

Cooper McKenzie



**Strangers
in the
Morning**

Red Rose Publishing

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Morning

By

Cooper McKenzie

Dedication

To new friends



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“I know I don’t *need* a man in my life, but it would be nice to have one around on occasion.” I heard the whiny tone in my voice, but couldn’t help myself. I’d been divorced for three years and was lonely and horny.

“So what are you going to do about it?” Lara, my best friend, had been with me through my rocky marriage, my divorce and now my growing desire for a new man in my life.

I looked Lara in the eye, then shifted my gaze to the picture on the wall over her shoulder. Two hands reaching toward one another, mother and child passing an orange Gerbera daisy between them. I wanted that. Someday. But first I needed a man in my life.

What was I going to do? I’d been asking myself that question for weeks now, ever since I’d started waking up in the middle of the night after dreams of naked bodies, sweat and sex that had left me hot and frustrated.

“I have no clue,” I admitted softly. “All I do know is that I want to meet someone who is the exact opposite of Rat Bastard X. Someone caring and sexy who can appreciate me for my weaknesses and quirks as well as my strengths. Is that too much to ask for?”

Lara was grinning by the time I finished my rant. Then she reached for her Palm Pilot. “I have just the man. Big, built and bald, he’s the most honest guy I’ve

ever met.” She scrolled through her contact list, then reached for her cell phone. Without another word to me she punched a number in and waited for an answer. “Hey, it’s Lara. What are you doing tomorrow night?”

My eyes got wide and I waved my hands and shook my head, trying to stop her from setting me up on a blind date.

Lara waved me off and turned away. “Yes, I know you said you’ve given up looking for anything serious. That’s good because neither is she. Yeah, uh huh.” She glanced at me then turned away again and lowered her voice. “Remember that picture you’ve been drooling over for months now? Uh huh. Yes. Okay. We’ll be there.” She hung up and put the cell phone in her pocket before I could grab it away from her.

“Tomorrow night at seven-thirty. Dinner at Baker’s Square. Dress casual.”

I was so overwhelmed I could find no words. My mind had gone completely blank. I opened my mouth, snapped it closed and then took a deep breath. “I cannot believe you just did that.”

“Why not? Kendall Malone, you need a man. You are not the type of woman who can spend her life alone. He’s perfect for you. All I’m doing is helping you find each other. What comes out of it is up to the two of you.”

“He’s not going to expect me to sleep with him tomorrow night, will he?”

Kendall seemed to take some perverse pleasure at my near panicked

question. “It’s time to put the past to rest. Bear is a completely different sort of man than Rat Bastard X or anyone else you have ever met before. He won’t demand you do anything you don’t want to do. If you do want sex, I think Bear’s the perfect specimen. Just do me a favor before tomorrow night. Go buy some condoms and not out of some bathroom vending machine. Just in case.”

“Yes, Mom.” I pushed out of my chair and headed for the front door before Lara had me engaged and married to this Bear person.

As I walked the two blocks from Lara’s house to my own, my brain became a pendulum swinging from thoughts of canceling the dinner to wondering if I should buy some sexy underwear, just in case. Then I pondered pursuing a one-night stand with a friend of Lara’s whom I would probably never see again.

That meant buying condoms. Did I have the guts to buy them? Rat Bastard X had always bought them, until my emergency hysterectomy after miscarrying for the fourth time.

All at once it hit me. “Oh my God, I have a date tomorrow night.” I didn’t know whether to dance a happy jig or throw up.



Standing just far enough away to still see, but not so close it looked like I was actually studying the display I marveled at the variety and choices. Colors, stripes or patterns. Ribbed, bumped or smooth. Regular, large and extra large.

How was a woman to choose a condom from this array in the hopes her blind date might end well? The only thing in my favor was that at five-fifteen in the morning there was no one to witness my mini meltdown. No customers wandering through the aisles. No employees stocking the Health and Beauty Department. The night crew of stock-people and floor cleaners were in the grocery area on the other side of the huge store.

I was tempted to call Lara, but she never answered the phone before nine. By that time I would be at my job as a middle school guidance counselor, up to my earlobes in problems and challenges to deal with before the nine-day Spring break began at 3:15 that afternoon.

I sidestepped closer to the display of protection for the sexually adventurous. Was a blind date really worth the heartburn and stress I was putting myself through?

“How does anyone choose?” I whispered.

“If you’re looking for a recommendation, these work well for me.” A tanned, masculine left hand with long, well formed fingers and no wedding ring plucked a box from the center of the display.

I jumped and turned to the man who had appeared out of nowhere beside me. Where had he come from? How had I missed his approach?

