready to reclaim her independence and stop making it so easy for others to treat her as a victim. And, whether she liked it or not, Leslie was going to have it out with Leo at some point, so it might as well be on neutral turf without her father's explosive temper to get in the way.

But as she pulled into the curved driveway and saw a familiar Lexus parked in her spot, Leslie almost changed her mind and turned right back around.

He wasn't supposed to be here waiting for her. She had been hoping for more time.

Leslie parked her car behind Leo's and got out slowly. As she approached the front door, she noticed that the locks were still intact. He hadn't forced his way in—at least not through here.

Squaring her shoulders, Leslie crossed the threshold. Closing the door behind her with a soft click that nevertheless echoed too loudly in the large foyer, she couldn't hold back a cringe, as if she'd just shut herself in the gladiator's ring with the people's choice.

"Well, isn't this a bit of role reversal." Leo watched her from the entrance to the kitchen at the other end of the hall, a shoulder propped casually against the door jamb with his arms folded across his chest. "Isn't it usually me coming in late to find you waiting with dinner?"

"What are you doing here?" She struggled to keep her voice from betraying the depth of emotion already strangling her.

"I live here, remember?"

"Not anymore, you don't."

"A brief lapse in judgment. One that my lawyer has advised me to rectify immediately. It seems that in my confusion and disillusionment after coming home to find my loving wife had locked me out of the house, the decision to leave *temporarily* instead of forcibly barreling through her father could possibly be determined later by a court to be a relinquishment of my legal rights to possession of the said matrimonial home."

Leslie lifted a brow at his practiced verbiage. "So you finally got some legal advice?" She should be relieved, right? That meant he'd decided not to fight her anymore and perhaps the divorce could go through more quickly.

So why had her heart started to race? Why did her hands shake as she turned away to set her purse down on the side table?

She removed her coat and went to hang it in the front closet. "I hope you didn't break a window or something, forcing your way inside the house."

"Funny thing, that. Did you know if you call a locksmith and ask for help getting into a locked house, they make you show them proof that the house is yours? I guess it's a good thing my name happens to be on the deed." He stood away from the wall and walked toward her.

She glanced up into his hard face, refusing to step back as he stopped a foot in front of her. "So exactly what did you expect to accomplish by coming here?"

As he stared her down, his eyes flashed with a heat she knew all too well. A heat Leslie responded to, despite herself. It softened the angry pounding of her temples, melted the ice over her heart. *This* was the reason she had let her father hide her away from Leo these last two months. Because she'd known a part of her would want to let him talk her out of her anger, let him back in. She'd known a part of her was still trying to believe they could be together again.

"Stop it!" she hissed, pushing past him and marching to the staircase. "We're not doing this again."

Before she'd gotten three steps up, Leo had her arm and was spinning her around to face him. He looked up at her and sighed. "Les, I'm tired of this shit."

"Let me go."

"Forget it, princess." His fingers curled around her upper arm. "I've played this game by your rules until now. I let you push me out of my own house without an explanation, I let your father call me names and keep me from my wife—because I was sure you'd come to me eventually. I was sure you weren't going to throw away our life together without giving us a chance to fix whatever it was getting in the way."

Leo tugged until she was forced to come back down a step or fall into his arms. He leaned in so close his lips brushed the sensitive nape of her neck as he whispered, "From here on in we're playing a very different game, Leslie my love. And I suggest you learn the rules real fast."

Chapter Five

It was about fucking time. Leo felt good about this. He should have come home and forced Leslie to face him two months ago instead of letting her hide behind her daddy for so long.

She stood balanced on the second step of the stairs as Leo consciously stroked a thumb over her smooth, warm skin. She glared down at him, a heated blush reddening her cheeks and putting a furious fire in her gorgeous eyes.

I can't believe she thinks I cheated on her.

How? How could she?

