



TO THE MAX
ANNMARIE MCKENNA

A guy. A girl. A silver pole...

As owner of Jensen Securities, Max Jensen lives by one simple rule: Never take your eyes off the target. Once he spies lithe little Jordan Landon wrapped around a pole, though, his eyes aren't the problem. It's keeping his mind on his job.

Her job as a pole-dancing instructor might cause a few raised eyebrows, but it's what she does on a speeding motorcycle that kicks Max's protective instincts into overdrive. And puts the hurt on his determination to keep his hands to himself.

Years ago, Jordan left her wealthy, disapproving family behind to pursue her dream of opening her own dance studio. Approaching a hottie in a bar was easy in her college days, but now? If she wants him, she'll have to put her big-girl panties on and go for it.

Once alone, their inhibitions disappear faster than their clothes. But when someone breaks into Jordan's home, Max finds himself in an uncomfortable position—as the target of Jordan's suspicions about his real motives.

Warning: What better sexual partner than one who pole dances? Just think of the possibilities... Add in a stubbed toe, priceless Tiffany and meddling mothers and you're all Maxed out!

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To the Max

Annmarie McKenna

Dedication

To everyone who asked for Max. I loved writing him and Jordan and hope you enjoy reading about them. They're two of my favorite characters.

Chapter One

Max Jensen sang along with Nickelback's "Rockstar" as he followed the woman he was currently investigating. Annie Devlin's husband was positive his wife was having an affair. Normally Max would have passed the case on to one of his subordinates, but considering Jack had broken his ankle that morning and Kent was out sick, the job had landed in his lap.

He hated these cases. Hated chasing after women, or men, who couldn't keep their pants zipped, thus pissing off their respective spouses and causing *him* to have to waste time snooping when he could be working more exciting cases.

Which was exactly why, when his company had gotten big enough, he'd hired employees.

Mrs. Devlin exited the highway into a middle-class area. Max wondered what her husband would think if he discovered his wife was not only having an affair but slumming too. Mr. Devlin would for damn sure think anything less than his own worth to be slumming it. He would also likely divorce the woman rather than have to touch what he'd perceive as her dirtied hands.

At least, that was the impression Max had gotten from the man. He sort of understood why Mrs. Devlin would look elsewhere if she needed relief.

She drove a few miles more before turning into a dimly lit lot and parking. Max parallel parked his own vehicle across the street where he could still see her, then extracted his camera from the bag on the floor. He reached for the big daddy lens. No doubt he'd need to do some zooming in.

A small strip mall sat to the left of the lot, an apartment complex directly behind it and a convenience store to the right.

Twenty bucks she was headed for the apartments and her lover. Why else would she have come all this way, out of her comfort zone of diamonds, fine china and high tea?

The woman would make a great friend for his mother.

Max turned off the car and slouched back in the seat to wait Mrs. Devlin out. The street lamp cast an eerie glow on the white car in front of him, making it a disgusting shade of...newborn-shit, mustard yellow.

Worse though, was the fact he even knew the color of baby shit. He had Ridge Casey, one of his clients, to thank for that. The man's son was adorable, Max admitted, but stinky as hell. And if Ridge's partner, Carter Malone, and Ryan, Carter's wife, kept it up at the rate they seemed to go at it, another baby would be making its way into the Malone and Casey fold before the year was up.

Made Max shiver. A grown man shivering over the thought of having a baby.

He tucked the camera into his lap and unwrapped the PB&J he'd made on the fly. Eating with the whole color thing going on in front of him sorta made him want to regurgitate the bite he took. Then again, at the moment, Max was hungry enough to eat dirt. He could be out enjoying a steak if the client hadn't insisted he follow his wife.

"She always goes out all secretive on Friday nights," he'd said, pacing Max's office in his Armani suit. "And she's been...wanting sex." The man had seemed downright offended.

Max had almost snorted out loud but somehow held it in. Imagine someone's wife wanting sex. What was the world coming to? He'd wondered at the time why in the hell the pompous ass couldn't follow his own wife to her destination, but then the supremely rich felt those kinds of things were beneath them. They'd rather pay an exorbitant fee to have someone else do it.

Another thing that reminded him of his mother. She had a real knack for paying too much for any service available whether she needed it or not.

Several minutes passed before Mrs. Devlin got out of her car. Her head swiveled in every direction. She was definitely afraid someone would see her.

But see her doing what?

Finally she shut the door, wrapped her fists in the lapel of her ankle-length fur coat and walked briskly toward...the strip mall?

A giggling mass of girls exited one of the shops, followed by what Max guessed were their mothers, attracting his attention.

Max sat up in his seat and gripped the camera, ready to snap a few shots. "Where in the hell are you headed, Mrs. Devlin? Meeting a man at his work?"

He scanned the shops. A donut place, a dance studio from which the girls had exited, a UPS store, a Subway and a used bookstore.

Mrs. Devlin paused on the walk to let the girls pass. The way she stuck herself against the brick wall, she almost looked like she thought the girls would sully her somehow. She shielded her face by turning into the wall and covering the other side with her hand.

What in the shit? Did she think a bunch of eight-year-olds would recognize her?

When the group had passed, Mrs. Devlin again looked around. As soon as she was sure the coast was clear she continued on.

And stopped at the dance studio.

So she was meeting a young, nimble dance stud then. Interesting.

She glanced to her right and left, tugged the door open and quickly disappeared inside.

Movement behind the window had him lifting his binoculars instead of the camera. A tall, lithe woman paced, sort of bouncing on the balls of her feet as she twisted long coffee-colored hair into a knot

on top of her head. With the direction she faced he couldn't see her exact features, but what he could view was the rise of her breasts as she reached upward.

Damn they'd be a small handful. Just the right amount. Gorgeous. Outlined succulently by a thin black leotard which he suddenly felt the need to peel off her to reveal her skin inch by inch until he'd divested her body of the skimpy piece of clothing.

She had to be commando beneath it because from the view he had with the lens that could pick up a playing card at five hundred yards, there were no panty lines in the skintight material.

"Damn it." The woman glided away before he could look his fill. Not that there was enough time in the day to do so. He figured he'd need several weeks for that.

With a groan he slumped into the seat. "On a fucking job and fantasizing about the scenery. Nice, Maxo. Real professional."

A few minutes later three women jaunted up the sidewalk, headed for the same place. The way they laughed and clung to each other made Max think perhaps they'd imbibed something before making their way to the studio.

Would make for an interesting ballet session.

There were a few more stragglers, ladies who waltzed into the studio just after six. Then the blinds used to shield the window during the day were tilted upward. Not closed, because light still spilled out.

"Damn it." He wouldn't be able to see inside from his position. He'd have to be up above the window to see down in, or standing at the window itself. Too bad he didn't have x-ray lenses.

Max waited a good ten minutes to make sure no one else showed up, then grabbed his coat from the passenger seat and climbed out of the nondescript Chevy Impala. Missing the luxury of his Lexus, he stretched his six-foot-three frame to wring out most of the kinks he'd acquired from sitting in the cramped space. Whistling, he crossed the street, hands in the pockets of his leather jacket, and peered between the slats. Thank God it was winter and the streets were lonely after dark or he'd look like some sort of Peeping Tom.

What he saw would make any male above the age of twelve choke on his own spit. His breath fogged the glass in the cold night air, and he fought the temptation to reach for his suddenly throbbing cock.

Two things registered at once.

One, this was no fucking ballet class. The beautiful woman he'd seen in the window had her sweet, tight, firm, lithe body wrapped around a silver pole, undulating with the pulse of music he could barely hear, her head dropped back in ecstasy.

And two, this job was officially over because Mrs. Devlin wasn't having an affair. Her secretive Friday night rendezvous were with a pole.

Jordan spread her legs in a wide V, almost in a splits position, and pressed her nose to the floor. Sweat dripped from her forehead to plop on the mat beneath her, and she welcomed it. She'd worked her class harder than ever before simply because she'd been pissed and needed to burn off the energy.

Dirk Clement, the asshole, had come on to her again that morning, and she'd had to practically fight her way out of his clutches. The bastard was lucky he wasn't sporting a black eye or squished balls right now.

Loosening the tightness of her spine, she sank farther down and sighed. "I have to quit my job."

"What was that, Jordan?"

Jordan looked up and planted her chin on her crossed forearms. "Nothing. Talking to myself." She'd forgotten her students were still around, stretching themselves in the hope they wouldn't be sore in the morning.

"You know, if I could get into that position, I wouldn't need to come to your class to impress Mike." Clare's eyes gleamed with her grin.

Her friend, Mia, snorted. "Honey, I got news for you. It would take a hell of a lot less than folding your body in half to impress Mike. Bending over and wiggling your ass would suffice."

"Then why the hell are we here shaking our thing around this pole?"

"Because if you want anything other than *wham bam thank you, ma'am* out of a man, you've got to work it. Make him wait for it."

"Right," added Christy, the third friend of the trio, "because pole dancing in front of him won't make him so damn horny that the second he gets his dick in you he'll explode and be done for the night, leaving you unsatisfied yet again. I think we're doing it backwards, girls."

"I don't know." Four heads turned to the corner where Annie was thoroughly bundling herself back into her coat. "It seems to be working for my husband."

Since Annie rarely spoke and was by far the most repressed woman in the class, Jordan was astonished by the soft admission. Annie seemed to realize she'd spoken the words out loud because her cheeks burned bright red and she visibly swallowed before shoving her feet in her boots and running for the door. Sprinting might have been a more apt word.

The friends burst out laughing as soon as the door slammed shut. Jordan sat up, smiling also, and tucked her legs into a butterfly position to continue stretching. She hadn't been kidding about working her ass off. Even she might be sore in the morning. But hey, she'd gotten over her anger.

Somewhat.

Enough to hopefully sleep through the night without feeling Dirk's groping hands touching her body.

"God, who'd've thunk it? Annie gettin' it on with the kink." Christy twisted at the waist and leaned to the side, her long arm extended over her head.

Mia laughed again—who wouldn't with the image of staid Annie in kink mode? "The woman hasn't spoken more than ten words in five months and she drops that little bomb?"

"It's always the quiet ones," Christy offered. "Shy girls always get the best sex, don't they?"

"Then you must be getting none, huh?" Jordan couldn't resist the taunt. Christy was the most vocal of the class, often making the eight students crack up with the latest bits of her life.

Not that Jordan could talk. When was the last time she'd done the horizontal mambo? A year ago? Two? So long ago her out-of-date contraceptive devices would more likely *help* her conceive rather than protect her.

"Hardy har." Christy jerked her head in quick succession to both sides, popping her neck. "I'll have you know I'm meeting a man tonight at the bar."

"Meeting one or seducing one?" Mia laid back on the mat, her arms and legs akimbo.

"Hopefully both," Christy said truthfully.

Jordan suddenly felt jealous. She wanted to *meet* a man. Wanted to seduce some stranger and have a night of unrequited lovemaking. One with no regrets in the morning and no awkward goodbyes. Hell she'd settle for pretty much anything at this point. Anything as long as she got to feel a cock between her thighs, buried deep inside her while her lover sucked and tugged at her nipples.

Jesus, she had it bad. She jumped to her feet, determined not to let the girls and their naughty thoughts drive her into a frenzy.

She should do it though. Head to the bar and pick up some man. Relive her college years, the glory days of her youth, when nothing and no one was going to stop her from doing anything.

Ten years could certainly change a woman, couldn't they? Now where was she? Cleaning houses for the rich, some of whom felt too entitled to clean up at all after themselves, and teaching ballet/pole-dancing aerobics instead of owning her own studio. At the rate she was going, her studio dreams were about fifty years out of reach.

Perhaps not quite that far, but still. Securing a loan for a place in a decent neighborhood for a woman with no means of financial backup wasn't easy. And with the present economy, the outlook was even less pretty. No bank wanted to fund her. Sure, she could throw her family's name around and have any amount at her disposal in the snap of her fingers, but that would mean using her background to get what she wanted.

No way in hell would she ever accept help from her parents.

Not that they'd give it. They hadn't forgiven her for choosing the path in life she had. Snobs. Christ, they'd even tried to tell her once who she should marry.

Enough. She wasn't going to go there. Not after the day she'd had and how hard she'd worked to shove it out of her system. Adding her family to the mix would only piss her off more.

Jordan bit her lip and made a decision. No more whining and moaning. Tonight she was going to do something about her misery. At least one of her miseries anyway.

Tonight she was going to get laid.

"Hey," she said, surprising the girls as they pulled their weary bodies to the benches that held their things. "Would you mind if I tagged along to this meet and seduce?"

Three mouths dropped open, but Jordan wasn't about to be deterred. She hopped to her feet, bouncing with an excitement she hadn't felt in a while.

"No."

"Sweet."

"Of course you can."

They answered together.

"Great. Where should I meet you?" Her mind was already doing a mental search of her closet and what to wear.

"We're going to Down Under. It's *ladies'* night." Mia smacked her lips.

"Perfect." Jordan grinned and started gathering her things. "What time?"

"Nine thirty. For some reason I never pictured you trolling for men, Jordan." Mia eyed her up and down as if seeing someone new instead of the dance instructor they were familiar with.

Jordan felt sort of new. Giddy. Needy.

She was going to get some.

She laughed. "I just decided I needed a distraction. What better way to distract myself than with the lesser species?"

"Amen to that sister." Clare put her hand up for a high five.

"Can't imagine why we thought you were any different than us," Christy purred. "You do teach pole dancing after all."

"Helps pay the bills." Jordan yanked her jeans over her leotard and buttoned them. "Not to mention what it does for your abs."

"Trust me, we know." Mia groaned and covered her stomach. "And what the shit was up with the sadistic workout tonight?"

Jordan shrugged. "I had some energy to release."

"I've got a far better way to work off excess energy than this." Christy gestured to the poles Dance Inc. had installed specifically in the back of the room for the growing-in-popularity class.

Jordan sure hoped the hell so. She wondered how rusty she really was at picking up guys.

"I hope I haven't lost it. It's been a while." Was she doing the right thing?

"Oh, honey," cooed Mia, "you shake your booty on the dance floor the way you do on those poles and you won't have any trouble gettin' some."

Everyone laughed again.

Jordan stamped her feet into her boots and laced them up before pulling her coat on and grabbing her helmet from its cubby. There was still another class, a late adult tap class, and since that teacher was there waiting for it, Jordan didn't need to lock up or anything. They walked out together.

"So we'll see you in a bit?" Christy eyed her dubiously as if she thought Jordan would change her mind.

"Absolutely. I'll be there." *With bells on.* She wouldn't miss this opportunity even if a loan agent fell from the sky with a contract in his hand.

Okay, yeah she would. But since such a scenario wasn't likely to happen...

The girls went one way after waving their goodbyes and Jordan went the other, headed for her prized possession. Stuffing her sweaty head into the full-shield helmet, she swung her leg over the cobalt blue Yamaha FZ6, her pride and joy, inserted the key and pushed the ignition button with her right thumb. She loved the sound of the bike as it revved to life. Tonight, for once, she was going to get more action than the vibration of her bike between her legs.