As my gaze traveled from the knee high display of condoms up his body, I

took a few seconds to admire the view. He was at least a foot taller than my own five and a half feet and powerfully built wearing faded jeans, a black T-shirt and battered black leather jacket. When I reached his face, I swallowed hard and tried not to gasp in instant lust-crush.

He wore his hair in a short crew cut, much the same as many of the Marines who lived in the area did. The short black hair and deep brown-bronzed emphasized blue eyes the color of the Carolina sky in springtime. Bright eyes that flashed in what I thought was recognition. But I had never met this man before. I'd remember those broad cheeks, strong nose and jaw, full lips and especially those warm blue eyes. If his hair had been long and flowing down his back and he'd worn a cotton shirt and leather leggings, I would have thought he'd stepped off an advertisement for the Cherokee Indian reservation.

The sexual being in me that had been comatose for years woke with a roar, though I doubted he felt the same. My straight, chocolate brown hair was just long enough to tuck behind my ears. My skin was ivory pale with a dusting of freckles that became more pronounced when I spent time in the sun. I was plain and pleasant, and way more curvy than fashion trends dictated. A hunk like him wouldn't be interested in me, though I could feel my body tighten up and dampen in preparation for whatever he might want to do to me.

I'd never believed in lust at first sight, at least not until this very second. As I

watched him, his eyes heated further and a smile tilted up one corner of his lips. Then he extended the box another inch toward me.

“Uh, thanks.”

I dropped my gaze and took the box. I’d always been of the “no question is too stupid” school, so before I could stop myself I asked, “I know this is probably a stupid question, but how does a man figure out which one works for him?” My cheeks burned as I tossed the box into my empty cart.

He shrugged. “No such thing as a stupid question. Trial and error. Experience. Testing them all as a much younger man.”

His voice was so deep I felt the resonance rumble through to my core. In response, my nipples puckered tight and my cunt clenched—sure signs I had been without a man for far too long.

A moment later the man beside me cupped his large warm hand around my cheek and under my jaw. I allowed him to slowly turn my head so I was looking up at him. I closed my eyes as he bent closer.

“No. Don’t close your eyes.”

I opened my eyes, blinked and met the warm blue gaze that brought to mind a clear April sky over New Bern, North Carolina.

“Are you off the market?”

The rumble of his soft question arrowed through me, sending my sexual

appetite ratcheting up another notch. If I wasn't careful I would attack this man without a thought to the fact that we were standing right next to the condom display in the middle of Wal-Mart.

"No."

"Would you like to be?" His index finger traced a line down my jaw to my chin as his head slowly moved closer.

"Maybe." I lifted a hand to his face and stretched upward, trying to close the last inches between us. His breath smelled like peppermint and coffee. My body tightened and my cunt began to dampen as it prepared for sex. Which in itself should have made me pause. I had never reacted to any male like this before. Not even Rat Bastard X had ever affected me like this. Of course, he'd smelled of cigarette smoke and onions.

"What's your name?" His big hands settled on my shoulders and began a gentle massage. They were so big they covered nearly the entire width.

"Kendall. And yours?"

"Josiah. This is crazy, but I can't help myself."

His hands slid up my neck to cradle my entire head in big warm hands. I raised my chin and closed my eyes as his lips met mine. With my inner voices screaming "Yippee!" I gave myself over to his kiss. For such a big, powerful man he had the gentlest touch.

His lips were warm and soft as they brushed over mine once, then again. It was as if he were mapping the territory before settling in. A shaft of powerful and unexpected lust shivered through me as my hands lifted. They ran up the front of his chest to take hold of his jacket. I held on tight to the leather to keep myself from floating to the ceiling like a loose helium balloon.

The sexual hunger I had caged after finding out Rat Bastard X was cheating with not one, but two girlfriends, tore through the wall of its container like a force five hurricane through a coastal trailer park.

Wrapping his arms around me, he snuggled me closer. I adjusted my stance, spreading my legs to straddle one strong thigh. With one muscular arm across the middle of my back, I arched into him, wanting to get closer. I traced his lower lip with the tip of my tongue, hoping to take this kiss even deeper.

Josiah made a sound of approval as his lips parted, bidding me entrance. He shifted against me and his long, thick cock pressed against my belly. Our tongues mated and dueled as our bodies got better acquainted through the layers of clothes.

“My truck’s outside,” he murmured between kisses.

“Uh huh.”

“It has a camper in the back. With a bed.”

While my body surged in the knowledge that an available bed was so close

at hand, my mind balked. I couldn't do this. I couldn't climb into the back of a truck and have sex with a man I had met two minutes ago over a box of condoms. I was a good girl no matter how bad I really wanted to be. I needed to know a man first, trust him before I could give him my body.