He loved this beautiful, stubborn woman more than anyone or anything else in this world. She was his life, the one person who brought him peace after the days and nights spent negotiating with and placating ruthless sharks, selfish assholes and childish divas. After the overnight stardom of one of his clients three years ago, Leo's agency had suddenly exploded and he'd been sought after by actors and actresses, models, authors—and everyone else under the sun. The money had started to roll in. For the first time in three years of marriage they hadn't been living from paycheck to paycheck. Leo had felt like he was finally able to give his wife the kinds of things she deserved to have—a beautiful house, a nice car—all the things Daddy spoiled her with before she'd married him.

But his business had gotten so crazy so fast, he'd worried about burning himself out. The only thing that kept him going was being able to lose himself in Leslie's welcoming arms when he dragged his ass back home to her at the end of the long days.

"This isn't a game, Leo." Leslie pulled her arm from his grasp and moved back up a step. "And I'm not going to play."

Struggling to keep his volatile emotions at bay, Leo stopped her again. "Too late."

He felt her intake of breath as he crowded her back against the stair rail and took her mouth in a kiss of brutal possession. *Too late for both of us.*

His arms snaked around her, his fingers splaying over her spine and the small of her back as he hauled her close, molding her body to his until she would be forced to accede that they were inevitable—an unbreakable pair. He devoured her, slanting his mouth over hers again and again, sliding his tongue deep to drink in the heady essence of her. “Damn you, Les,” he murmured against her lips. “*Fight*. Fight for us, baby. I can’t do it alone for much longer.”

With a growl, she tore away from him. “What would be the point in fighting for something I don’t want anymore?” Her face flushed a beautiful pink.

He laughed. “That’s a fucking lie, and you and I both know it.” Oh, she wanted him all right. He could see the glaze of passion in her eyes. It was in the way her body swayed toward him even though her hands shoved against his chest. Despite whatever Leslie thought he had done, it probably killed her to admit it, but she still wanted him. It was the one thing Leo knew for certain, and it gave him hope that he could somehow save this marriage.

Leslie’s fingers curled, her short, pink-tinted nails digging through the soft Merino wool of his pullover into his tensed biceps.

“Damn you, Leo.” She shook her head and swore under her breath, but then she was suddenly kissing him back, kissing him like he was a tall glass of water and she’d gone without for the last two months.

Breathing was overrated. He didn’t need to breathe as long as Leslie was in his arms. He didn’t need to see as long as he could crush her sweet lips beneath his own. His arms tightened around her slender waist as their tongues clashed, tearing a harsh groan from his throat that echoed upward, to the high ceiling of the curved stairwell. Her brand was seared into his skin as her mouth moved over his chin and the column of his neck. She sank her teeth into the thick tendon and he groaned again. Her palms slipped from his shoulders, down his chest until she nudged her fingers beneath the

hem of his sweater and the white tee shirt beneath that. He couldn't get enough of her touch, needing it as much as he'd always needed her, with a fierce, possessive intensity that sometimes frightened him to his soul.

Lifting her head, Leslie pushed his sweater higher over his abdomen. "Off," she said, her eyes bright as she waited.

Leo raised his arms, reaching over his shoulders to pull the material over his head. He refused to believe that this was only a matter of sex. Leslie wouldn't use him just to scratch an itch, her integrity was one of the things he loved most about her. It was his own integrity he sometimes worried about, because Leo knew he would take advantage of every opportunity that presented itself when it came to Leslie. Right now, he didn't much care why she had suddenly switched gears, and he wasn't going to give her a chance to change her mind.

The soft wool fell from his fingers to the bottom step behind him. Leslie was already working the buttons of her silky blouse. "Not fast enough," he growled, pushing her shaking fingers away.

He paused.

"Go ahead." She cocked her head to the side with an irreverent grin. "I know you want to."

Leo chuckled, some of the urgent desperation that had spurred him to this point ebbing as he looked into her green eyes. Her smile grounded him, gave him a feeling of peace, something he had been missing for too long. It had been torn from him that night he'd arrived to find the doors of his home locked against him and Leslie's father waiting on the front step.