Chapter Two

Max groaned and dropped onto a stool at the bar of Down Under. His blood pressure had nearly blasted through the atmosphere on the way here. Watching the kamikaze on that projectile some people commonly referred to as a motorcycle had left Max with heart palpitations and fingers that would no longer straighten. He hadn't even realized he'd been squeezing the steering wheel to death until she'd come to a complete stop and hopped off the death trap to disappear rather quickly into an apartment building.

Why he'd stuck around and followed her to her home he didn't know. Something about the woman had made him sit in his uncomfortable car and wait for her though. Even when Annie Devlin had gone, taking her nonexistent case with her, he'd been too captivated to leave. Thank God, because then he'd seen the woman get on the motorcycle. He'd only just gotten his heart rate and breathing close to normal when she'd skipped out of her place again, dressed in a different pair of slim, butt-hugging jeans, and gotten back on the damn blue bullet. She'd swept her almost-black hair into a low ponytail and stuck her head into the helmet once more, and it had been all Max could do not to dart across the street and yank her off the beast if for no other reason than to keep himself from having a coronary.

She'd been grinning like a loon. He wondered what her mother thought of her little girl on a bike.

Perhaps her mother didn't have a clue. There wasn't much his own mother knew about what he did.

Max should have left right then instead of stalking her like some kind of deranged lunatic. He should have gone home, done the paperwork to close the Devlin case and washed his hands of the suicidal woman. But no. For some indefinable reason he couldn't imagine letting her take off on that damn piece of machinery without following her to make sure she arrived alive to wherever she was headed in such a blissful mood.

Sixty-seven fucking miles per hour on the goddamn highway and fifteen minutes later, here he sat, ready to drink away the pounding in his chest and the renewed ache in his permanently curled fingers.

And make sure she didn't drink too much then get on her damned little crotch rocket again.

All the times he'd seen a motorcycle on the road and never thought a thing of it, and one little woman had brought out every protective instinct in his body.

You don't even know her name, Jensen.

His dick didn't care. All it knew was that the woman was fucking hot.

The live band's music drummed into his head, amplifying the headache brought about by her stunt driving. From where he sat he could see her and the women from her class whom she'd met outside. They

were seated at a round table to his nine o'clock, all of them laughing and throwing their heads back at something the redhead said.

Kamikaze's long throat drew his attention. He wanted to swipe his tongue up and down the column, tasting her. He wanted to take in the scent of her right there behind the lobe of the ear graced with a high-cartilage piercing. He wanted to know if she had any other piercings. Like her navel or her pussy. Did his pole dancer have her clit pierced?

Jesus Christ, Jensen. She's not your fucking anything. What would his mother say if he brought home a pole dancer for Sunday dinner? Not that he gave a rat's ass what she said. Well, actually, it might be freaking hilarious to see his mother's face when kamikaze disclosed her occupation. He slapped his hand on the bar. "Shit. She's got you tied in knots, doesn't she?"

"What's that, mate?"

Max jumped at the bartender's Australian accent and cleared his throat. "Nothing. I'll have a Fosters." She'd fucking driven him to drink on duty.

But then, he wasn't technically on duty anymore. Mrs. Devlin hadn't been having an affair tonight, and he'd seen her on her way, not sweaty from sex but instead a thorough swing on a pole. He'd done his job, so this was after hours. Time to relax, throw back a beer or two and watch the—he glanced up at the muted TV in the corner—rugby match?

"Here ya go, mate. Fosters. Long day?"

It took a moment for Max to understand what *long die* meant. "No. Just a long-ass afternoon." *And an even longer night tailing a kamikaze with a death wish.*

Okay, so she hadn't been crazy on her bike. Hadn't done any of the stupid shit he'd seen some punks doing for fun when it was really dangerous as hell. Like standing on the seat doing eighty on the highway or popping a wheelie in the middle of traffic. Yeah, she'd sped a tiny bit, but no more than the rest of the traffic. She'd actually handled the thing pretty damn well now that he looked back on it.

"Find yourself a nice partner and take a load off, mate. Tomorrow will look better."

If he woke up next to a certain partner it might.

Damn. He had to stop thinking of her in terms of sex. He didn't even know her name, had only discovered her because of a job. How likely was it she would wind up in his bed? No matter how goddamn beautiful she was or how fucking hard she made his dick, he had to remember he didn't know anything about her. Other than the fact she could wrap herself oh so sweetly around a shiny silver pole.

Get control of yourself, Maximillian. That's what his mother would say. And he knew what would come next. *Unscrew your penis and put it on the shelf. Jensen men do not think with their little heads, no matter what your father does.* She always said *penis* too. Nothing vulgar would ever come out of Kara Patterson-Jensen's mouth, but she sure as hell would never mince words either. God help you if you ever spoke back to her.

As the black sheep of the family, Max mostly got the cold shoulder, chin raise, snuffle and glare. His mother chose to ignore the career Max had craved since he was nine years old when the security company paid to keep him safe had done their job. If his bodyguard at the time, and later Max's mentor, Richard, hadn't laid his life on the line, Max would be twenty-some years in the grave.

Richard had taken a bullet to protect his young charge, and Max, even at nine, had vowed to repay the older man in any way possible. After years of showing him the ropes, Richard had helped Max form his own company specializing in security and PI-type work. Another thing Max felt needed repayment.

He wondered what Richard would think of Max's distraction. He had, after all, pretty much dismissed the case the second he'd seen Mrs. Devlin in her, um, *dance* class. Just because he hadn't seen the woman with a man tonight didn't mean she wasn't having an affair.

Who the hell was he kidding? The woman was hiding her affinity for pole dancing. That's all.

Max lifted the bottle to his lips and took a drag. His gaze wandered back to the table where *she* sat, and he nearly choked. All four women were eyeing him like he was a prime piece of meat to be devoured.

"There ya go, mate." The bartender nudged Max's shoulder. "Night's lookin' better already."

A tiny smile tilted the kamikaze's lips before she turned away, and damned if the come-get-me look didn't make his zipper dig into his erection.

He borrowed a widely known mantra and changed it to suit his situation.

I will not have sexual relations with that woman. I will not have sexual relations with that woman.

It would be wrong, right?

She stood, her round, perfectly palm-sized breasts pressing against the fabric of the silky shirt she wore, her ass cupped in that pair of skinny jeans he wanted to peel away inch by inch. She'd taken the elastic from her hair so the gorgeous strands swung freely around her shoulders and attempted to hide the nipples he swore he could see poking through the thin material covering them, despite the dim light.

Then she took a step toward him, and another, this time more hesitant. Her head turned in the direction of her friends, and she shushed them with a finger at her lips.

Sure he was drooling, Max swallowed and gulped down the remainder of his beer. If he didn't leave before Kamikaze got to him, he'd have her stripped naked and thrown belly down on the bar, his cock thrust inside her sheath before she could say hello.

She flicked another glance his direction then fled to a hallway under a sign that read Restrooms.

Well, if that didn't beat all. Max leaned both elbows on the table and ordered another beer.

What on earth was she doing trying to pick up a stranger at a bar?

Sex, Jordan. Remember the sex you wanted to have to rehydrate your parched woman's parts? The ones currently shriveling up from lack of action?

With ultimate resolve, she lifted her face and stared at herself in the mirror.

“Jordan, you will go out there and seduce that walking sex God.”

A snicker behind her made her jump.

“You go, girl. Hey, while you’re handing out the confidence, mind sharing some with me? There’s this really hot guy out there I’d do just about anything to go to bed with.”

Jordan smiled and told herself not to punch the woman. Surely she wasn’t referring to the same guy. There were lots of other men in the bar.

But only one who’d been built specifically for causing a woman to orgasm with a simple touch. Jordan was sure that would be the outcome if she ever got the nerves to get close enough to him.

Enough. She was here for sex, she was going to get some. Self-doubt was not going to dissuade her.

“Sure,” she said to the woman washing her hands. “As long as we’re not after the same one. I’m not into threesomes.” *And I really don’t want to go to jail for breaking your neck. Tall, dark and drool-worthy is mine, mine and all mine.*

The woman’s laugh grated on Jordan’s nerves, tempting her to strangle the bleached blonde’s neck just to get her to tell her who she was lusting after.

“Oh, my God, he’s like, so cute. Red hair...”

Jordan didn’t hear another word over the breath she let out. Time to buck up and become a woman all over again. If luck was on her side tonight, the stud at the bar was going home with her.

Or she was going home with him.

She’d lived the last few years in anonymity, surely she could pick up one man and not be found out. He hadn’t seemed to recognize her at least.

Jesus, she was doing it again. The urge to slap herself grew. Where was the set of *cojones* she’d used to move out of her parents’ and live her own life away from all the crap money entailed? She straightened, flipped her hair over her shoulder and checked to make sure she didn’t have anything green between her teeth. That’d be a mood killer for sure.

She was here to get her sex on.

“Good luck.” Jordan shoved through the door and headed straight for the bar. If he wasn’t still sitting there, she would cry.

“Go get him, Jordan,” she heard from the friends she’d come with. It gave her courage. Hell yes she’d get him. She’d use his body as her pole and show him all kinds of new moves.

His closely shaved dark brown head hung over his beer and his shoulders were slumped. Damn. She’d thought he’d been interested. She hadn’t mistaken the way his nostrils had flared when she’d started toward him earlier or the way his eyes had widened. There’d been a flash of lust, damn it. On both their parts.

Jordan was suddenly close enough to reach out and touch him. Mmm...he smelled so good. Like man and cologne and yum all rolled into one, and she smelled it even over all the combined alcohol and smoke odors of the bar.

It was do-or-die time. Jordan tapped him on the back. “Hello.”

His head whipped back so fast she was amazed he didn’t give himself whiplash or fly off the stool. Catching himself before that happened, he darted a glance between her and her friends before settling on her face.

His eyes were green. Pale green. Beautiful. Her panties went wet just looking into his gaze.

At least she knew she hadn’t dried up quite yet.

“Hello.” Oh man, the sound of his voice made her shiver. Deep and sensual. It curled around her to the point she swore she could feel his mouth moving on her throat.

“I’m Jordan.” Did she stick out a hand to shake? Where the hell was her inner college chick?

“Max.”

Max. Perfect. She wanted Max. Right here, right now. If only clicking her heels together and pronouncing, “There’s no place like home, there’s no place like home,” would get her anywhere.

He seemed to contemplate something. It made her nervous. Picking up men used to be so easy. Of course those were the days of trying to attract the media attention just to piss her mother off. Right now, Max was going to give her a complex.

“You wanna dance, Jordan?” He said her name like he was trying it out on his tongue.

She wanted to shout, “Try my clit out with your tongue too, please.”

She refrained. No use scaring the man off before she’d gotten out of tonight what she wanted.

He hopped off the barstool—or stood at any rate—and towered over her five-foot-six frame. Maximillian. Maximillian? Is that how she saw him? Appropriate because right this second she felt like she’d just won a million bucks. He had to be a good few inches beyond six feet, muscular too, as evidenced by the fit of his shirt beneath his leather jacket. She wanted to rip the shirt off and lick his abs, see if he tasted as good as he smelled.

Please God let him be this big across the board. She needed big. Needed to be filled to capacity plus some. Her clit actually ached at the thought of him between her legs.

She’d turned into a hooker. A pole-dancing, stranger-picking-up, begging-for-big hooker.

The devil on her shoulder was going to win hands down over the angel telling her to go slow.

“I’d love to dance.” *Horizontally on a mattress.* Could one portray one’s need with just a look? Can you say skank? She ought to be ashamed of herself.

He took her hand in his and led her to the jumble of bodies shaking it to the music on the wooden floor. There was a clap and cheer behind her, and Jordan almost flipped off the three girls she’d come with.

“Your friends are happy for you?”

Lord she loved his voice and how it practically vibrated across her skin. “I guess.” As if she was going to tell him, *Of course they are. We came here trolling for men and I’ve already landed one. You. Congratulations. You won an out-of-practice, dried-up pole dancer. Woohoo!*

Yeah, that'd go over real well.

"You don't do this much, do you?"

Fuu-udge. He could friggin' tell that? "No. Not really. Well, not in a while anyway." He didn't need to know just how long it had actually been.

His right palm held her left hand with gentle ease, and his other hand came around her waist to rest at the small of her back, his long fingers practically spanning her waistline. She wondered if he'd slip it lower, cop a feel.

Please God, cop a feel. There was the inner college vixen. Course, back then she'd have reached behind there and moved it for him if he hadn't done it fast enough.

Which Max didn't.

She bit her lip. A pole-dancing aerobics instructor and she was stiff as a board. What happened to making him the pole?

He pulled her to him with a quick jerk, and she suddenly found her belly pressed against a rather solid object. A long, hard, thick object by the feel of it. She looked up into his face and read the desire written on every millimeter. Day-old scruff on his cheeks made him seem even more rugged. Her legs wobbled with the thought of those tiny whiskers scraping on the inside of her thighs and the sensitive skin of her pussy.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to be with you tonight." His breath fanned over her lips, he was so close.

"Me too."

"Good."

She kissed him. Stretched the two or three inches that separated them as he leaned down, and kissed him, opening her mouth to his and pushing her tongue inside. He tasted like the beer he'd been drinking, but she didn't give a damn. She only cared that the man she'd seen across the room and lusted over immediately wanted her as much as she wanted him.

She was going to sleep with a stranger.

No, she was going to make love to a stranger. Jordan had a strong suspicion that when they finally reached a bed there would be no sleeping involved.

Now why did the mere idea give her such a thrill?

Chapter Three

Max tilted his head and took over the kiss, all the while calling himself ten kinds of fool. She was sweet, and more potent than any alcohol. He was definitely leaving this bar drunk on something tonight, but he most certainly wouldn't be leaving alone.

"I shouldn't be doing this," he murmured at her ear before kissing a path down her jaw line and back to the sensuous mouth waiting for him. He wanted to see her lips tight around his cock, wanted to see those baby blues looking up at him from her kneeling position on the floor.

"Me neither." Her fingernails dug into his shoulders and one of her feet lifted to climb his leg as she tried to fit her pussy against his cock. With his height it wasn't happening for her, and he sensed her frustration.

He was going to have to fire himself for fraternizing with a...what? She wasn't anything to him, he reminded himself. He'd met her while on the job.

Sort of.

Stalked her more like. And that made him a criminal.

He should be trailing his own ass and taking pictures.

A soft moan escaped Jordan's lips, wringing Max out of his thoughts.

"Is this what you want, kamikaze?" He slipped his hand between them and cupped her mound.

She groaned with relief and ground herself on the heel of his hand, her perfect white teeth coming out to bite at her lower lip.

"Kamikaze?" Jordan gasped when he rubbed her harder through the denim she wore.

"Yeah." He nibbled on her ear and hoped like hell his hand was somewhat hidden from view as they were still standing on the dance floor. A glance up showed no one was paying attention anyway.

If she thought anything about the nickname he'd given her, she'd already forgotten it. Her eyes were glazing over. She was close, he could tell by the way she held her body stiff.

But what he really wanted to see was just how limber she could be.

Max yanked his hand from between them but kept her tight to him. He spoke against her temple and rocked her down from her near climax.