"Kendall?" Josiah loosened his hold just enough so he could hunker down and look into my eyes.

Meeting those sky blue eyes was the hardest thing I'd done in quite awhile. "I can't," I whispered. "I'm sorry."

Before he could persuade me differently, I bolted. Jerking free from his now loose hold, I turned and pushed out of his arms. He released though he could have easily held me where I stood. Grabbing my cart, I hurried away without a backward glance. I fought back tears of frustration, of regret, of the loss of something I couldn't define.

What might have happened if only I'd said yes stayed in the forefront of my thoughts as I crossed the store to the grocery area. Rushing up and down aisles, I grabbed a few things and put them in my cart, the mental shopping list I'd put together the night before gone.

Finally I gave up. Though I'd stayed the course of a "good girl" and left before doing anything I could regret at a later date, my body remained overly wound up and achy. The last thing I could think about was whether I needed

toilet paper, garbage bags or aluminum foil.

Turning the cart around in the middle of the paper products aisle, I headed back toward the front of the store. My cart held two cans of carrots, a box of tea bags, a bag of egg noodles and the box of condoms.

Thankfully the clerk on duty was distracted by a conversation with another clerk as she checked me out. I felt my cheeks burn as the condom box was swiped over the electronic eye and dropped into the plastic bag. I accepted the bag and my change and headed for the door, though I listened, still half hoping to hear my name called in Josiah's deep, deep masculine voice.

As I crossed the sidewalk, I jumped when my cell phone chirped its happy song. Pulling the phone from its designated pocket of my purse, I glanced at the readout. The caller's ID was blocked, but the call originated somewhere in town.

"Hello?"

"Are you okay?" The deep voice sent a thread of renewed hunger straight to my belly.

"Josiah? How did you get my number?"

"There are only two people in New Bern with the first name Kendall. The other one is an eighty-seven year old man. Are you okay? I didn't hurt you, did I?" He sounded concerned, like he actually cared about my feelings.

"No, you didn't hurt me. I'm fine. It's just... well... um..." I fell silent because I

couldn't come up with a plausible excuse, not even for my own mind. To kiss a stranger and almost give in to sex was not who I was.

"What are you doing today?"

"I have to work."

"Have dinner with me tonight?"

I paused a moment to swallow hard. "I can't."

"Why not?"

"I have a date."

"Break it."

"I can't. Not without incurring the wrath of my best friend." I climbed into my car, but was glad I wasn't driving when Josiah asked his next question.

"What are you wearing under your clothes?"

"Excuse me?"

"I'm imagining black silk. A thong that's damp from your sweet juices and a front clasp bra that's full to overflowing with pink tipped tits that are so hard they're aching."

I swallowed hard again and bit the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing out loud. "Yeah, sure, whatever you want," I whispered.

If only he knew the truth. I was wearing old, faded pink French cut cotton briefs that had a run in the knit material. With it I wore a white sports bra that

kept my C-cup jugs from jiggling too much as I race-walked around school. I'd learned early in my career that middle school boys are fascinated with tits, especially when they move as their owner walks.

"How about you?" I found a shred of bravado to ask in a voice that came out way more sultry than I expected.

I smiled when Josiah cleared his throat on the other end of the line. "Umm, to tell the truth, I can't remember."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes, why?"

"Unzip and look." I giggled at the bizarre path this call was heading down, as well as the fact I was an active participant, something I had never done before.

"Do you do this often?"

"Do what?"

"Turn a man on so much he resorts to phone sex for relief?"

"Is that what we're doing? Having phone sex?"

"We will be if we keep this up." His voice grew rougher and deeper as the conversation continued. Even through the phone his smooth assurance set something inside me to humming.

I took a breath as I wrapped my free hand around the steering wheel. I needed something to hold onto. "So, what are you wearing? Or are you running around

kissing strange woman commando?”

Josiah groaned at my question. “White boxers. Are you a strange woman?”

I ignored the question. “Are you hard?” One hand left the steering wheel. For some reason my sensible side had gone on vacation and I was feeling daring, yet nervous, about the next few minutes. I needed an orgasm. Phone sex with a stranger had me so turned on I had to send myself over the edge before I would be safe to drive.

I brushed my fingertips over the knotted, super sensitive nipple of one breast and then the other. I pinched them and gasped as electric pulsations shafted from tit to cunt, causing my thighs to clench. I closed my eyes and easily recalled the feeling of Josiah’s hard male body brushing against mine. He’d been so solid, so masculine.

“Now how could I be anything but? You?”

“I’m not hard, no. But I am wishing I was a different sort of woman.”