Still, he wasn't going to turn down an opportunity to rip her clothes off—literally—and Leo took the folds of her shirt in his fists and rent the flimsy material apart with an exaggerated yank.

Listening to the little silver buttons scatter across the ceramic tile, his gaze fell to her creamy, smooth skin, to the swell of her breasts above the fine, pink lace cups of her bra,

a bra that barely covered nipples he knew to be a dusky rose color. He wanted to tweak those nipples between his fingers until she screamed, wanted them in his mouth, tightening against the raspy torture of his flicking tongue.

Leslie stepped into him, her warm body flush with his as she sought his mouth. Returning her kiss with deep attention, Leo hooked his thumbs beneath the thin straps curled over her shoulders, sliding them down to hang loosely from her arms before tugging on the soft cups so that her supple breasts burst forward into his palms.

She gasped and pressed closer, thrusting her hips forward. Leo used all the tools at his disposal to drive her mad with wanting him; his body, his hands, his lips and teeth. When finally she blurted out a desperate plea for more, he slid his palm beneath the hem of her skirt, along the inside of her thigh. "Are you ready baby?"

He knew she was. After years of loving this woman, he had learned how to read every one of her body's signs, and right now all of them were screaming for him to fuck her.

Gripping her chin, he tilted her face to his, looking into green eyes that had turned dark and cloudy with passion. "There'll be no more denying what's between us, Les. No more running from me. You're mine, no matter what you think I've done. *Mine*. And I'm yours. Always. Whatever happens, you better believe I'm not letting you go ever again."

With her blouse falling open in tatters and her skirt hiked up to her thighs, Leslie knew she could nod and give Leo the assurances he wanted...but would it be a lie? Could she give him the promises he asked for now and still face herself in the mirror tomorrow? Could she let him back into this house, into her life, and carry on with this marriage as if he hadn't torn her heart from her chest?

She didn't know.

At first, the situation had seemed very black and white. Her husband had cheated on her. She would get a divorce. But now she knew it wasn't so straightforward as that.

The last two months without Leo had been devastating, as bad as the images from that damned video. Two months ago, Leslie hadn't understood how hard it would be to deny the love she still felt for him.

But now she did.

Blinking back tears she would die before letting him see, Leslie returned Leo's serious look and finally nodded.

He shook his head. "That's not going to be good enough this time." He kissed her. Hard. Fast. Then he actually took a full step back, dropping his hands to his sides. "Without letting sex cloud the issue, I need to know you're going to stick around and give us a shot at fixing our marriage."

Leslie wanted the warmth of his hands on her again, now. But he was right, she couldn't let the demands of her body make this decision for her.

Could she forgive him? Could she trust him again?

As long as he came clean and stopped insisting on his innocence. As long as he admitted to his mistake, she could at least try.

She wanted to try.

"I don't understand where you got this idea I've been unfaithful to you, and it hurts to find out you don't trust me enough to believe me when I say I haven't." Frustration and pain were evident in his clenched jaw as he took her hand and pressed it to his chest. "Feel that, Les. My heart beats for you. Only for you. Since the day we met, it's been that way."

With a hopeful heart, Leslie closed the distance he had put between them. "Then kiss me, Leo. I promise we'll talk...later." Her whisper broke as she reached for him. "You can't ask me for any more than that. For now, just kiss me."

His hesitation was brief, but long enough for Leslie to think maybe he would demand more. She couldn't give it to him. Wouldn't make any more promises. Not yet. But... "I do love you, Leo. Even though I hated you, I couldn't stop loving you."

He lifted a finger to trail down the line of her cheekbone, dragged a thumb over her bottom lip. "And do you? Hate me?"

"Part of me does. Part of me really wants to hate you. It would make my decision so much easier." Surprisingly, Leslie felt a smile curve her lips as she leaned her cheek into the palm of his hand. "Maybe—" She leaned forward and kissed him. "If you weren't so persuasive." Another kiss. "So irresistible." And again. "So—"

A low moan and he pulled her hard against his solid chest, forcing his tongue between her lips to sweep the inside of her mouth again and again as he stripped the remains of her blouse from her shoulders and unfastened the clasp of her bra.