"My place or yours?" Whichever was fucking closest he hoped. He was about to come without her even touching his most critical parts.

"Which is closest?"

He smiled. "I'm in Clayton."

She angled her head back and looked appalled. "That's too far."

"So we go to your place. Unless you're not comfortable with that. We can always go the hotel route."

"I'm not far from here."

He knew that, of course, having just followed her home from the studio and then to the bar, but tipping his hat to that knowledge would have her fleeing like a doe in the crosshairs. And rightfully so.

"You sure?" No matter what, he wasn't into forcing a woman. He wanted her to feel safe.

"Positive. Let's go." She started tugging him across the floor, and he laughed. Minx.

Part of him wondered if his little pole-dancing kamikaze did this often—which pissed him off. The other part wondered, based on certain reactions he'd witnessed earlier from her, if she did this at all. She'd said she hadn't done this in a while but what did that mean? A day, a month? A year?

A pole-dancing virgin? No way. He knew instinctively she was no virgin.

Damn. He suddenly hoped she had a practice pole at home. His dick hardened to the point of pain behind his fly at the image of a private dance, her in nothing but her panties...and then in nothing at all.

Jordan stopped at the table he'd seen her at before. A man now graced the seat she'd had.

"Hey, Jordan. This is Mike," one of the girls said.

Jordan and her energy practically bounced. She tugged her coat off the back of Mike's chair and jerked it on. It only served to remind Max he'd never taken his off.

"Nice to meet you. I'm leaving now."

"But we just got here." This from another of the women who knew exactly where Jordan was headed, based on the gleam in her eye.

"You stay then. I... We're... This is Maximillian." She sucked in a breath and Max narrowed his eyes. How the fuck had she known his name? "Max." She turned to him. "Sorry about the Maximillian. It suited you. I really have no idea if that's your real name."

It suited him like a giant pimple on his ass. Maximillian was the name his mother had given him. His snob name. Then again when Jordan said it... "No problem."

"Okay." She turned back to her friends. "So. See you next week?"

"Uh-huh." The third woman spoke this time, she too smiling with secret knowledge.

Jordan bent to retrieve something from beneath the table, giving Max a beautiful view of her perfect jeans-covered ass and a nice slice of skin where her shirt rode up. He had to bite the inside of his cheek to keep from grabbing her hips and thrusting against her.

Time for that later. When there were no clothes to separate them.

When she straightened she held her helmet in her hand, and his erection ran off like a scared rabbit. Jesus Christ, he'd forgotten she had to ride that damn thing again. With all the coiled energy she was currently harboring, that bullet of hers was going to prove to be too much to handle.

He'd be wiping her body off the pavement instead of lifting her in his arms to bathe her after fucking her senseless. He fisted his hands. Max had been on the wrong end of a Glock protecting a governor, gotten stabbed twice, shot at when he was nine and attacked by a dog at thirteen but nothing, *nothing* scared him more than seeing his kamikaze on that bike.

"Alrighty then. Max?"

"Yep. Let's go." He put his hand just above her cute butt and escorted her to the door, dreading what was about to occur but powerless to do anything lest he give himself away. A chorus of goodbyes serenaded them out.

She walked quickly, matching her strides with his, obviously just as anxious to be with him as he was to be with her. Now he'd do anything to be heading back to his place in his car.

"You ride?" What the hell else was he going to say?

"Oh. Yeah. I'm not fast or anything so I think you'll be able to keep up." She winked at him. Actually fucking winked.

He wondered what she'd think of him if he admitted to her that watching her ride the fucking motorcycle made him a sweaty, nauseous mess.

Resting the helmet on the seat, Jordan pulled her hair into the ponytail as she'd done earlier. "Where are you parked?"

He nodded in the direction of the Chevy. Now more than ever he wished for his Lexus. What kind of man would she see him as to be driving what amounted to be an unmarked police car?

His fucking mother was showing through. Only a snob would think in terms of a woman seeing who he was by the car he drove.

Jordan yanked on the helmet and strapped it below her chin. He was tempted to knock on it to make sure it was real then try and tug it off to see if it was good and secure on her sweet noggin.

If he didn't fucking get the image of her wrapped in road rash out of his head, he'd never be able to give them what they both wanted because his dick would remain permanently wilted.

Weren't guys supposed to be turned on by chicks on bikes?

"I'm actually only about fifteen minutes from here."

"Okay." Should be more like twenty, but okay. He was turning into a fucking pussy. "Do you have a car?" he couldn't resist asking.

"Yeah. For my job. Have to carry stuff. But I *love* my bike. Wouldn't trade it for the world."

He'd have to think of something to entice her away from it then.

Shit. What the hell, Jensen? She's a fling when you should have unscrewed your dick and put it on the shelf, remember? Neither of them was looking for forever here.

He ripped his keys from his pocket in a vicious movement.

“Hey,” she said, putting her hand on his cheek and looking at him from behind the open visor. Damn helmet made her head look big, he groused silently.

“You okay with this?”

He wanted to yell “no” and throw her over his shoulder and stuff her into the backseat of his car. “I have a feeling you’re going to make me nervous on this thing.”

She laughed. “It’s not me I worry about, it’s everyone else.”

Exactly, goddamn it.

Her face went soft. “I want to kiss you.”

His dick went hard. “Kinda difficult with that thing on your head.”

“But you can take it off me when we get home. It and more,” she promised.

“Christ.”

She leaned as close as she could get with the helmet in the way and whispered near his ear. “I think I can make up for your nervousness of having to watch me ride.”

Max grabbed her helmet with both hands and rested his forehead on it so he could still see her. “I’m going to hold you to that.”

The vibration of the bike on her clit had not made her life any easier. It had been all she could do not to pull over and tell him to fuck trying to make it to her apartment. Was it possible to orgasm by motorcycle alone?

Jordan slipped off the seat after pulling into her spot next to her more sensible red Honda hatchback, a car she’d picked up used for a good price to haul all her cleaning supplies from job to job. Her mother would have a coronary if she ever saw Jordan’s modes of transportation. She smiled and patted the seat before yanking off the helmet and shaking her head.

If ever there was a time not to think about one’s mother, now was it.

Max’s headlights blinded her for a moment as he turned into an empty space three spots beyond hers. He drove the kind of car that perfectly blended in. Sort of like her hatchback. It reminded her of an unmarked police car. Could he be...? Nah. She hadn’t noticed a gun anywhere on his person, not that he couldn’t have taken it off. He had been at a bar after all, but he would have told her if he was a policeman.

Right?

Didn’t matter. He could be a chimney sweep for all she cared. She cleaned houses for a current living, wasn’t like she could talk about career choices.

Her heart stuttered when the top of his dark crew-cut head emerged. How the hell did he fit in there without causing himself some serious muscle pain?

Jordan licked her lips as he drew closer to her. Stalked was a more apt word. She felt like a lamb in front of the lion. What was that phrase she’d heard? Stupid lamb.

The corners of his lips turned up. His hand came up to cup her left cheek. She sucked in a breath and shivered at the touch. His lips descended onto hers and his tongue swept into her mouth.

Oh Jesus, was she ever the stupid, stupid lamb. Max would devour her whole and leave her a blubbering puddle of goo.

But by God she was going to enjoy every second of her consumption.

He tasted like mint now. Preparing for them to be together? So sweet. Jordan wrapped her arms around his neck and angled her head for better access. He deepened the kiss, taking what she offered willingly. Her clit tingled in response, her nipples hardened.

Her human pole was oh so enticing. She had to move this show inside.

Not to mention it was damn cold outside.

"I'm on the first floor," she whispered against his mouth and gasped when his hand lowered to the small of her back and hugged her body to his. His erection pressed into her belly, telling her he was still just as interested as she.

He put his forehead on hers. "I don't like that bike, kamikaze. Scares me."

"I'm sorry."

"Are you?"

"Not so much."

He smiled and tugged her head back with a fist in her hair. "I think you'll have to make me hard again."

Jordan hitched her leg up and put her knee over his hip, rubbing her pussy on his erection. "You don't seem to be having trouble in that department."

"Minx."

"I think that's one step up from kamikaze."

He brought both hands around her and squeezed her buttocks. "You promised I could divest you of some clothes when we got here." The soft growl at her ear sent a wave of goose bumps over her skin.

"So let's go."

Max turned her and with his hands on her shoulders followed her to the front door of her apartment. For a split second as she stuck the key in the lock, she wondered if she was completely insane for inviting someone she knew nothing about into her home.

Chapter Four

Max took a deep breath and shook off his wayward doubts. He was doing nothing wrong. Consensual sex with a beautiful woman who wasn't in any way associated with a client.

Shit. He'd drive himself crazy with this line of thought. She'd come to *him* at Down Under, not the other way around.

Right, because following the woman wasn't weird.

Jordan threw the door to her apartment open and stepped inside. Max hesitated until she turned and beckoned him with a crook of her finger and a come-get-me smile.

He was a man above all else and there wasn't a man on the face of the earth who could resist the temptation before him. He shrugged out of his leather jacket and dropped it inside the foyer before kicking the door shut behind him with his heel. His intention had been to grasp Jordan's face in his hands and seize her lips but she had other ideas.

She leapt on him, pushing him back on the door. He caught her under her ass, holding her squirming form as she attacked his mouth like a starving animal. So much for running the show.

Panting, Jordan jerked back and stared at him. "Wait."

Wait? She wanted him to wait?

"I just want you to know I don't do this often. Never. I never do this. Well not since college anyway and even then I didn't do it a lot—"

Max held her in one arm and put a finger over her mouth. "Shh."

Chest still heaving, she closed her eyes. "I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about. You say no, we stop. Easy as that." *Please God, don't say no.*

"I won't say no." She wiggled out of his hold, her eyes glittering with a heat that made him hard as granite.

She slipped to her knees, her gaze never leaving his, her fingernails trailing down his abdomen to stop at the button fly of his jeans where she deftly unbuttoned him.

"Fuck." Max fisted his hands as her fingers slipped into the waist of his jeans and boxers and slowly pushed them to his knees. His T-shirt got hung up for a second on his dick where it jutted out. He forced himself not to take her head in his hands and thrust into her mouth. He had to let her set the pace.

"Mmm."

Mmm? What the hell did “mmm” mean? *Mmm, yum, I want to lick you dry, or Mmm, I’m not sure I can do this?*

Jordan surveyed him from every angle, and despite the fact that Max stood six foot two, weighed two hundred pounds and could take down an opponent in about twenty different ways, he suddenly found himself self-conscious. If he were a virgin, he might find his erection wilting under the scrutiny.

“Sorry. Just deciding where to start.”

Shit. Max closed his eyes and swallowed. “You don’t have to do this, Jordan.”

“Oh, yes, I do.” Without touching him she leaned in and pressed her tongue to the base of his penis.

The saliva got caught in his throat, choking him.

She licked him from root to tip, pausing to flick across the sensitive bundle of nerves of the frenulum, which made his eyes cross, before settling at the weeping hole and sucking the head into the hot recesses of her mouth.

“Oh. Shit.”

He’d had blow jobs before. Many of them. In the past. So why was this one so different?

She sank down farther on him, attempting to take all of him. He didn’t want her to choke and brought his hand up to her hair to pull her back.

She slapped his hand away.

“Damn it, Jordan.”

“Mmm.”

Oh, motherfucker, Jesus Christ. The hum sizzled along his dick to the base of his spine. His head hit the door with a thunk just as the head of his cock hit the back of her throat. When he glanced down she’d taken his entire length. Holy. Shit.

Jordan backed off, her tongue doing some wicked swirl along the way, and her cheeks hollowing with the force of her suction. She released him with a pop. One of her hands cupped his balls and the other wrapped around his cock. She pulled downward on his sac while twisting her spit-slicked fingers around the base, creating a dual sens—ah, make that tri sensation. Her lips surrounded the head again.

“Jordan...” he cautioned. He was seriously close to coming in a seriously short amount of time.

“Mmm.”

Oh, payback was going to be sweet. He slammed his head against the door once more and gripped the wood trim with his fingertips.

Sweat beaded on his forehead. His knees wobbled like a virgin’s. He shifted his stance, widening his feet as far as his jeans-hampered legs would allow him for better balance.

And then she touched him, a fingertip pressure behind his balls, pushing on his perineum, making him gasp.

“Shit.” He couldn’t remember ever being reduced to one-word phrases while getting sucked off.

The finger moved farther back to the tight ring of his anus. Max's eyes rolled back. There was nothing he could do to hold out, not with a finger on his ass, a tug on his balls, a twist on his dick and a vacuum on his cock head.

The room spun as the warning tingle became more like an explosion.

At the last second Max had a moment of clarity and reached out to somehow try and pull Jordan's mouth off his dick.

She protested and he lost the battle. Her fingers gripped him tight, squeezing and caressing the base of his cock as he pulsed unendingly into her mouth.

Jordan sat back on her heels and looked up at him, that sly little gleam in her eyes.

Max tried to clear his mind but one thing raged to the forefront.

"Where the fuck did you learn to do that?"

Jordan felt inordinately pleased with herself. She'd nearly brought Maximillian to his knees.

Why did the name Maximillian sound like someone who should run in her family's circle? And, ew, why was she thinking about them? They were the last thing she wanted to think of at the moment. Not when she had a hot, willing, sexy man at her disposal.

She grabbed his hand, intent on pulling him down the darkened hallway toward her bedroom, only to get yanked to a stop.

"Pants around the knees, kamikaze. When I trip, we'll be lying on the floor instead of in your bed."

"Then take them off."

His eyes widened a fraction of an inch and when she looked down she saw that his cock had responded in kind, only way more than a fraction.

"Time's a wastin'," she taunted, licking her lips and staring at his erection. She could certainly go for round two right where they were.

"Fuck."

"You say that a lot. Care to put an action to the word?" She sidled back to him and kissed his open mouth.

His hands cradled her face and angled her head right where he wanted her, then he took over the kiss. His tongue plunged deep. With the toe of her shoe, she pressed down on the crotch of his jeans and pushed them to the floor.

Jordan broke the kiss and once again kneeled on the floor.

"Jordan..." Max's voice held a warning. Jordan chuckled and glanced up at him.

"Relax, big guy. Just helping you out of your shoes and pants."

"Oh." His shoulders slumped and she swore a look of disappointment flashed across his face.

She smiled and bent to the task of unlacing his shoes, pulling them off his feet, followed by his socks, which he helped with by standing on one foot when needed, then yanked his jeans off too. That done, she jumped to her feet, grabbed the hem of his shirt and relieved him of it also, leaving him standing at her front door deliciously naked.

A round, puckered scar on his right side, about bellybutton height, attracted her attention. Her fingertips reached for it as if uncontrolled. His hand wrapped around hers, keeping her from touching.

“What happened?” It sure as hell looked nasty, whatever it was.

Max brought her fingers to his lips and placed a soft kiss on each knuckle.

“It’s old. Nothing to think about now.”

She shrugged it off. “I’m all for thinking about other things.”

“That’s good. Now get your ass in that bedroom of yours and strip.”