“What sort?”

“The sort that would be in the bed in the back of your truck at this moment.” My thighs began to clench rhythmically, my hips rising and falling in a pale imitation of sex. It had been too long since a real live hard, throbbing cock had spread the lips of my cunt and carried me to orgasmic paradise. I was so close to peaking that I missed his answer. “Sorry, what did you say?”

“I said I wouldn’t change a thing about you. Arrggh.” He ended with an extended guttural groan. Had he really just ejaculated? Had our kiss and now this strange conversation really gotten him so worked up he’d had to jerk off and come?

My hand dropped from my breast to cup my crotch, squeezing my clit through my slacks once, twice and then I shuddered as every muscle in my body clenched with my own orgasm. “Oh. Oh. Oh God.”

“Kendall? You still there?”

“Uh huh.”

“My phone is beeping that it’s about to go dead. Have a good day and I’ll...”

“Hello? Josiah?” I said into the phone. When there was no answer I checked the readout. His cell had, indeed, gone dead. At least it had waited until we’d finished having sex.

It took another minute before I felt certain I could drive home without getting into an accident or winding up in a ditch.



I waited until an ecstatic Jack Thompson left my office clutching his acceptance letter to the North Carolina High School of Performing Arts before collapsing into my chair. I closed my eyes, and wondered how to go about canceling my blind date. I was exhausted and knew I would not make a good first impression on anyone. Plus I’d always been a one man woman and Josiah remained

in the forefront of my thoughts. I wanted to be his woman, not some man known only to his friends as 'Bear'.

A soft knock broke the silence of my windowless, closet-sized office. Glancing at the day's schedule, I frowned. I didn't have an appointment for another hour. In that time I planned to eat lunch, return calls and put out any fires that had come up during the morning. Opening the door I found Josiah looking much as he had hours earlier, except for a look in his eyes. I couldn't tell if it was anxiety or something more sinister.

"I'm not a stalker. I'm not crazy. I just couldn't wait to see you again."

As he spoke, he stepped into my office, bumped the door closed and gathered me to his chest. I was so surprised to see him I didn't fight as he lowered his head and kissed me. As soon as his lips touched mine, hunger for sex bubbled up in me like an overloaded volcano experiment.

I wrapped my arms around his waist, then slid them down to cover his ass. He responded by tightening his arms around me and deepened the kiss until we were right back where we had been just hours earlier. All at once any hesitation I had felt was gone and I was ready for anything. From the feel of Josiah's cock pressing against the zipper of his jeans, so was he.

I reached for his belt as he pulled my blouse from the waistband of my slacks. His roughened fingertips brushed the skin of my back and then traveled

around and up my body to cover one bra-encased tit.

Frustrated by his belt, I cupped the bulge covered by his zipper instead. Josiah pulled back, swore softly and took two steps away. My chair stopped him and he collapsed into it much as I had done just moments earlier. When I took a step toward him he held both hands up to ward me off.

“Stay over there. I’ve got to talk to you, but you have to stay over there.”

I leaned against the door, crossed my arms over my chest and said, “Talk about what?”

“You need to know a few things before you go on your blind date tonight, starting with my name. It’s Josiah Bear. My mother and now you are the only people who have called me Josiah since before I was in the service. Everyone else calls me Bear.”

It took a few seconds before my brain put everything together. Bear. Josiah Bear. “You’re Lara’s friend?”

He nodded with a deep breath, all the while warm blue eyes stared deep into mine.

“You’re the guy I have a blind date with tonight?”

Again he nodded.

“How did you find me this morning? Were you following me?” I frowned as curiosity turned to suspicion and edged toward anger at being under surveillance.

“What would you have done if you hadn’t liked the way I looked? Or I hadn’t kissed you? Are you here because I said no to going to your truck and fucking you? Are you here to break our date in person?” Though I wanted to scream, I was highly aware that the office walls were about as thick as a doubled layer of paper towel.

Josiah looked stricken by the time I finished. “No, that’s not it at all.” Standing, he crossed the space between us in a single step. He wrapped his arms around me, holding me gently. I tried to push him away, but it was like trying to move a brick wall.

“This morning was a crazy coincidence. I’d just finished a job and decided to pick up a few things before heading home. I recognized you from a picture Lara had. She’s also the one who, just an hour ago and under great duress, told me where you worked.”

I lifted my face to study his. His eyes blazed blue heat. I could see he was sincere.

“As for your saying no to a visit to my truck, I thought you were very brave and smart.”

“So why didn’t you tell me all that this morning?”

He swallowed hard and looked away for a moment. Color filled his cheeks and he admitted, “I was so caught up in you that I didn’t think about it until later.