"Turn around and bend over the railing," he growled in her ear. "Put that fine ass of yours in the air."

Excitement raced through her veins as Leslie did exactly as he told her. She turned, gripping the banister tightly, and leaned forward. The stair rail wasn't quite low enough, so she stood on her tiptoes to angle her ass outward for Leo's inspection.

She shivered as he curled the flat of his hand around the back of her neck and forced her over even farther until the rail pushed deep into her belly. He trailed a searing path down her spine with his tongue.

"Reach behind you and flip your skirt up."

Having dressed in a pleated skirt that swayed loosely around her knees, flipping the hem to her waist was easy enough. She was glad not to be wearing a narrow pencil skirt.

"Oh, baby. That's nice." Leo's fingers traced down the thin string of her lace thong before he cupped and squeezed her butt cheeks, pressing his erection between them through the thick denim of his jeans. The rough abrasion of cotton against her smooth skin made Leslie moan and tighten her hands around the hard oak of the railing. He smacked one cheek hard when she squirmed against him. "Don't move too much now. You're going to spoil all my fun."

When he dragged the pink lace over her hips and down her thighs, she obediently stepped out of the garment, twisting to look over her shoulder as he took a step back. He watched her with a predatory gleam in his eyes.

Leslie felt a hot blush rise in her cheeks.

“Put your right foot a step higher. Spread your legs and let me see how wet you are, how much you need what only I can give you.”

“Leo—”

“Now, princess. Do it.”

Dictatorial and forceful. He knew very well Leslie liked it best that way. She loved when he took control of her body as if he owned it *and* her. And in a way, she guessed that he did own her after all, because Leslie could no longer imagine the idea of leaving him. Could it be possible he was innocent, that there was some other explanation for that video? Anyone seeing them together would agree that this man worshiped her. Love and respect were written all over his face. Leslie had trouble imagining that he would even look at another woman, much less cheat on her.

Maybe she was *his*, but Leo was also *hers*.

Putting aside everything but the throbbing of her pussy, she did as he asked. Bent over, with her skirt hiked to her waist and her thighs spread wide, Leslie was completely at Leo’s mercy. On display. For him.

He fell to his knees behind her. “So pretty,” he said, kissing her. Two kisses that would have been almost chaste if he hadn’t left them on the rounded cheeks of her ass. Then his hands spread her wide and his tongue licked deep between her hot, swollen flesh.

With a sharp cry, Leslie tensed. “My God, Leo.” Her chin dropped to her chest. She was glad of the curtain of hair that fell forward in front of her face to hide the expression of ecstasy she was sure she wouldn’t have been able to keep him from seeing. Not that it mattered, Leslie was beyond trying to protect herself.

Relentless, he pulled her hips higher, pushed her legs farther apart. His stubble burned as he rubbed his face over her vulnerable skin, his mouth hot, his lips and tongue dragging moisture from her core until it ran down her thigh.

Finally, when she thought she couldn't stand any more and was ready to beg him for release, he stood. Leslie listened as he released the buckle of his belt. She heard his zipper being pulled, and then the distinct tear of paper. "I picked up some condoms this time," he said.

Presumptuous ass. But it seemed he had a right to be. Looking over her shoulder again, Leslie watched as he rolled the latex over himself.

He pressed the broad head of his cock into her in one long, smooth stroke. She bit her bottom lip and tried to push back against him, to take him deeper, but he was already easing out.

Slowly.

She urged him to return to her by angling her ass higher, but he reached for her hips and held her still. She moaned, throwing her head back when he filled her once again.

"What do you need, baby?"

"Fast," she murmured. "Hard and fast. Please, Leo."