Jordan sucked in a breath. Her nipples tightened against the silk of her bra. Though she’d decided to go it alone, away from the money and out of her parents’ clutches, at this precise moment in time she was never happier that she’d continued purchasing her expensive lingerie. Nipples against smooth, satiny silk versus nipples against cheap, discount cotton—silk won hands down.

She turned and sashayed down the hall, looking back over her shoulder with the best come-fuck-me eyes she could muster.

Max’s gaze narrowed and his cock bobbed before leading him like a man on a leash toward her.

In her bedroom, she flicked on the light then stopped at the foot of the bed and surveyed the room. At least she hadn’t left it a complete disaster when she’d hastily refreshed and changed her outfit before heading to the bar earlier.

“Didn’t I say to strip?”

Jordan’s heart pounded and her pussy clenched. This was exactly what she’d wanted, right? With slow deliberation, she turned and began unbuttoning her shirt, letting him see each inch of skin uncovered as she did so. This time he licked his lips. She loved the way his nostrils flared and a tiny muscle ticked in his jaw.

When she’d gotten her shirt all the way undone, it fell from her arms to the floor, and she reached for the button on her jeans. Two steps brought him into her personal space and a slap of his hand on her wrists wrenched the material from her hands.

“I changed my mind. I want to do this part myself. After all, you divested me of mine.”

“Whatever you say.” *Whatever makes you get inside me that much quicker.*

Long, lean fingers of one hand dipped behind the waistband while the other hand lowered the zipper with a hiss. Then both hands went to the small of her back, delved beneath her panties and pushed the fabric of both materials over her rear end and down to her knees before he cupped her cheeks and squeezed.

Hugging her close, he nibbled on her earlobe, drawing a ragged breath from her lungs. His cock nestled at her tummy when she wanted it lower. Time to take the bull by the horns.

“Unless you plan on fucking my bellybutton, we need to be in a better position.”

“Greedy imp.”

“Hey, you already got some action. I’m the one still unsatisfied here.”

Those long fingers wandered from the crack of her ass to the slick opening of her vagina and one, maybe two of them entered her. Her head dropped back and her eyes rolled.

“Tight.” He half-growled, half-groaned the word in her ear.

Imagine that. A couple years of sexual abstinence had made her a born-again virgin.

His tongue licked a path up her neck and back down to the V at her throat. With his unoccupied hand, the one not currently making her heart race, Max bent her backward and suckled a nipple through the silk barrier.

Holy freakin’ God.

The upside-down view of her dresser reminded her of condoms. Did she have any in that drawer that weren’t dry and cracked from age? Did he have any? Was she destined not to get any nookie after all? The mere thought made her want to puke. Sheer bliss sat within reach and she might not achieve it.

“Do you have a condom?” she blurted, still hanging upside down.

He snickered. “Just one?” His fingers retreated from her pussy and she nearly whimpered.

“Well. For starters.” *At least.* Two or three might be better.

“I think I got us covered,” he whispered, moving to the other nipple.

“Can you possibly do that without the bra in the way?”

“I’m getting to it. Patience, kamikaze.”

“Why do you keep calling me that?” She squeezed the back of his neck when he bit down gently on her nipple.

“That damn bike.”

She jerked her head up and stared at him. “But, wait. You called me that *before* you saw my bike.”

For a split second she swore his eyes widened. “I saw you pull in to the parking lot of the bar. Kamikaze was the first thought that came to mind.”

“Hmm. Well, you’re going to have to get over your insecurities about my bike.”

“Oh yeah?”

She nodded. “I would hate to think you think I’m a fragile little butterfly because that would mean you might hold back with me in this bed right here behind me and then I would have to hurt you, and while I’m not opposed to strangling the woman in the bathroom, I don’t want to hurt you before I’m done with you.”

One of his eyebrows rose to an impressive height. He turned her and nudged her onto the bed, stripping off her jeans and panties as she went, leaving her only in the bra, wet circles from his mouth surrounding the taut buds.

“You wanted to strangle someone?”

He spread her legs apart, exposing her pussy, which she was sure glistened in the overhead light. He looked at her core like a starving tiger eyeing a fat water buffalo. “Can we talk about this later?”

“Yep.” He flicked the closure of the bra between her breasts and removed the offending item, then kneeled between her feet.

His hot breath fanned over her pussy a second before his tongue touched her clit. Her feet didn’t quite reach the floor so she had nothing to brace herself against. Those fingers returned, stroking her channel, while his tongue flicked and lapped at the bundle of nerves, driving her insane.

Jordan propped herself on her elbows and watched. His gaze caught and held hers, seeming to dare her to come. An outcome which was quickly approaching fruition. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d come so soon. Normally she had to really work at what she knew would be her one and only release. Hell, sometimes after working it forever she still never came. Then it was time to bring on the fake. While some men didn’t give a rat’s ass if they got their woman off or not, there were a few out there whose ego got severely offended if they didn’t. She’d learned it was best to fake it either way if she didn’t come.

Maximilian, however, seemed to be having no trouble bringing her clit great pleasure.

Her thighs shook where she tried to grip the edge of the bed, and she dug her heels into the bedframe for a miniscule amount of leverage.

Then his fingers touched something inside her, causing her back to arch and stars to flicker behind her eyelids. Had she ever actually seen stars before? His mouth closed on her clit, sucking the tiny nub behind his teeth and biting ever so slightly. The small pressure was all it took for the lingering tingle of anticipation to explode into throb after throb of long-awaited ecstasy. This was what she’d hoped for. This and more.

Max kissed her clit, sending a subsequent frisson of leftover orgasm through her, then moved up her body, pushing her farther back on the bed. He settled over her, his erection nestled against her pussy, and she couldn’t for the life of her figure out why she’d ever waited so long to get back in the game.

“You’re beautiful when you come.”

Well, what could she say to that?

“If I get up, do you promise to stay right here in this position until I get back?”

She lifted her head, panicking with the idea he might run out on her before the big finale. It didn’t matter that she was done and wouldn’t likely see the stars again for another two or three years, she wanted to feel him inside her. “Where are you going?”

Hadn’t she given him good head? Had she offended him somehow?

“Condoms. In the jeans you stripped off me at the front door.”

“Oh.”

His mouth descended on hers, transferring her body’s taste to her lips. “Don’t move.”

“Couldn’t if I tried.”

“I heard that,” he called, disappearing into the dark hall of her apartment. “Son of bitch.”

Jordan bucked upright. “What’s wrong?”

“Stubbed my toe.”

A crash sounded down the hall and another curse that sounded something like “fuck me” and “shit”. Jordan cringed and smiled at the same time.

“I am so sorry. Whatever it is, I’ll replace it.” His voice carried down the length of the hall.

She sort of doubted he’d be able to. If she was right about his vicinity, he’d probably knocked over the Tiffany stained-glass lamp she’d received as a house-warming gift from her best friend who couldn’t imagine Jordan living a life without all the things money could buy. It *had* fit so perfectly with the rest of her décor and getting rid of it would have hurt Phoebe’s feelings so she’d left it.

“Don’t worry about it.” From her best friend or not, it was still only an object. Not important in the grand scheme of life. Certainly not as important as a best friend.

Her mother wouldn’t agree, but then that’s one of the reasons Jordan had moved out of her parents’ smothering mansion and lifestyle to pursue her own dreams. Her owning a dance studio was definitely not in their plans. They wanted her to settle down with whomever they chose and become a high-society wife and mother with all the social status that entailed.

No child of hers was going to grow up raised by a nanny and a tutor.

Max’s grumbling grew closer as did her renewed interest in what her very near future held.

And then the whole place went dark.

“What the hell?”

“Max?” Jordan sat up.

“Your lights went out.”

She giggled. “I can see that. Come back to bed.”

“Let me check this out first.”

“Don’t bother. It’s happened several times before. Something about the breaker. I can fix it later. Much later...”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, Max.”

“Fine. Talk to me so I can find you in this tomb.”

She tried for her sexiest voice. “I’m over here, Max.” She even pouted and batted her eyelashes, though the effect was lost since he couldn’t see her.

The bed shook and Max cursed again. “Son of a bit—”

“Get down here before you mangle yourself or break something else.”

“Jesus. I really am sorry. I’ll replace it, I promise.”

Great. Now she’d have to find some cheap knock-off brand so he wouldn’t feel guilty about breaking the lamp she really didn’t put much monetary value on anyway. It was pretty, yes, but people meant more to her than things any day.

She wondered for a split second how Max viewed relationships, then shook her head of the notion. One night was all she was likely to get from Maximillian. She didn’t even know his last name, for chrissake. Then again, he didn’t know hers either. And since she didn’t go by her real last name, he wouldn’t know her from any other Jane Doe. “There’s only one thing I want from you, Max.”

“Pushy.”

“That’s right. Now, can you see to get that condom on or do you need some help?”

“Please tell me you’re not serious,” he grouched.

“Only trying to be of service.” And she was practically dying waiting on him.

“I’ll show you service.”

Oh, please do. Please!

The bed dipped between her legs and Max fitted his body on top of hers, the head of his cock snuggling right where she wanted it to.

“Yes.” She threw her head back and begged him to thrust into her.

“I’ll go as slow as I want, kamikaze.”

The tip of his erection penetrated her opening. His arms came down on either side of her shoulders to hold his weight, which caused the smattering of his chest hair to tickle her nipples.

Max’s hips flexed, filling more of her with his cock. Jordan bent her knees and squeezed her thighs against his waist.

“You’re killing me, Jordan.”

“Yes I will if you don’t start fucking me, *Max*.”

He thrust forward, impaling her on his hard length, making her gasp at the sudden fullness and the slight pain.

“Breathe, Jordan.” His thumbs traced a line down either side of her face. She hadn’t even known she wasn’t breathing.

The air left her lungs with a whoosh.

“Am I hurting you?”

She shook her head, then realized he couldn’t see her. “No.”

“Good.” He withdrew, the action setting off a riot of sensation in her pussy and unbelievably making her clit tingle again as if it were revving up for another climax. Impossible, she knew, but she wasn’t about to argue when it felt so damn good.

In and out he thrust. She’d never felt so high from sex. Like it was the greatest thing on earth. With each entry he did something, some kind of twist of his hips that pushed against her clit. A drop of sweat landed on her forehead, mixing with her own.

The tension grew at her pussy, the almost-there impression that she might come again. His body rocked into hers as if he knew exactly how to wring every ounce of a second climax from her. But it wasn’t enough. Frustration hit her like a sledgehammer to the back of head. So close. So close.

His fingers slipped into the curls surrounding her hidden bundle of nerves and caressed her.

“Shiiit.”

“Come for me, Jordan. Come *with* me.”

“Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.” She wanted to so bad. So bad it hurt. Seriously. A cramp seized her calf where she held it so rigidly against his thigh.

Jordan cried out in both pain and astonishment as the first wave of an orgasm broke over her.

After thrusting one last time, Max went still above her, his own release pulsing within her.

For the first time in her entire life, Jordan wished there was no latex barrier involved. She wanted to know what it felt like to have a man’s semen spurt into her. This man’s sperm.

Her heart pounded in revelation. She knew nothing about Max. Not even his last name. And she wanted him without protection?

What in the hell was wrong with her?

The cramp became more charley horse and bit into her leg with ferocious strength, destroying any sense of post-climactic euphoria there might have been.

“Charley horse, charley horse,” she cried, squirming beneath Max in an effort to reach the afflicted muscle.

“Shit. Where?” Max withdrew from her pussy and rolled to her side.

“Calf.”

He grabbed her leg.

“The other one,” she gasped, pinching her eyes closed against the insane pain. Max took hold of it and rubbed up and down her calf, feeling for the bunched muscle and massaging it with absolute accuracy.

Once she was able to breathe again, she wilted into the bed.

“Better?”

“Yes. Thank you.”

“No problem.” He continued stroking her leg from knee to ankle.

“I’m sorry I ruined it.”

“You didn’t ruin anything, kamikaze. I think the top of my head blew off.”

“Gross. I can’t wait to see that mess when the lights come back on.”

“You said this happens a lot?”

“Yeah. Old place. The breaker pops. It just needs to be flipped, I’m sure. Been doing it every once in awhile since I moved in.”

His lips touched her shoulder and moved to the tip of her breast. “And how long has that been?”

“Three...” she gulped when his mouth closed around the nipple and the rest of her sentence came out in a squeak, “...years or so.”

Max wrapped his tongue around the sweet berry in his mouth. He loved her taste, her squeaks when she came, the way her body arched beneath him. In the past he’d been one to have some fun and then run, but right now he wanted nothing more than to wrap her in his arms and snuggle under the covers. He imagined waking up next to her in the morning and slipping inside her tight sheath while she came awake.

He slid his hand down her abdomen and into the nest of curls shielding her mound and found himself wanting to go another round right now. Fuck waiting until morning.

Max slipped his fingers down the cream heating her slit. Jordan’s back arched, bringing her breast up and farther into his mouth. He couldn’t get enough of her. His cock responded as well, ready for another go of her pussy pulsing around him. He loved her smell and her attitude and her—

Son of a fucking bitch, Jensen. You know nothing about her. She’s a night of good sex. Not wife material.

As soon as he thought it, he nearly jumped off the bed.

Since when did a round of sex—albeit utterly fanfuckingtastic sex—make him think in terms of a wife?

With one last glide of his fingers through her core, Max untangled himself and stood.

“Where are you going?” She sounded almost frightened. Because she thought he was leaving her or because she was scared of the dark?

“To clean up first, then I’m going to go fix your lights.”

“Aw, my hero.”

“Yep, that’s me.” He flexed his arms in a superhero pose then lowered them when he realized the effect was lost in the dark.

Max was beginning to wonder who Jordan really was. She lived in a moderate apartment, had a job that surely didn’t pay a ton—although she had mentioned another job so he guessed she did all right. She had to be if she had the kind of money he now needed to replace the Tiffany lamp he’d dumped on the floor and allowed to shatter into a million pieces. His mother had enough of the damn things in the home he’d grown up in that he’d known as soon as he’d seen the colorful light shade that it had been a Tiffany.

Of course she could have inherited the item, in which case he felt like an even bigger moron.

And she was probably wondering how the hell he was going to pay for such an extravagant item.

Nevertheless, it would give him the chance to see her again.

He turned and felt his way to the bathroom he'd seen to the right, hoping to God he didn't stub another toe or worse, cause the Waterford vase he'd observed to come off the dresser next to the door. That's all he needed, to be into her for another grand on top of the Tiffany. Not that he couldn't afford it, he just didn't want her feeling guilty for thinking he couldn't.

He made his way to the sink and over to the toilet.

"Trashcan's between the toilet and sink," she said, right behind him, making him come out of his skin.

Some security specialist. He cleared his throat. "Thank you."

After disposing of the condom and washing his hands he worked his way back out. Now, though, he could see a minute amount, mainly her silhouette in the doorway. There was a glow behind her.

"Where is that light coming from?" He put his hands on her shoulders and turned her to face the illumination.

"The street, I guess. I opened the blinds because I saw it coming through the cracks."