And then my phone died.”

I leaned forward to rest my forehead on his chest. Closing my eyes I mulled over his words. I felt his lips brush over the back of my neck as he waited without saying anything further.

Just being this close to him again caused my cunt to dampen and nipples to grow hard. My mind clouded until all I could think about was being alone and naked with Josiah in a real room with thick walls, a proper bed and no deadlines to interrupt us.

“You’ve got to leave now,” I said after taking a deep breath and lifting my head.

“Leave?”

“Yes. I have to get back to work.”

“And tonight?”

“I have to think about it.”

Josiah looked like he wanted to argue, but nodded. With a look that warned of dire consequences if I decided not to show for dinner, he brushed a kiss on my cheek then opened the door and walked out.



Lara walked into my bedroom at quarter after seven, took one look at me and asked, “Who is he?”

“Who’s who?” I asked as I straightened the camisole top I’d bought during a spur of the moment shopping spree after work. It was scarlet silk. Under it I wore my new front clasp black silk bra that matched the G-string I wore under my favorite blue jeans. I felt sexy though I still wondered if I really could let go and have sex, no matter how much Josiah turned me on.

It wasn’t that I didn’t want him. It wasn’t that I didn’t trust him. I just wasn’t sure I trusted myself to be satisfied with a one-night stand that might even spill over into a weekend fling.

“The man who has you dressing like that? Like a woman going out on a real date.”

I turned from the mirror and grabbed my purse. “Maybe I just decided I wanted to make a good impression on your friend.”

Ten minutes later, she parked just down the block from the restaurant.

All at once my nerves kicked into high gear. “Are you sure this guy is okay?”

“He’s a good guy. You’ll be fine. Just relax and enjoy his company. Now let’s go. Knowing Bear he’s already inside.”

I followed Lara into the family restaurant with giant butterflies doing an enthusiastic polka in my stomach. As I followed her through the room, my gaze caught Josiah’s. He stared back with warm eyes and a welcoming smile.

“Hey Bear, how’s it hanging?”

“Hello, Lara. You’re looking good.” He said without a glance in her direction. His deep as a well voice resonated through me, reawakening the hunger I had spent all afternoon trying to control.

“Bear, I’d like you to meet Kendall Malone. Kendall, this is Bear.”

“Hello Josiah.” I stepped forward and offered my hand as if we were strangers.

He stood and ignored my offered hand. Instead he gathered me close to his chest, dropped his head and kissed me. Smiling against his lips, I returned his greeting with enthusiasm.

He broke the kiss before I could lose myself completely to our surroundings and the dozen or so people watching us. With a squeeze of strong arms around my back, he released me then seated me next to him on one side of the table. Lara sat on the other side. Josiah rested his arm along the back of my chair and I snuggled into his side, not surprised to find that I fit perfectly. I looked forward to seeing how well we fit together in other ways as well.

Lara stared at us, stunned. “Okay, you two have met before.”

We nodded in unison.

“And you obviously got along.”

Again we nodded.

“How hungry are you?” Josiah looked at me, his blue eyes glowing with a

different kind of hunger.

“Not very.” I said, squirming in my seat.

“Want to get out of here?”

Before I had a chance to answer, a young woman wearing a pale yellow apron over her jeans and T-shirt stopped beside our table. “Good evening, what can I get you to drink tonight?”

“We’re not staying. Thanks anyway.” With that Josiah stood and helped me from my chair.

“Hey, wait a minute,” Lara grabbed my arm.

“Yes?”

“What’s going on with you two?”

Josiah smiled and looked at me. I grinned back and nodded before he said, “You’ve been telling me for months that you thought we’d be perfect for each other. We’re going to go find a room with a bed, a locked door and thick walls to see just how perfect.”

Lara looked me in the eye. “Did you buy the things we discussed?”

I smiled and nodded. “Yes, Mom. I’ve got lots of protection.”

“Me, too.” Josiah said with a wicked grin. “Between us we should have enough to get through at least the next day or two.”

Laughing at our private joke, we linked hands and headed out. We had a

room to find with a big bed, a door that locked and thick walls.

The End

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Author Bio

Cooper McKenzie always thought she had been born a hundred years too late, but has come to appreciate air conditioning, computers and other conveniences of modern day living. She enjoys the slower pace of New Bern, North Carolina as well as the history and small town community found there. In addition to dreaming up her next story, Cooper enjoys reading everything from children's books to vampire romance, singing in her church choir and needle-weaving. She loves to hear from her readers at coopermckenzie@ymail.com

As Cooper McKenzie:

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Love Bite -Vamping With Jayne Series: Book 2

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