"You're beautiful, Les, you know that? You feel so good riding my cock. Perfect." His slow thrusts increased in tempo. "You've always been just what I need, in every way. I don't want anyone but you. Don't you believe that?"

She didn't know what to say. Didn't say anything. He was pounding in and out of her now. Fast. Hard. Her breasts swung with the force of his powerful movements at her back.

"Come on. The truth. Do you believe me?"

The delicious tension rose higher and higher, curling out from her core and exploding before her eyes in brilliant prisms of bright colors that pierced her heart. "Yes," she whispered. *"Yes, I believe you."*

Chapter Six

Leslie woke with a sense of calm that felt a little alien. She had spent the last few months in a dense fog of anger and pain, telling herself again and again that it was over between her and Leo.

She'd been lying to herself. Even hiring a lawyer to draw up divorce papers had really only been a smoke screen for the fact that she didn't want to believe her marriage was a failure.

Although she hadn't wanted to know any more of the gory details than what was already burned into her brain from the images in that video, the truth was Leslie had understood that if she was ever going to be able to close this chapter of her life and move on, she needed to know why he'd done it.

Why?

Now moving on seemed even farther away because she'd promised to give Leo a second chance. And she intended to honor that promise.

It hadn't been the sex that finally convinced her to relent—she told herself she could have resisted Leo if she'd really wanted to—and it hadn't necessarily been his dogged assertions of innocence. Really, in the end it had been Leslie herself. She'd always trusted Leo. And she trusted her instincts. Her instincts were telling her now that she couldn't have been so wrong about him, about his love for her. There was something about all of this that she had missed.

She couldn't ignore the video or the fact that her own loving husband had left her arms to spend the night at the home of the same woman he'd been so obviously fucking in said video. But at least now she was willing to entertain the possibility that there must be a way for him to explain it—a way that wouldn't break her heart all over again.

Stretching, she realized that it felt good to be sleeping in her own bed again.

Surprisingly enough, Leo wasn't in it with her.

Leslie stretched her arms over her head and pointed her toes. She ached all over, in wonderfully wicked places. After the episode on the stairs, Leo had carried her to their room. He'd taken her again in the bed hard and fast, and then let her mount him and ride him slowly to another shattering orgasm before following her into the shower.

Afterward, spent and exhausted, she had fallen asleep cocooned in his arms, mindful of the irony that only a few days ago she'd bemoaned the fateful circumstance which had her awakening in the same position.

Opening her eyes, Leslie glanced at the digital reading of her alarm clock. It was very early in the morning, still dark and quiet. Leo should be lightly snoring away beside her, but she thought she knew why he'd gotten up. The same thing that had plagued her own sleep.

They had unfinished business to take care of.

She got out of bed and pulled on a wrapper from the closet. Leslie knew exactly where to find him.

Walking down the stairs to meet him was harder than it should have been, but at this point, more avoidance would have looked cowardly on her part and she refused to give Leo the satisfaction.

Stopping at the curved archway leading into his large office, Leslie thought at first that she'd guessed wrong. The high-backed rolling chair behind the solid mahogany desk sat empty, but at the other end of the room a cozy blaze crackled away in the fireplace in front of Leo's black leather club chair, and a half-empty crystal tumbler sat in a small ring of water that would no doubt leave a stain on the mahogany finish of the small side table. She smiled. *He still hasn't learned to use a damn coaster.*

"Leo, what are you doing down here?" The chair faced the fire and away from where she stood at the entrance of the room, but she could see his elbow resting on the wide arm.

No answer.

“Leo?”

With a deep breath, Leslie stepped inside and was immediately enveloped in warmth. She knew why he had always liked this room. Entering felt like crossing over into another world, a private, intimate world. There had been many evenings when the two of them had closeted themselves in here together. She would stretch out on the couch reading a book or tapping away on her laptop, and he would sit behind the desk, working tirelessly. At some point she would glance at him and be mesmerized by the powerful, dynamic, fascinating man she’d married. Inevitably, he would look up to find her watching and call her over to join him in his lap, on her knees at his feet, or laid out across the desk.