"Why are the streetlights on but not the build...? Never mind. Your breaker wouldn't make all the lights in the neighbor—"

A crash of glass breaking interrupted him. Max shoved Jordan behind his back and put himself between her and the bedroom doorway. Someone was breaking into her apartment and Max had no clothes on. Even more disturbing was the fact that his gun was out in the car where'd he'd left it so Jordan wouldn't discover it and ask questions.

"Get in the closet and stay there until I tell you to come out," he murmured. Jordan shivered behind him, her hands fisted at his shoulder blades.

"What the hell do you think you're going to do?"

"My job." Anything and everything to protect her. The lights going out and someone breaking in wasn't a coincidence.

"What kind of job do you have? Cop?"

"Something like that." He shoved her toward the closet door, thankful he'd absorbed the layout of the room when he'd entered.

"You can't go out there naked," she insisted quietly, pushing something soft into his hands. It felt like a robe of some kind. Damn him for leaving his phone attached to the waistband of his pants which were still out in the foyer.

"Call nine-one-one from your phone and stay the hell hidden."

There was a soft curse from the front room and the crunching of glass. Their uninvited guest had just found the Tiffany.

“Hide *now*.” Fuck the robe. Max was going into battle Highlander style, sans clothes.

He tiptoed to the door and heard Jordan mutter, “Stupid fool.” A half-inch-wide beam of light illuminated the Tiffany glass. The shards sparkled from the hardwood, then the beam swept away. Whoever the perp was, he wasn’t after Jordan for the moment. Max would make sure it stayed that way.

A black-clad figure complete with mask trailed the light to a desk in the far corner of the TV room. The light disappeared for a second behind the intruder then reappeared on the opposite side of the desk. The squeaking of the chair when the man pushed it out of the way was followed by another muttered curse.

He flicked through the papers on the desk, almost negligently causing them to flutter to the ground, then laid the pencil holder on its side, letting the pencils fall out.

What the hell? Something was way off.

Next the man moved to the couch and threw a pillow to the floor. There was no freaking purpose to the man’s movements. They were totally random.

At the coffee table he slid the magazines off and shoved the whole table out of whack. The cushions on the couch were the next to fall to his careful disheveling.

The man was trying to make it look like someone had ransacked the place.

Furthermore, though he was being quiet, he didn’t exactly seem worried about getting caught, so he either didn’t think the occupant of the apartment was home or hoped she was asleep, which didn’t seem too likely considering it wasn’t exactly the dead of night or anything.

Max crept his way along the wall, careful not to reveal himself until he could get close enough. Unfortunately the Tiffany had spread out farther than he thought. It crackled beneath his bare foot, cutting into his skin. Max hissed.

The man looked up, his widened eyes eerily lit up through the slit in the mask by the flashlight. He sprang from his seat and shot through the doorway leading to the kitchen. Max stepped on more glass while giving chase.

“Son of a bitch.” A door slammed. No way in hell would Max catch up. Not naked and sporting glass in his feet.

“Is he gone?” Jordan’s voice made him turn around from where he stood staring at the dark door.

“I thought I told you to hide.”

She snorted. “As if. You’re in the buff and barefoot, in case you hadn’t noticed. I wasn’t going to let you chase some maniac like that.”

A strong light flicked on, making him squint in its brightness.

“Found a flashlight and called the police. They’re on their way so you might want to think about putting some clothes on before they get here.” She shined the light on the floor and pointed out his pants and shirt.

Max hobbled over to them, pissed off. A woman coming to his rescue when she should still be nestled inside some hidey-hole.

“What’s wrong?”

“Stepped on the glass I broke earlier. Be careful, it’s right where you’re standing.”

“That’s why I put shoes on.” She moved closer to him where he sat after gathering his clothes. “Let me see.”

“It’s nothing.”

“Let me see, macho man.”

“Fine.” He lifted one foot so she could see the bottom.

“Shit. Don’t put the shoes on. I’ve got to go get some tweezers.” She turned back the way she came. “Or maybe a pair of pliers.”

In the dark once more, Max was left to wonder who the hell had broken in and why. Then again, the woman had Tiffany and Waterford so there was no telling what else she had. Which made him want to get up and investigate.

Also made him want to put a fist through the man’s face for daring to enter her residence.

Just what the hell was going on?

Chapter Five

The lights were still off when the police arrived. Max could have gone outside to investigate, but he wasn't willing to leave Jordan alone, and with the police minutes away, he'd cooled his heels and waited. He was happy to see the officer who entered was someone he knew.

"Simmons." Max shook the officer's hand and gestured him inside. He left the door open so they might see better in the spill of light from the street. It aided the glow of candles Jordan had lit in the last few minutes while waiting for the police.

"What're you doing here, Jensen?"

"You two know each other?" Jordan paused in sweeping the shards of glass into a dustpan.

"Yes," Max answered her, then turned his attention back to Simmons. "I was with Ms...Jordan, when this went down."

Officer Simmons looked down at Max's hastily wrapped feet. "What happened to your feet?"

Max pointed to the floor littered with the glass. "I knocked over the lamp earlier then stepped all over it when I was chasing the suspect out."

Simmons's right eyebrow rose impressively. "You were barefoot? So I'm guessing this wasn't a professional call."

Jordan spoke before Max could. "Yes. He was barefoot. Now you've probably gathered that we were sleeping together so can we just get on with why someone broke into my apartment?"

Simmons' other eyebrow rose to meet the first. "Absolutely. When did the lights first go off?"

Jordan cocked her head to the side in thought. Good thing she seemed to know because apart from the throb in his toe from kicking the damn table and then the mind-blowing sex, Max wasn't sure he would have been able to tell Simmons if an elephant had been dancing in the room.

"Mmm...maybe thirty minutes or so ago."

Simmons nodded, stuffed the small Maglite under his chin so he could see and wrote the time down in a little notebook he pulled from his pocket. "I checked. Electricity is only out in this apartment. Rest of the complex is on. My partner's out checking the box right now. The caller told the dispatcher the perp was gone. We've got a unit cruising, looking for anybody out of place. Doubt we'll find anyone though."

Simmons surveyed the room. "Tell me what happened."

"We were in the bedroom." No use hiding anything now that Jordan had outed them with her first breath. "Heard glass breaking. I told Jordan to hide in the closet then I tiptoed down the hall. I saw a black

shape and the beam of a flashlight, like a mini. He went straight for the desk in the corner.” He stabbed a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the desk. “Kind of rooted around for a bit, tipped over the pencil holder, moved the cushions on the couch. If he was looking for something, he sure didn’t seem to be in a hurry to do it. It was more a methodical ransacking. I couldn’t figure out what the hell he was doing. I’d have gotten to him except I stepped on the damn glass and alerted him. He bolted before I could get across the mess and went out the door.”

“You armed?”

“Armed?” Jordan’s voice went a couple octaves higher than normal. “He was naked, where would he have been armed? Furthermore, *why* would he have been?”

The lights flicked on, surprising them.

Max took her hand in his and ignored the naked remark. The last thing he needed was to hear the backlash of having chased an intruder naked. “No. It’s in the car.”

“Does she not know what you do?” Simmons seemed shocked as he directed the question at Max.

“No.”

Jordan yanked her hand from Max’s. “What do you do?”

“Max is a security expert.”

Damn Simmons.

“A security expert, huh? Well no wonder you know people.” Now her tone had dropped. “Why didn’t you tell me? Wait a minute. Did my *mother* send you? Is that what this is about?”

If looks could kill, Max was pretty sure either he or Jordan’s mother was about to die.

“Now hold on. I don’t know your mother, so no she didn’t send me, and I didn’t tell you because it never really came up. I don’t know what *you* do either.” Well, not everything she did anyway. He didn’t think she’d be very happy about his finding her while he watched one of his cases. God knew how she’d react if she discovered he’d followed her all over town.

The point he was getting at was that neither of them had shared any personal information beyond their first names.

“Touché.” She sort of deflated and returned her attention back to the mess.

Why did he feel like he’d just gotten kicked in the gut?

“Ma’am, can you think of any reason someone might want to break in?”

When she glanced at Simmons, her face was once again composed. In fact, Max could almost swear her eyes glittered with anger. Had to be a trick of the light.

“No. Well. Yes. I guess. Maybe. Not realistically, but theoretically? Maybe.”

“Jordan.”

She whipped her head his direction. “What?”

“Breathe.” He stood behind her, rested his hands on her shoulders and gave her a squeeze, trying hard to ignore the tremor that went through her body. She seemed more nervous now than she had when a stranger had been in her home, and Max’s protective nature went on high alert.

She lifted her chin and spoke to the officer. “My name is Jordan Landon.”

Max dropped his hands and stared at the back of Jordan’s head. It couldn’t be.

“Okay.” Simmons scribbled on his pad.

“Then I guess there’s a few multimillion reasons someone might break into your place.” Max gritted his teeth. Why in the hell was the heiress to Landon Holdings living in an apartment? And where the fuck was her security? He sure hoped to shit she didn’t count a flimsy door lock as security.

Her spine went ramrod straight, and if it were possible for fire to actually shoot from one’s ears, it would be doing so right now from hers.

“Excuse me?” Simmons shifted his weight to his other foot.

“Ms. Landon is Jordan Grace Landon, heiress to Landon Holdings,” Max said softly.

Jordan’s eyes narrowed, but he had no clue why she was angry at him.

“Oh.” This from Simmons who suddenly looked a little awestruck.

Jordan’s hands landed on her hips and her lips thinned. “I’ll have you know that I have lived here for three years without one problem and the first time I bring a man here...” she was slowly turning toward him, “...all of a sudden someone breaks in.” She stabbed her finger into his chest, and he grunted but took the semi-onslaught. “Maybe it’s you they ought to be investigating. Maybe you were sent by someone to keep me occupied while another person went through my things.”

Max captured her finger to keep it from poking him any further and pulled her flush to his body.

“Kamikaze, if I’d been sent to keep you occupied, I wouldn’t have lost my mind after seeing you naked and sent a priceless Tiffany lamp to the floor.”

She sucked in a shocked breath. “You knew that was Tiffany?”

“Baby, we roll in the same circles. Yes, I knew it was Tiffany and I *will* replace it, I swear. As for the rest of this conversation, can we have it away from Officer Simmons’ ears?”

Jordan appeared as if she’d rather stick a hot poker in his eye but nodded. He kissed her lips because he simply couldn’t resist. Jordan, however, had no problem resisting him, and kept that beautiful mouth of hers sealed.

“So...” Simmons’ gaze went back and forth between Max and Jordan.

“No, there’s no one in particular I can think of off the top of my head who might want to break in.” She sounded tired, as if she just wanted the whole mess to disappear. He couldn’t blame her.

“Then again...” She cocked her head to the side, then those eyes narrowed again and her mouth pursed.

“Who?” The question was echoed by both Max and Simmons.

“Dirk Clement.”

“Who the hell is Dirk Clement?” Max couldn’t contain the possessive growl that slipped out.

“I clean his house.” Her face contorted, and Max had a sneaking suspicion it was with disgust.

Max’s first thought was to look the man up as soon as Simmons left, and his second was he couldn’t wait to see the man with a black eye.

Jordan seethed inside and wondered just what the hell was going on. One minute she was a pole-dancing instructor trying to earn enough money to open her business, the next she was sleeping with a security specialist. Someone exactly the type her mother would plant to keep an eye on her.

Ooh, that woman was going to get an earful. The last thing Jordan needed was another babysitter.

And Max? Goddamn it. The man had taken his duties to the next level, hadn’t he? Sleeping with her? She guessed he at least got out of it whatever her mother had paid him.

The whole idea made her feel sleazier than Dirk Clement ever had. At least Dirk had nothing to do with her mother. Clement had his own nefarious reasons. He’d been trying to worm his way into her bed in the utmost of immoral fashions. Hadn’t he been trying to do that since the moment he’d hired her? But break into her apartment?

Jordan shivered in revulsion. Gross. Absolutely gross.

She seethed in silence, waiting for Max to return from walking Officer Simmons out. She’d had the most fantastic sex of her life a short while ago, and now the man who’d revved her body might have been a plant. He’d said he didn’t know her mother. A lie? Dare she believe him after all the other stupid stunts her family had pulled since she’d moved out?

He had looked shocked when she’d given them her name. Then again, if was being paid, he’d probably do whatever he needed to keep up the charade.

She needed a shower. And she wanted to see his face right before she slammed the door on it.

Except she wasn’t sure it was possible to forget the things Max had done to her. Her traitorous body for sure wanted a repeat. And she for damn sure wanted answers. Now.

Damn it all to hell.

The door clicked open and in he walked like some kind of god. Even though she was good and pissed at both Max and Dirk Clement, nothing could detract from Max’s looks or the way he made her heart race at the mere sight of him. It had been that way since she’d first seen him at the bar.

He shut the door and she was damn glad to see an expression of resignation on his face. She hoped to hell this wasn’t going to be easy on him.

“Well?” she started, ready to get on with it.

He shrugged. “The patrols didn’t spot anything unusual.”

“Not what I’m talking about Maximillian *Jensen*.” Then it dawned on her. With all her stewing, she hadn’t put the names together earlier when the officer had recognized Max. “Jensen. As in...Kara Patterson-Jensen? You’re her son?”

“Yes,” he admitted, not looking the least bit sorry.

“So how did...?” So damn confused. And even more damning. They did run in the same circles, and Max was exactly the type of man her mother would hire.

“Shall we sit or hash this out standing up?” Max stuck his hands in his pockets.

“As long as you stay on your side of the couch and don’t touch me.”

His eyes narrowed dangerously. “I don’t think I can agree to that, kamikaze.”

Jordan crossed her arms over her chest.

Standoff.

Max didn’t move, just stood there looking all sexy and determined.

“For God’s sake. Let’s get it over with.” She actually harrumphed.

He nodded sharply. “There are better things we could be doing.”

“Not a chance, bucko.”

“So you say.”

Jordan replaced the cushions then sat on one end of her cream-colored microfiber couch. She realized her mistake a second too late. Max sat next to her, not giving her an inch, and since she’d foolishly believed he’d be a gentleman and sit at the other end, she didn’t have any room to breathe, let alone move. He grabbed her hand and held tight when she tried to pull it back.

Brute.

“I never meant for us to make love.”

She snorted. “Little late for that revelation.” And why in the hell did his announcement break her heart?

“We really should have never even met.” His thumb played lazily over the pulse point at her wrist in an almost hypnotic fashion.

“Start at the beginning. And try not to leave anything out,” she said, deadpan.

He...squirmed, for lack of a better word, with an air of discomfort. “First, are you sleeping with this Dirk Clement?”

“What?” Jordan leapt from her seat and stared at him incredulously. “That is seriously nasty, and why in the hell would you ever think that? How do you even know the scumbag?”

His shoulders dropped in relief. “Thank God.”

She thought that was what he said. She couldn’t be sure because he muttered it.

“I don’t know him. Just made me jealous.”

She couldn’t stop the gag that choked her. “Jealous? That’s rich.”

He smiled. "Yes. Jealous. I had a hunch you didn't like him based on your expression, but I had to know for sure. I was beginning to think I might have to kill the man for touching you."

"Fine, get on with it. I want to know what's going on. How much is my mother paying you?"

"Nothing. I told you. I don't know your mother. The truth is—"

"The truth. Right."

"—that I was following one of your students."

"Students?"

"Yes."

Jordan shook her head. "One of my...my aerobics class?" Complete confusion took over.

"Yep." Max sat back and locked his hands behind his head. The action drew her gaze to his chest.

Jordan swallowed.

"Annie Devlin."

"Annie? Annie who never speaks and covers up with a full-length fur so that no one sees her, Annie?"

"Uh, yeah, her."

"What do you want with her? And what the hell did this have to do with me?"

"I was hired by her husband because of her secret rendezvous on Friday nights. Imagine my surprise when what I found was your sweet little body wrapped around a pole."

Jordan gasped. "You were watching me?"

"No, I was watching her. But the second I realized Mrs. Devlin wasn't having an affair, well, then my attention turned to you."

"Well, isn't that special." She didn't have a clue what else to say. "So you weren't hired by my mother?"

"No."

"Then how is it you ended up at the same bar as me?"

Max sighed. "Sit down."

Jordan must have hesitated a bit too long because his arm snaked out and he grabbed her, pulled her onto his lap and wrapped his arms around her.

"Much better." His murmur tickled her ear and sent a shiver down her spine. He might as well have licked her pussy. "I admit to following you."

"What the hell for?"

"You've got to be kidding me, Jordan. One look at you in your little class and I was drooling. Then you came out and got on that damn bike and I just about had a coronary."

Realization dawned. "That's why you were calling me kamikaze."

"Yes. I swear if I ever see you on that hunk of metal again, it'll be too soon."

"Hunk of metal? You really should be nicer to my baby. I love him."

“Anyway... After you got to the bar I thought, ‘I can’t leave her there. What if she drinks too much then gets back on that stupid contraption?’ So I stayed despite wondering if I’d lost my mind.”

Dang it, she wanted to believe him, but wow. Seriously? Then again, how else would the man know Annie’s name?

Um, hello? Security specialist. He probably knew more about her than she did.

Max frowned. “You don’t believe me.” His hand rubbed a small circle on her back. Then he shifted her, forcing her legs to straddle his thighs. The position put her breasts right at mouth level for him. Her nipples peaked in response, damn them.

She deflated. “I’m starting to,” she said begrudgingly. She shouldn’t still want him. Not with all the doubts she had. But she had a feeling his activities beyond his initial surveillance of her were not something he typically partook of. Feeling impish, she walked her fingers up his chest. “So...do you sleep with all your suspects?”

“You aren’t a suspect. Or anyone of interest. At least not of criminal interest.” His grin told her she was of interest in another way though. He swallowed. “I should fire myself for stalking you and doing what I did to you.”

“Did *to* me? You’re over-thinking it. You hardly forced yourself on me. I’m sure I was quite the willing participant. In fact, if you’re telling the truth, then *I* was the one who picked *you* up at the bar.”

He grabbed her fingers as she slowly inched them down to the hardness she felt growing against the apex of her thighs.

“Still, it was completely unethical, immoral—”

“Yadda, yadda, yadda. We did nothing wrong or unethical, immoral or illegal. We were strangers who picked each other up at a bar. I won’t tell anyone if you won’t.”

“Why aren’t you married? And why the *hell* are you without protection?” He blurted the question and she saw that he couldn’t believe he’d asked.

“I’m sure my mother has some Kennedy picked out and waiting in the wings for me.” She watched Max’s lip curl in distaste. Or jealousy, she couldn’t decide. “Her idea of a future and mine don’t mesh.”

His hands went to her bottom and pulled her closer to his body, rubbing his denim-covered length along her slit. She wished she hadn’t put the pants on, but then meeting the police without pants might have been a tad strange.

“Our mothers must be related.” His lips went to her throat and teased the sensitive skin.

“Why’s...why’s that?” Her clit sat up and begged for more attention than it was getting.

“I’m pretty sure mine has a Rockefeller all picked out for me.”

“Aw, that’s sweet.”

“How are you involved with Clement?” His thumb pressed on her sweet spot, making her eyes roll.

She arched back, seeking better contact. “I told you. I’m his cleaning lady.”

Max grasped her shoulders and shook her once. She focused on his face. “My next question then is why is Jordan Grace Landon cleaning houses?”

His words wounded her. Jordan jerked out of his hold and off his lap. “I guess you wouldn’t know a damn thing about wanting something so badly you could taste it.”

He snorted. “I did want something really bad and it tasted fantastic. It’s part of the reason we’re having this conversation in the first place.”

“I wasn’t talking about sex.” She ground her teeth in frustration. The last thing she needed was for him to condemn her reasons for making it on her own.

“You and I both know what we did wasn’t sex.”

Jordan sniffed and turned her shoulder. She had thought it had been more, but now with the jumble of thoughts in her head... Had he played her like a million-dollar fiddle or were they really just two people attracted to one another?

“What is it you want so bad you’d live outside of the protection your family can provide? I’m not judging you, Jordan, I’m curious.” He eyed the apartment for a long moment, and anger boiled in her stomach.

Please God, don’t let him be like her parents.

Jordan let out a harsh breath and sank onto the couch again. “I want to buy my own dance studio. It’s all I’ve ever wanted to do. While my mother thought ballet dancing was fine for poise, no way in hell would she allow me to do something so menial. I left. To prove to her I don’t need her money to live a meaningful life.”

“Now I know our mothers are related.”

She couldn’t help but smile. “That would be a bit squicky because that would make us related. What did she do?”

“Definitely don’t want to be related. I left too, though I did use some of her money to start my security business. I’m the black sheep of the family,” he said proudly.

Everything in her eased. She cuddled into his side. “Well then, we’re quite the pair, aren’t we?”

His thumb traced a lazy circle on her shoulder. “I like the sound of that.”

Jordan’s nipples pebbled and a funny twist went through her belly. First, though, she still had to deal with who had broken into her home.

“Why did he come here?”

“I don’t know. But I intend to find out. Any idea what whoever he was would be looking for on your desk?”

“No clue.”

“I didn’t get the feeling he was doing anything other than trying to make it look like he’d been searching for something.”

“But why?”

“Well, let’s go see then, shall we? Won’t hurt to see if I’m wrong.” He pushed up and then pulled her to her feet before dragging her to the desk.

There were papers strewn across the top, papers that had been organized pre break-in. She sat down, blew a few strands of hair off her face and tucked them behind her ears. She really needed a ponytail holder.

“Unless it was small, I’m pretty sure he didn’t have anything in his hands besides a flashlight when he bolted.”

Jordan pushed some of the papers around, trying to remember what had been there in the first place. A class schedule for the studio, her client list, a few invoices for supplies. Nothing at all interesting to a robber and certainly nothing Dirk Clement would be interested in.

“There was nothing of importance here. Anything of value I keep in a safe-deposit box or back at my mother’s.” She didn’t see anything missing. Her gold pen still lay in its case, the crystal paperweight, the laptop, everything. “If he took anything, I can’t tell.”

“That’s what I thought. The whole thing was just plain odd. But it was worth a shot.”

They stared at each other. “So now what?” Was he going to leave? Act like nothing had happened between them? Move on to bigger and better things?

“We go to bed and deal with it in the morning.”

“Excuse me?” Had she heard him right?

“I said...” he leaned over her, a hand on each arm, trapping her, “...we go to bed and deal with this in the morning.”

“You’re staying?”

“I can’t very well leave you alone, now can I, kamikaze? You being all by yourself.” He nuzzled her neck with his lips.

“Can’t because someone broke into my apartment? Like you feel protective in your security-man mode, because let me tell you, those guys were another reason I left the fold.” Max’d have a black eye if that was the only reason he was staying with her tonight.

“Partly. Protection is part of my job, and if you think for one second I’d leave you alone after someone got into your home, then think again. But, kamikaze...” he moved in, kissed her, deep, then pulled back, “...if I just wanted to protect you, I could call in any one of my employees to sit and watch your place for the night. Now get your ass up, your clothes off, and get into bed.”

Jordan’s breath stumbled in her throat. Her clit took notice, throbbing without being touched, and her nipples hardened.

“While you’re getting ready, I’m going to do something about the door so we don’t have any more unwelcome visitors.” He straightened and walked away.

Hello? She watched the wiggle of his fantastic backside and swallowed. Had he just ordered her to do his bidding then walked off like he hadn't set her body on fire?

Hell yes he had. She leapt from the chair, scrambled around the room blowing out candles then ran down the dark hall, hoping he didn't take too long to get the door in order. The shirt she wore went flying across her room as did the panties and pants she'd donned for the police. Then she dove onto the bed, repressing the urge to scream and kick her feet like she'd just won the lottery.

A sharp pounding came from the kitchen and she envisioned him covering the hole where the intruder had broken out a pane of glass so he could reach in and unlock the door. At least the lock was still intact.

A few minutes later, right about the time her skin began to cool, Max entered her room, stripping his shirt over his head. Thank God the lights were back on because this was one show she didn't want to miss. He'd undone his jeans, leaving a gap where the head of his cock protruded. Jordan licked her lips and remembered the feeling of her mouth wrapped around it.

"Keep looking at me like that and we won't even get to the main course."

"And what is the main course?"

"You." Max stalked across the room and crawled onto the bed between her legs. His nose dipped into the crook of her knee and his lips traveled up her inner thigh before settling at her core.

"Mmm..."

His tongue flicked wildly at her clit, wasting no time in bringing her to the edge, and then a long finger penetrated her sheath and thrust in and out. This time she knew the flickering lights she saw had nothing to do with the electricity.

"Holy shit. I don't think I've ever come that quickly."

"Sorry. I couldn't wait." He suited words to action and pressed his cock head just inside her channel.

Jordan sucked in a breath, arched her back, tilting her hips to provide better access, and gripped the sheets. After that it was all about holding on for dear life while Max pounded into her. With every penetration his pelvis rubbed against her clit, jolting the fractious nerves there and keeping them from settling. His balls slapped against her anus. She'd never thought about that part of her body being erotic, but suddenly she wanted to roll over and present herself.

Max didn't give her the opportunity. He ground into her one last time and held himself rigid above her as he pulsed inside her.

Shit.

"Shit." Max echoed her thought. "I'm sorry." He put his forehead on hers. They were both breathing heavy. "Tell me you're protected."

"I can't do that."

"Damn it. Any chance you just ended your period yesterday?" He said it so hopefully she laughed out loud.

“Ah, no. Sorry.”

“It’s not your fault. I got wrapped up in seeing you naked and spread out for me that I didn’t even think about a condom.”

Jordan wrapped her arms around him, unable to hate him for a mistake. Would there be consequences? Perhaps. Would it mean the end of the world? No. She kissed his neck.

“I think it was both our faults.” She lowered her tone and spoke into his ear. “Next time we’ll just have to be more careful.”

“I swear I’ve never done that before. I mean the no-condom part, not the sex. I can even show you my last physical if you want.”

She laughed. “I could tell you were experienced, trust me. And ditto for me. I haven’t even had sex for a while.”

He lifted his head and smiled at her. “Are you sure you’re not one of my mother’s Rockefeller plants, brought to my attention so I’d end up getting you pregnant and then we’d have to marry?”

Jordan laughed again and crossed her heart. “As long as you promise your last name isn’t really Kennedy.”

“Nope.” Max withdrew, leaving her feeling empty. He lay down next to her and pulled her into his arms. “Does what we’re doing seem wrong?”

She played with the hairs on his chest, doing her best not to yank them out one at a time in a nervous fit. “Nooo... Does it to you?” *Please say no. Please say no.*

“No. That’s what’s so scary. Everything feels so...right. Like I could get used to being with you. And since I only met you a few hours ago, you know...”

“I get it. It is a little weird, yes, but I don’t regret for one second what we’ve done, and it isn’t wrong.”

Max pinched her right nipple lightly and rolled the nub between his fingers. “Definitely not wrong.” He bent his head and sucked the nipple into his mouth.

After driving her crazy and making her squirm to get more, he released the bud with a pop. He nibbled his way up her breast to her collarbone, traced the length of her neck and pressed his lips to her mouth. His tongue slipped inside and danced with hers.

“Tomorrow,” he said, breaking their connection, “in the light of day, we’ll talk about things.” He kissed her forehead and hugged her close.

It *was* late. Jordan suddenly found herself tired. She snuggled into Max’s heated body and yawned. “Okay. But I warn you, I get up early.”

“How early?”

“Six. Have to be at the dork’s by eight.”

Max turned her on her back and pushed himself up on an elbow. “The dork’s?”

“Dirk Clement.”

“It’s Saturday.”

She shrugged. “Did I mention the man was a squicky dick?”

“Squicky?” He laughed.

“Yes. It’s the most appropriate word to describe him.”

“Then perhaps I’ll go with you and make sure he keeps his *squicky* hands off you.”

“Suits me. Just be prepared to stay out of the way of my right hook, because as soon as I arrive for that job tomorrow I plan on getting fired.”

Max smoothed a thumb over her cheek. “You got a good right hook, huh?”

“Years of dancing have made me very strong.”

“Trust me, baby, I saw how strong you were when you were wrapped around that pole. Remind me never to piss you off. And by the way, when do I get a private showing of that little routine?”

“Hmm...you play your cards right, could be as soon as I blacken the dork’s eye.” She slipped her leg between his and brought it up to nudge his package. “I’ll have plenty of free time afterwards.”

Chapter Six

Max sat next to Jordan in her much more sensible car as they drove to Clement's estate. Jordan had gotten up earlier than she'd told him she would, waking him with a blow job and sucking him dry. Thinking about it made him get hard again. He had a feeling he was in for a lot of tight jeans in the near future. At least he'd had a change of clothes in the car with him. He'd stashed them there after getting caught once on the job without a change of clothes for three days. Now he always carried a bag.

Not that it mattered because he'd already decided he was taking Jordan back to his house after she dealt with Clement this morning. The man would be lucky to walk away with only the black eye Jordan threatened.

She pulled the car to the curb and looked at the house with a mixture of resignation and antagonism.

Dirk Clement couldn't possibly come out of this unscathed. Max had a feeling Jordan was a force to be reckoned with when pissed off. Look how far she'd gone to get out of her family's clutches.

"You mind if I go with you?"

"By all means. Be my guest." She yanked the key from the ignition and held it between her fingers like a weapon. Perhaps the dork, as Jordan referred to him, was going to lose an eye instead.

Max rocked back on his heels and waited for his knock to be answered. The house reminded him of the one he'd grown up in. Pretentious and overdone. He wasn't sure what to expect when the door opened. A snobby butler? A maid in a French maid's costume?

Surprisingly enough, Clement himself opened the door, a sneering grin on his face which quickly turned downward when he saw Max standing next to Jordan.

"Jordan. You've brought help with you today?" His nose went into the air as he spoke.

"We need to talk, Mr. Clement." Max entered the house without being asked, pushing Clement out of the way while Jordan followed.

She got right to the heart of the matter. "Did you send someone to break into my apartment last night?"

Oh brother. Max saw Jordan's hand ball into a fist. At least she wasn't still holding her keys.

Clement's mouth opened and closed like a fish. "Absolutely not. Why on earth would you even think something like that?"