Oh God, the good memories made their current separation so much worse. Despite the problems they’d encountered in seven years of marriage, Leslie had honestly believed the two of them had been *happy* together. She’d believed her heart and her soul were safe in his keeping. She’d believed that Leo loved her – like she loved him.

Walking across the plush oriental carpet, she stopped beside the chair and let out a quiet sigh.

Asleep.

To her surprise, a kernel of tenderness blossomed, a tight ache in the pit of her belly that spread to her heart and brought a misty sheen to her eyes as she looked down at... *her husband.*

His dark hair stood straight up, as if he’d run his fingers through it more than once before falling asleep. It was something he did when feeling stress or frustration and she wondered if he’d been having difficulty with one of his more highly strung celebrity clients.

His head had dropped back and to the side. Long, heavy breaths escaped his slightly parted mouth. As Leslie stood over this strong, sexy, compelling man who had given her the best years of her life and the worst pain she’d ever known, the anger she’d

been holding onto for what seemed like such a long time lessened, and beneath it was still so much love.

She didn't know if it was going to be enough to get them through this, but—

“Hey there, princess. What's going on behind those beautiful, stormy eyes?” He was watching her, looking sleepy and comfortable.

She smiled and accepted his outstretched hand, letting him pull her down onto his lap. “I think we should probably talk now.” Unable to avoid the temptation, she twirled her fingers in his hair and brushed a short curl from his forehead.

“You're right. We should have talked a long time ago, but I guess now is better than never.” Taking her other hand, he laid a warm kiss to the center of her palm and then pressed it to his chest. Like a cat, Leslie flexed against the expanse of smooth skin revealed by the open throat of his collared shirt.

It was more difficult than she thought it would be, asking her husband why he had slept with another woman. “Leo—”

“I haven't been unfaithful to you, Les,” he interrupted. His tone hardened and she could see that he was having difficulty keeping his anger in check. “You need to tell me once and for all where you got this ridiculous idea and then get the hell over it.”

Realizing that her hand had clenched into a tight fist in her lap, Leslie swallowed. There was no getting around it, she would have to show him. She got up and walked to the desk where her laptop sat.

“Where are you going?” He looked over his shoulder to follow her movements.

Pulling open a drawer, she reached inside for the disc. “Come here,” she said, sliding it into the disk drive to load up. He joined her at the desk and lifted an eyebrow. She pushed him into the chair, and when the video was set to play, she moved away. She didn't need to see this again.

Leslie knew from experience that the video was snowy and dark for the first few minutes. Perhaps the tape had been defective near the beginning, but it cleared up just in time for the “good” parts.

She paid close attention to Leo’s expression as he watched the computer monitor. She knew exactly the moment when he realized what he was looking at, and her heart lurched painfully. In her mind she saw the film playing out. She saw the woman crawling naked onto the bed, beckoning the man to come to her. She saw Leo enter the frame, crawling over her and kissing her deeply, plucking at her nipples before going down on her. It would be a long time before the woman rose and did the same to him, and an even longer time before they were seriously fucking. The film was fifty minutes, and Leslie had forced herself to watch every single one.

“Oh, Jesus. Shit, Leslie, that’s what this is all about? Where did you get this?” Leo didn’t sound surprised at what he was seeing, only that she had found it. All the pain flooded back, stabbing her in the heart. Somehow, as impossible as it seemed, she’d been hoping he would tell her that the man licking that woman’s pussy wasn’t *her* husband. Wasn’t *her* Leo.

She shook her head. “Does it matter?”

He reached for the mouse and with a click, Leslie no longer heard the woman’s throaty moans of pleasure, or her husband’s rough words of encouragement.

“No, I guess not.” He ran his hands through his hair as he came back around the desk toward her. “But it’s not what you think.”