"You wanna know why?" Jordan asked, advancing on the weasel who backed up even more until his heels hit the wall behind him. "I think you're pissed because I turned you down over and over and over and this was your way of payback."

Clement's gaze shifted between Max and Jordan. "I never came on to you."

Jordan's eyes narrowed. "'Why don't you slide down here to the pool when you're finished up there, sweet thing? Care to have a drink when you're done? I can think of something much nicer for you to wear while you're working, baby.'"

Max's stomach turned and a red haze filled his vision. "You said those things to an employee?"

"That and a hundred other sordid comments." Jordan put her hands on her hips. "Did you break into my apartment?"

Clement's gaze jerked to Max's. "No. I didn't. I... No. I don't even know where you live. How could I when you wouldn't talk to me?" Sweat had started to bead on the man's forehead.

"I'm sure you have the means, Mr. Clement."

"I didn't do anything wrong." His face had turned a strange shade of purple, and Max wondered if this was what they meant in historical fiction when they said someone was suffering from apoplexy. "Fine. I said some things I shouldn't have but you..." he stabbed a finger in her direction, "...you dance around here shaking your hips and, and, try to get me all worked up. I thought you were...flirting." Clement acted as if the thought had come to him that very second. He behaved like a two-year-old who hadn't gotten his way. In short, Clement was having a temper tantrum for being caught.

"Maybe there's a reason I never told you where I live, did you ever think about that?" Jordan was definitely handling the situation better than Max thought she would. He sort of saw her now as the charging-up-the-drive-guns-blazing type. "I quit."

"You can't quit. That would be a breach of contract." Clement stamped his foot to emphasize his point.

"I'm pretty sure you breached the contract by saying the things you did. And I'm cleaning your house, not managing your money. Your contract doesn't mean much to me at the moment."

Max wished he had a pair of handcuffs. It might be nice to leave with him cuffed to the gauche fountain inside the foyer.

"It gives me great pleasure to say to your face, I quit, Mr. Clement."

"You won't get any references from me then."

Jordan turned and started walking down the steps. She spoke over her shoulder. "Your kind of references I don't need."

Max watched her leave then turned back to Clement. "If I find out you had anything to do with the break-in last night, you can be sure you'll hear from *me* again. With police in tow. And for future reference, I suggest you keep your mouth shut when the help is around unless you want a lawsuit slapped on you."

Clement vigorously nodded. "I swear. I didn't do it. I don't know where she lives."

"Let's keep it that way, shall we?"

Max didn't skip down the drive the way he wanted to, but he did whistle. One problem down, one still to go. Though they'd discovered Jordan's former employer was truly a weasel, Max still had no clue who'd broken in last night. He'd hoped the case would be solved with a visit to Clement, but despite the fact Clement was a dick, Max didn't think he'd been lying about not having anything to do with the break-in at Jordan's place.

He wondered what Jordan would say when he told her he'd be sticking to her like glue until her guest was identified, because he sure as shit didn't believe the act had been random. Someone knew who Jordan was.

Dirk Clement was an absolutely absurd man. Jordan slammed the door to her hatchback and simmered while waiting for Max. In an extremely short amount of time, she'd somehow become attached to the man. Perhaps fate, through Annie Devlin, had brought them together. She wouldn't go back in time to change things even if it meant a loan for her own studio would fall into her lap at this very moment.

Besides, she'd done some thinking during the night while she'd been pressed against Max's side. If he could use some of his family money to start his own business, perhaps she could too. Maybe she wasn't looking at things from the right angle. She was an adult. Her mother had no say in how Jordan spent her own money.

The passenger door opened, letting in a cold gust of wind.

"What an idiot." Max yanked the door closed with a thud.

"Do you think he was the one in my apartment last night?"

"No."

"Well, then who the hell...?"

He grabbed her hand and set it on his thigh. "I don't know, but you can rest assured I'll be spending the day looking into it. Are you positive you haven't pissed anyone off?"

"Positive? No."

He smiled at her which made her insides all gooey like a warm chocolate chip cookie. "Then are you sure no one knows who you are?"

"No on that account either. I don't think it would be a gigantic leap for someone to figure it out either. Apart from Dirk the dork who only thinks with his little brain." Jordan turned the key and started the engine, then pulled into the street. "You'll have to give me directions."

"I will. For now just get on 70." Max lifted Jordan's hand and kissed her knuckles.

A thrill shot through her.

The euphoric feeling got cut off by the sudden ringing of her cell phone from the cup holder. She retrieved her hand and answered the call.

As if the day couldn't get worse.

"Hello, Mother."

"Jordan, darling." Jordan rolled her eyes at her mother's sickly sweet greeting. "I've just heard about the break-in last night. Are you willing to stop playing your little game and come home now? Can't you see how dangerous it is?"

Jordan sat up. "And just how did you hear about it, Mother?" She hadn't had a chance to tell a soul yet.

"Don't be silly. Jeff, of course."

Jordan ground her teeth. "And how would Jeff know?" She hadn't seen her shadow, Jeff, since she'd flown the coop. Jordan assumed he'd been assigned some other menial job.

"You didn't honestly think I would let you run off to live in squalor, now did you? He's been watching you all along. Until now there's been no reason to interfere, but bringing home some vagrant from a bar? Jordan, really. I brought you up better than to let some common gold digger get his hands on your money. I had to do something."

"Oh. My. God. So you had someone fucking break into my place?" Jordan wanted to scream. And considering it wouldn't be very nice to kill the woman, what she really wanted to do was take a few whacks at a punching bag. Not even Dirk Clement had made her see this particular shade of red. "You've been spying on me."

"Don't you dare speak to me with such vulgarity. And yes. Someone had to stop you from squandering your life away."

Max put a calming hand on Jordan's thigh. Her cheeks heated because she had no doubt Max had heard every single word out of her mother's mouth.

"You know nothing about my life. If I want to squander every penny in my account, I'll do just that. You also know nothing about the vagrant I brought home to have wild monkey sex with all night long."

Her mother gasped and Jordan smiled, knowing she'd hit a homerun with the remark.

"Max is no vagrant, Mother. He is Kara Patterson-Jensen's son, if you must know, and even if he were a window washer you would still have no say in what or how many ways I do him."

"Jordan Grace Landon."

Jordan envisioned her mother's shocked face and kept at it. "He's the black sheep of his family too, like I am. We're a perfect pair. And...we love each other," she shouted.

Max's hand squeezed hers. She hoped he understood she was only playing it up for her mother's sake.

"And from now on you can keep your flunky security men at home with you because Max happens to be one. He's the one I am entrusting my body to."

“I will have you cut out of any inheritance you might be thinking is yours if you don’t stop speaking to me with such disgrace right this second.”

Jordan sighed. It had not been her intention to lambaste her mother, but this time the woman had stepped over the line in sending someone to burglarize her home in the hopes of scaring her straight.

“I’m sorry, Mother, but you’ve gone too far with this stunt. If you want to disown me, fine. I’m not sure Daddy will be too happy, but fine. I don’t want a dime. I want to own my own studio and teach kids to dance. I want to marry the man of my choice and have babies who aren’t born thinking money can buy them everything. I want to live my own life and not have you tell me who I should marry for the sake of *your* appearance. I’m going to hang up now, Mother.”

She did, pressing the end button on her mother’s shriek. Then she powered off the phone.

“Wow.”

Jordan sank back into her seat. It took her several seconds to realize she’d pulled to the side of the road and the car sat idling still within sight of Clement’s estate. Her cheeks heated at what Max had overheard.

“So shall we just get right to the babies since we’ve already had unprotected sex or do you think we should get married first?”

Jordan choked on her spit. Max pounded on her back.

“Sheesh. Don’t say things like that unless you mean them.”

“Who says I don’t?”

She stared at the crazy man. “Are you serious?”

“As a heart attack, kamikaze.”

She must have looked completely confounded because Max laughed and cupped a hand behind her neck. He urged her closer and kissed the tip of her nose before murmuring to her, “I just have a few stipulations.”

“A few?”

“Yep. The bike has to go or you really will give me a heart attack.”

“Not a chance, bucko.”

He growled against her lips. “You have to let me finance your studio or we’ll be old and gray by the time you get it up and running.”

“I can think on that one.”

“Pole dancing is for my benefit only.”

“Hey.” She poked him in the ribs, making him grunt. “It’s good exercise. And the way we go at it, I’ll need all the help I can get.”

“And last but not least, seeing as you’re so good at it, would you please make a call to my mother too and tell her how it’s going to be?”

“Now that I can handle.” She melted her lips on his and kissed him until they were both out of breath.

About the Author

Annmarie McKenna lives in Missouri where she stays busy writing, shuffling four kids to various activities and trying to keep sane. She loves to hear from readers and can be reached at annmarmck@yahoo.com. To learn more about Annmarie, please visit www.annmariemckenna.com or join her Yahoo! group for updates on her latest releases or other information http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Annmarie_McKenna.

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Look, but don't touch...

Veiled Desire

© 2010 Alisha Rai

Leyla Karimi can't keep her eyes off the hunky guy living in the house behind her. How could *any* woman resist ogling Dr. Mason Barrett, especially when he makes it so easy by parading around in his skin and skivvies?

If it was only their age difference, she would have made a move a long time ago. Except Mason is more than a neighbor. He's her baby brother's oldest friend. It's not like they can have a casual fling and walk away in the morning.

Mason's been doing a little lusting—okay a *lot*—for quite some time. When he catches Leyla peeking, it's a sure sign she could finally be ready to heat up his nights with loving. One taste of her lips, though, and he doesn't want a "little" of anything. He wants it all.

Unwilling to jeopardize a lifetime of friendship for a one-night stand, Leyla is reluctant to throw caution to the wind. When he's kissing her senseless, though, it's hard to remember all the reasons why she should hold back...

Warning: Contains a hot hero who doesn't mind baring it all in the name of love, a heroine who doesn't settle for less, a sweet romance, steamy sex in a car and more good lovin' in bed.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Veiled Desire:

As Leyla chewed her last bite, savoring the taste of strawberry, cream cheese and cinnamon, she glanced up to find Mason's gaze on her mouth, his eyes just a bit unfocused. He looked hungry. And since his plate was clean, she figured it wasn't for food.

Her heart rate accelerated. Though she was careful with her love life, she'd received her fair share of admiring looks over the years. She knew what male interest looked like. But...Mason?

Well, why not? Hadn't she spent months wrestling with her attraction and feelings for him? Why wouldn't that desire be reciprocated?

Baby.

Sweetheart.

This is a nice thing to wake up to...

"Why don't you call me Lee-Lee anymore?" she blurted out. Sasha had tagged her with the nickname in childhood. Though her brother had grown out of it, Mason had continued to use it affectionately. But now that she considered it, he had switched to only calling her by her given name for months.

He didn't seem at all startled by her pulling the topic out of thin air. "Because it's a child's name. Neither of us are children, are we?"

She was a bit too rattled to answer. Her heart pounding, she swallowed the lump in her throat and deliberately set her fork to the side. Leyla dipped her finger in the remaining syrup on her plate. His eyes flicked down to follow the lazy figure eight she made and followed her finger back up to her mouth, where she enclosed it and...sucked.

His eyes flared, and he bit his lower lip. Hard.

Oh my. Well, this was very interesting.

Leyla had never considered herself a wilting flower, so as much as she wanted to swoon a little, she stiffened her spine at the obvious signs of desire she was suddenly noting all over him. Dilated eyes, chest rising and falling. Even his nipples were hard.

Want to taste. Then maybe he would reciprocate.

Her head was spinning from the onslaught of the sudden epiphany. Did he just want her for sex? Because that would never work. She wasn't set up to be a fuck buddy. But if he wanted more, did she? What about Sasha? How would her brother react?

Her natural humor kicked in, and she tried to fight the sudden urge to laugh at herself. Sasha had always been the impulsive Karimi, but here she was, ready to go nuts on the basis of a couple of hot looks. Time to slow down and really think about this. He hadn't given her that much encouragement, if she looked at it objectively.

To distract herself, she picked up her plate and stood. "You done?" Without waiting for anything more than his nod, she picked up his empty plate as well and carried them both to the sink. A small pile of dishes had already been gathered there.

As she grabbed the sponge and drizzled some soap on it, she heard the scrape of his chair behind her. "You don't have to do that."

"I don't mind."

"Seriously, leave it."

Trying to diffuse some of her tension, she forced a smile into her voice and made a tsking noise. "Look at all these dirty dishes. You and I both know you'll let these gather until you don't have any other choice. I still have a few minutes, and I'll just—"

Without warning, hard hands closed over her hips, and she dropped the sponge. He swiveled her around. Reaching behind her, he wrenched the water off. "Goddamn it, Leyla. Stop treating me like a kid."

She blinked up at him, stunned at both the anger on his face and the hard tone of his voice. "I'm not."

"You are. I'm not your son, and I'm not your brother. I can do my own fucking dishes."

Her eyes narrowed. "You don't need to swear at me."

He sneered. "Are you going to chastise me for my language now?"

"Someone needs to. You idiot. I certainly don't think I'm your mother."

"Then stop acting like it. You don't have to clean up after me. You certainly don't need to do my fu—"

She slapped her hands against his chest. "That's a nasty swear, Mason. Say it again, and I will make you sorry. I was doing the dishes because you cooked, you ass."

He stilled. "Do you mind if I use it and I'm not swearing at you?"

"What?"

"Fuck."

The short, graphic word looked erotic on his full lips. She caught her breath.

"Do you object to the word or the context?"

"The-the context."

His lips quirked. "I'll keep that in mind. I apologize. I'm sorry if I overreacted."

"I'm not your sister," she blurted out.

"I know that. I've known that for a while. The question is, do you know it?"

"Yes." She realized at that moment that her slightly damp hands were flat against his chest.

His naked, hard, hot chest.

Leyla had never touched him so intimately. Hugs, pecks on the cheek, pats on the back; that was it. The way she'd been raised, males and females who were platonic friends didn't touch each other inappropriately. Mason knew and respected that.

She couldn't look at his face. Instead, she studied her hands, so small against the wide expanse of his chest. Her one hand curved over his developed pec. She only had to move just a smidgeon to scrape the nail of her pinky over his nipple.

Then he was growling, a low rumbling noise, using his tight grip on her hips to pull her closer and crowd her against the counter. He shoved one hand into her hair, tilted her head and lowered his lips to hers.

All she could think was that she no longer needed to wonder if he desired her. He didn't bother with an exploratory foray or gentle teasing. He kissed her as if they'd been kissing for years, as if he had an absolute right to her lips and her mouth. It was hot and carnal, his mouth open on hers, his tongue stroking against hers and inside. When she twined her arms around his neck and sank into him, he made a rough noise and captured the zipper on her hoodie. One quick tug had it undone, and then it was like her shirt just magically undid itself of its buttons for him as well. He pushed it to the side with rough impatience until her breast filled his hand.

When he pinched her nipple, Leyla figured she was pretty much done for. Her breasts were sensitive, but Mason touched her with just the perfect amount of pressure. She arched her back and whimpered into his mouth. God, she wanted more.

He ripped his mouth away and studied her with hot eyes. She knew what she would see if she glanced down at herself right then. Tousled hair, unbuttoned top, her right breast plumped up by his hand, her

nipple long and tight. She didn't want to look down at herself. The reality would force her brain back into action. There was a certain comfort and simplicity in letting one's vagina do the talking. "Mason, please..."

Slashes of red crested Mason's high cheekbones. "You're so beautiful." He dipped his head, pulling her nipple into the wet cavern of his mouth.

If she'd thought that Mason knew how to touch a nipple, that was nothing compared to how well he could suck one. He was a freakin' maestro of the nipple, suckling hard and fast, teasing her with light flicks of his tongue. She looked down at his blond head against her skin. Instantly, doubts and worries crept into her mind. She shut her eyes and they faded. She didn't want to think. Just feel.

He drew away from her nipple. "One day, I want to spend just an hour or two sucking your breasts. Will you let me do that?"

What was a girl supposed to say to that? Yes please? She nodded, since she really couldn't think of anything she'd rather have at that moment.

"Good." He flicked his nail against the wet tip of her breast and she shuddered. His eyes narrowed. "Are you close? Already?"

"Mason, I need..."

"Don't worry. I know."

The heat is on...

Dangerous Lover

© 2010 Charlene Teglia

Take Me, Lover, Book 4

Just a few more weeks and accounting student Cherry Harris will officially get her master's degree and kiss her pink waitress uniform goodbye. There's something else she'd like to make official, too—no more bad boys.

Tired of getting burned, she's determined that from now on, it's nice guys or nothing. What could be nicer than a firefighter rescuing a kitten from a tree? Joe Deluca looks like the perfect way to break her romantic destructive pattern.

Perfect melts like ice cream on a hot day when Cherry finds out that when Joe's not in uniform, he rides a motorcycle and wears a leather jacket over his tattoos. Is he a nice guy, a bad boy, or the man who's just right for her?

The five-alarm passion Joe inspires proves an irresistible temptation, but Cherry's determined to guard her heart if not her body. Until a firebug leads them both into danger and Cherry is forced to admit her heart's been in jeopardy from the beginning...

Warning: Contains a sexy firefighter and burning-up-the-sheets sex scenes that use ALL the words. May induce Harley-Davidson motorcycle fantasies you should not attempt on a moving vehicle.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Dangerous Lover:

Her cell phone rang on her way home. Cherry fished it out of her bag and answered it. "Hello?"

"Cherry." Joe's voice filled her ear. "Just heard about the fire at the ice cream shop. Are you all right?"

"Fine." Except the hand holding the phone was shaking, she realized. "Mostly."

"Were you there when it happened?"

"Yes." She blinked hard, eyes still stinging from the black cloud she'd left behind. "It happened so fast. One minute everything was fine, and then I smelled smoke."

"Nobody hurt, according to the report." But his voice sounded taut, not his usual relaxed tone.

"No," Cherry agreed. "We got everybody out and the fire truck arrived almost immediately."

She heard him exhale as if he'd been waiting for her to confirm it before he believed it. "Good. I wasn't sure if you were working today, but I had to call."

"Worried about me?" A spot of warmth flickered to life inside her.

"Yes. I have plans for you."

Oh, yes. Plans that included him, his bike, a loose dress, and a pair of panties she could live without. What did he have in mind? Whatever it was, it was sure to take hers off the unexpected emergency she'd just been through.

"If you're offering to distract me, I could use a distraction," Cherry said.

"Me too." His voice took on a raw sound.

She blinked again, not entirely due to the irritants she'd subjected her eyes to. The dangers Joe risked every time he reported for a shift had to make the relatively small and uneventful fire at the restaurant pretty minor on his scale. But he had been worried about her. Maybe because he knew firsthand how bad a fire could be.

"I'm all for distractions." She tried for a light tone, but a note of real longing came through. She needed the diversion Joe offered. "You're not working today?"

"Not at the station. When I'm on there, it's for twenty-four hours straight. I do two of those shifts a week."

That had to make for really long days. Especially if an emergency happened after twenty-three of those hours. The relatively open schedule must make up for it.

"What do you do the rest of the time?" Cherry reached her building and headed for her apartment, curious about what Joe did off-duty.

"I'll show you. Are you home now?"

"Just." She stopped outside her door and fished out her keys.

"Be ready in fifteen minutes."

Figuring that was long enough for a shower, Cherry let herself in and locked the door behind her, stripping as she headed for soap and water. She wadded her discarded clothing and dumped it in the laundry basket, hoping the smoky smell would come out in the wash.

After she hopped out of the shower rinsed and clean, she felt better. A few minutes with some hair gel and a blow dryer got her mostly ready. Cherry skipped a bra and pulled on a soft pink T-shirt. A flared mid-calf-length denim skirt went on next. The draping fabric was loose enough to let her straddle a bike and long enough to keep her decent. She decided to live dangerously and wear pink lace briefs underneath. If she had to sacrifice them to great sex, she was pretty sure the orgasms would be adequate consolation.

A knock sounded at her door just as she finished. Joe appeared in the peephole. Cherry grinned at the fish-eyed view of him then opened the door.

His eyes took her in from her sneaker-clad feet up, warm with approval. "You're right on time."

"So are you." Cherry retrieved her bag and slid it up her shoulder as she joined him outside, locking the door behind her and dropping the keys into her bag.

His hand settled on her waist as he pulled her against his side. "You feel unscathed."

“Yep. Just a little shaken up.” She leaned into him, enjoying the warmth of his body touching hers, the sexy way his fingers gripped her waist and the buzz of anticipation his closeness filled her with.

“I should check you out thoroughly,” Joe said. “In case anything got overlooked.”

Cherry nodded, trying for a solemn tone. “You’re right. Better safe than sorry.” Although, right now, she didn’t want to play it safe, and she wasn’t sorry.

They reached Joe’s motorcycle and climbed on. Cherry leaned forward, loving the feel of her breasts pressed against Joe’s back and her arms around his middle. Her feet found their pegs as he revved the engine and then they moved forward.

He drove her through neighborhoods with spacious yards and shady trees, winding around side streets, before coming to a white two-story house with a long driveway and a detached garage that sat sideways at the end of it, surrounded by a copse of ash and birch trees.

The Harley came to a rumbling stop while Joe retrieved an electronic opener from a pocket. The garage door slid up and they rolled in. Joe aimed the Harley at a metal stand and parked on it. The stand raised the bike up a little and held it stable. Cherry could see shiny rows of tools hanging neatly on one wall and various other bikes on similar stands, some with wheels off and in differing stages of assembly. Parts covered a workbench that ran the width of the back wall.

Joe reached back and ran a hand up her thigh under her skirt. “Climb off and get back on in front of me.”

What did he have in mind? Cherry swung a leg over, stood, and came around to the front. The motor continued to idle, a deep rumbling sound. The open garage door meant whatever they did, they weren’t going to die from carbon monoxide in the process. And the sideways angle of the garage to the street, with the additional privacy afforded by the screen of trees, meant nobody passing by could look in.

With a mental shrug, Cherry did what he wanted and climbed on, facing the gas tank while Joe slid back on the leather seat to make room for her.

His body framed hers as his arms wrapped around her. His mouth found her ear, nipping at the sensitive skin of her lobe before speaking. “Hands on the handlebars.”

Okay. Cherry leaned forward and gripped them. It helped her balance, especially when Joe’s hands moved to cup and squeeze her breasts, thumbs seeking out and rubbing her nipples through the thin fabric of her T-shirt. Then down her waist and hips, catching the hem of her skirt and hiking it up to her waist. She drew in a sharp breath when he toyed with the lace edge of her panties.

“You going to miss these?”

“Terribly,” Cherry said, the catch in her voice giving away the lie. “You can console me by making their loss memorable.”

“You won’t forget this.”

Joe kissed the nape of her neck, his warm breath sending shivers dancing down her spine. The rumbling vibration of the bike between her spread legs made her feel like she was primed to take off and rocket into ecstasy. He teased her, running his fingers around the upper edge of her panties, then the legs, starting at her hips and slowly moving towards her center.

“Joe.” She wanted him to touch her there, between her legs, to feel the pad of his finger pressing against her swollen clit.

He answered her with more instructions instead of the touch she was on the edge of demanding. “Scoot up a little.”

Cherry hitched forward and gasped as that put her clit in contact with the warm, vibrating gas tank.

Joe reached around her and gunned the throttle, increasing the vibration.

“Oh.” Cherry’s eyes went wide and her lips bowed as she rocked into the machine.

“Now you. Work it the way you like it.”

New Year's resolutions have never looked so good.

Make Mine Midnight

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New Year's Eve. The party is rockin', and Claire is in her usual spot holding up the wall. It's all right. She's much happier scribbling in her trusty little notebook than mingling. Especially since those notes turn into the sexy erotic romances she pens in secret. Those two gorgeous gods across the room are perfect hero material and...oh dear, are they headed her way?

Mason and Hunter know she won't remember them as the scrawny geeks they were in high school. She also doesn't know they've been lusting after her for ten long years, waiting for her to meet a man and have a normal relationship. They're through waiting. The time has come to make their move—and show her exactly how much they've changed.

One night in the middle of a Mason/Hunter manwich, and Claire has enough research material to fill a hundred notebooks. Good thing she's got OfficeMax on speed dial to order more. Except suddenly her two hunks have this crazy idea that keeping her is selfish. Selfish? She may be mousy, but this mouse is about to roar...

Warning: Threesomes! Light bondage, blindfolds, breakfast made by two hot men who used to be geeks. Parades, cotton candy, more sex, and convincing said men they are WRONG and threesomes are RIGHT.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Make Mine Midnight:

"I want the whole scoop later, sweetie," Paul called after them as Mason and Hunter practically frogmarched her down the hall to the stairwell. There were no slow feet, no stopping or pausing, just a straight, quick arrow to the stairs. Two short flights down had them on the next floor where they proceeded to continue down the hall like they'd done so a million times. Like she had so often. Before she could say a word, they stopped right in front of 13A.

Interesting since she'd never given the directions. They should have had to ask where she lived, not known how to take her right to her front door.

Her suspicion rose again. "How did you know where I lived?"

"Paul." Hunter felt her jeans pockets and victoriously extracted her set of keys.

"I knew that man had a big mouth, but damn. He told you everything, didn't he?"

"Don't get mad at the middleman, sweetheart." Hunter pecked her cheek as he fumbled the key in the lock then pushed open the door to her place.

"I still want to know what's going on."

“Later,” Mason growled in her ear. Literally growled. “Time for talk later. We need to see you, want to touch you, taste you.”

Claire wondered if it were possible for one’s heart to actually explode. The thing was beating so hard surely it was close.

“And what if I don’t want to do those things?” The act of defiance pretty much fell flat. She knew it based on their twin predatory grins.

“If you really didn’t want this, you’d go inside and slam the door in our faces. One thing we remember for certain about you is your stubbornness.” Hunter turned serious and touched her cheek. “If there’s anything we do that scares you or you don’t want, just tell us. We’ll back off.”

They would. She didn’t know how she knew it, but she did. They wouldn’t hurt her. Maybe leave her heart crushed in a million pieces when they left, but they wouldn’t physically hurt her. They weren’t that kind of men. Not ten years ago, and she could see they still weren’t.

What could she say to that? She nodded and stepped inside, letting them follow her in. Not want this? Pfft. The door sounded with what seemed like an ominous click and then Hunter spoke again.

“Take off the shirt, Claire. I can’t wait to see you.” Mason’s hands fisted and she wondered if he were trying not to pounce on her. His expression clearly showed he wanted to do just that.

She swallowed and reached for the hem of her shirt, revealing inch by inch of smooth, creamy skin in an almost provocative dance. Where her inner vixen suddenly came from she didn’t know and didn’t particularly care. When her bellybutton appeared, Mason dropped to his knees and placed a kiss on the indentation. The act startled her and Claire bumped back into the wall. Mason took advantage. He held her hips and kissed a circle around her navel, tickling her into a rush of giggles.

Beside her, Hunter groaned. Because he wanted to do the same thing? Damn, she wished she had a better handle on all things sex in real life, not just in the written word.

A moment later, Mason backed off, a silly grin on his face. “Sorry.”

She had a feeling he wasn’t. “Right.”

“Off.” The impatience she remembered Hunter having shone through in spectacular fashion.

“Geez. It’s not my fault I was interrupted.” Claire shimmied the shirt up, reaching her arms to the ceiling to remove it, but before she could take it completely off, Hunter grabbed her bound arms and kept them raised above her head. As a result, her face was covered by the material as well. “Hey.”

“Stay.” Hunter had been reduced to one-word grunts, which made a thrill go through her.

A mouth latched on to one of her silk-bra-covered nipples, puckering the bud tight before the cup was pulled below her breast. Fingers manipulated her other mound. Claire’s knees wobbled and someone pressed her into the wall.

Her nipple was sucked deep into a hot, wet mouth and then a tongue wrapped around it. Teeth bit gently and Claire cried out into the fabric of her shirt. She’d never experienced such a sensation, the

sharpness of teeth followed by the soothing lap of a tongue. The clip between her breasts popped open with deft fingers and the cups fell to her sides, leaving her practically naked from the waist up except for the bunch of fabric around her face. She knew her nipples were standing out from her small breasts, and somewhere in the back of her mind she thought about being embarrassed but couldn't summon the energy when what the two men were doing to her nipples felt so damn good.

"Sheeeesh." Claire's legs buckled on a particularly strong suck.

She squealed when Mason laughed and scooped her up in his arms. "Where's the bedroom, baby?"

"Down the hall." The shirt still shrouded her face but try as she might she couldn't wiggle loose. She had a feeling Mason wanted it that way.

Light filtered through the hole at the top and she wondered what they thought of her scrawny apartment as they lit the rooms one by one. She knew what they'd find in her room. The walls were dark red—where red she called it—the comforter plaid in a matching shade of red mixed with browns and navy. Not very girly, but then she wasn't a very girly kind of girl. A touch of makeup on the dresser, a few simple dresses and a bit of jewelry were about as feminine as she got.

There was a shuffling sound and then the world spun as Mason turned and laid her on the bed. Her bare back on soft sheets told her the shuffling had been Hunter pulling off the comforter.

"Can I take this off now?" She squirmed in an attempt to extract herself. Who knew it'd be so hard to get your shirt off when you really wanted it off?

"I don't know, Hunt, I kind of like her blindfolded."

Claire stilled, her heart racing. Blindfolded? As in not being able to see? Anything?

She'd written the scenario lots of times. And the idea of doing it here and now made her clit throb in excitement. But still, if she didn't at least pretend like the idea scared the shit out of her, what would they think of her? That she did this sort of thing all the time?

She fumbled out of the shirt. Her glasses came off with the material, and she eyed their blurry forms. "What do you mean?"

Hunter pulled a black, silky-looking scarf from his back pocket and showed it to her. "A little something to force you to feel, sweetheart."

"Do you always carry little black scarves in your pocket, Hunter?"

"I like to be prepared." His lips split into a sexy smile that made her belly flip-flop.

"Huh. I like prepared." What the hell. It was the chance of a lifetime, right?



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