“Isn’t it? So you’re going to try to tell me that wasn’t you? That it wasn’t you and that actress, *Sylvia Darling*, your big new client?” Her voice broke and she put up her arm to ward him off as he stalked across the room. “And to think, I thought it was admirable of you to tell me where you were going that night. I remember thinking you couldn’t possibly be doing her if you had the nerve to admit where you’d been. I guess that just means you have more gall than I ever imagined. And I guess it makes me a bigger fool.”

"Leslie, listen to me. That stupid video is *not* what it seems. We've always had trust between us, and I need you to believe me now." He refused to let her push him away, taking her hand instead and pulling her to him.

"I'm listening, but that's all I can promise."

"Fine, then listen." His eyes were dark as he gazed down at her. "You're right about most of it. That is me in the video. Me and Sylvia."

She tugged, trying to retrieve her fingers from his grasp, but he held firm.

"And you're right that she recently signed a contract with me. A few months ago I spent the night at her house negotiating the terms with her—and her manager. I've told you that already." He paused. "What I didn't tell you was that we knew each other, years ago. Sylvia and I were together for about six months until she went on to bigger and better things in Hollywood. We broke up a little while before I met *you*."

"So, what? You guys decided to see if the spark was still there, and thought it would be cool to videotape the results?"

"No. Les, I haven't touched that woman in years. The video you saw is eight years old. I hate to admit it, but at the time we thought it would be fun—" He cleared his throat. "I honestly believed the thing had been destroyed a long time ago."

She stilled. Oh God, could it really be possible? Thinking about it, she knew it could. Leo didn't *look* any different now than he had the day she met him. He kept his body in great shape and his hair in an easy, natural style—although now that she thought about it, had his hair been a little longer in the video?

Leslie didn't want to hope, but hope was there anyway, stinging her eyes until she couldn't see. Leo cupped her face in his hands and wiped away her tears with his thumbs. "You know I'm telling you the truth. You know the last thing I'd ever do is hurt you." He kissed her.

Instead of choking out an answer, she kissed him back. The tears kept coming, tasting of salt, washing away the hurt until all she felt was love.

"I believe you," she whispered. "I do. Oh God, Leo. I'm so sorry."

He wrapped his arms around her and held her tight as if he were still afraid of losing her. "Don't apologize, baby. Jesus, I can't believe you saw that. I admit the evidence was pretty damning. I just wish you had talked to me, so perhaps we could have avoided all this pain. Your father was like the Secret Service, I couldn't get anywhere near you."

Shame filled her as she acknowledged the truth of his words. "Speaking of my father, he said the disk had come to him anonymously. Do you know who would have sent it?"

"It must have been Sylvia herself." It was his turn to look uncomfortable. "A few days after you kicked me out, she showed up at my office to make a play for me, telling me I was better off without you, that she and I were meant to be together and she wanted to give it another go."

"She what?" *That bitch*. This had all been orchestrated so some other woman could try to steal her husband.

"I told her that ship had sailed and I wasn't interested in anyone but my wife. She's called a couple of times since, but I've managed to avoid her for the most part."

Leslie believed him. All of it. The truth was so obvious. He loved her. He always had. She knew it with every fiber of her being, deep in her heart and soul, and she wouldn't disrespect what they had by doubting that truth ever again.

She still didn't like the idea of his old flame thinking she could get her claws back into Leo. "What about the actress? She's your client now. I don't know think I like that very much."

"As a client, I can legitimately have Joseph take Sylvia's calls. I made him a partner in the agency."

"You did what? When? Why?"

"I did it for us. All of this made me realize that I don't want to be away from you so much. I don't want to go to the endless parties because it's 'good for business', while you sit at home waiting for me every night. As my partner, Joseph can attend half of the social events where we need to maintain an agency presence, and that way I can spend more time with you."

Leslie threw her arms around his neck. "I love you so much. And I've been working on my fear. I want to be able to leave the house and lead a normal life. I want to go to these things with you, to be on your arm and show the world how proud I am of your success."

"You don't have to be anything or do anything to make me happy, Leslie. Just love me."

"Thank you for being so stubborn and not giving up on me after I threw you out of the house." She kissed him. "I'm sorry. So sorry."

Pulling her along with him, he sat back down in the club chair in front of the fire. "Come and show me how sorry you are, baby."

His grin set fire to her blood and Leslie smiled back. Standing before him, she knew the glowing firelight behind her showed off her curves through the thin silk robe. With deliberate movements she untied the sash and slowly let the material slip off her shoulders to pool on the floor. In the flickering light, Leslie smoothed her palms over her breasts and down her belly into the trim thatch of hair at her thighs. She could see Leo's pupils dilate as he leaned back into the chair to watch.

"Oh, sweet Jesus. I have the hottest wife."

She chuckled and went to her knees before him. "It's just the heat from the fireplace," she teased. Her hands worked his belt buckle and unzipped his pants. He lifted his hips to help her tug them down.

His erection sprang free. Leslie wrapped both her hands around him and squeezed. His harsh groan fell to the top of her head as she leaned forward and dipped her tongue

to the small opening at the tip of his cock, and then ran down and back up the length of his shaft, teasing him mercilessly.

“All of it, princess.” He threaded his fingers in her hair, urging her to take more of him. “I want you sucking my cock as hard and as deep as you can with that wicked mouth of yours.”

Gladly she obeyed. Flicking her gaze upward, their eyes met as he looked down at her. She could imagine what he saw. Her nakedness as she perched on her knees between his thighs. The flush of her cheeks. Her fingers wrapped around his thick length, holding him ready for her mouth. Her glistening lips as she took him in.

His hand tightened in her hair as he thrust his hips upward, pushed his cock deeper. She licked and sucked, working him until he was on the brink of release, until with one last thrust and a loud shout, he came in her mouth.

When Leslie sat back on her heels and looked up at Leo, his head had fallen back against the chair. His eyes were closed and he breathed heavily. With a satisfied smile, she climbed into his lap and curled into his warmth. Happiness infused her every cell and she wouldn't have been surprised to discover she was glowing from the inside out.

After a few quiet moments, she started to relax and thought maybe she would fall asleep just like this and make Leo carry her back upstairs to bed, but he already had other plans. With his hands spanning her waist, he guided her on top of him. Leslie swung her leg over his thighs, settling a knee on each side of his hips.

His hand curled around the back of her neck as he pulled her forward for a wet, deep, tongue-tangling kiss. With a low moan, she leaned into him, rubbing the tight peaks of her breasts against his still-clothed chest. He swore and pulled the cotton tee shirt over his head, then cupped her breasts in his hands and pulled her in to ravage her mouth with another long kiss.

“Now, Les.” His scratchy murmur rumbled against the curve of her neck. “I need to be inside you now.”

“Yes. God, yes.” Leslie raised her hips as Leo shifted in the chair. She came down slowly, but Leo was having none of that. He reached for her, his fingers digging into the flesh of her thighs as he surged upward, spearing her already pulsing folds in a hard stroke.

Looking into his face, Leslie swiveled her hips, grinning when he groaned. Purposely, she slowed things down again to increase the torture, relishing this joining of husband and wife.

Before long, however, they were both panting hard, bodies tensing and arching. Leslie’s rolling movements came faster with Leo helping her along, his hands at her waist, lifting her up and down his cock until he stiffened and growled out his release.

As she shattered apart in a devastating orgasm, Leo lifted a hand to her cheek. “Thank God for you, Les,” he whispered. “My heart.”

She shook her head and leaned forward, kissing him with so much love she felt it coming out of her in wave upon wave of joy. “And thank God for you. My soul.”

The End

About the Author

J.K. Coi is a multi-published, award-winning author of contemporary and paranormal romance and urban fantasy. She makes her home in Ontario, Canada, with her husband and son and a feisty black cat who is the uncontested head of the household. While she spends her days immersed in the litigious world of insurance law, she is very happy to spend her nights writing dark and sexy characters who leap off the page and into readers' hearts.

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