

ELLORA'S CAVE

Blush

THE NEXT
BIG THING

Madelle Morgan

SCINTILLATING
SAMPLES

The Next Big Thing

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When Harry the inventor shows up at her bank to apply for a loan, Angela is not impressed by his lack of business plan or collateral. So Harry introduces her to his own brand of marketing by having her try the product herself—the only bra in the world that’s more fun to put on than take off.

The bank might not buy Harry’s idea, but the “support” he has given Angela convinces her to boost his business in return, and they team up to raise enough funds to make Harry’s dream take off. Angela and Harry give each other such a rise that it’s love or bust for the bra-ntrepreneurs as they realize they make a great pair.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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The Next Big Thing

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Edited by Meghan M. Conrad

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication May 2010

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Chapter One

Gerry Radcliffe knocked on the glass panel beside the open door. “Angela, do you have time to meet with a new client?”

Angela Easton, a junior loan officer at Frederick Financial Services and the only woman, peered at him over her new glasses and stifled a sigh. The other loan officers tended to snag the best prospects from walk-in traffic, leaving her the dirty work of denying loans to poor risks.

“I have time right now,” she admitted. As Gerry well knew. Her client base was miniscule.

“Only a woman can properly assess what this guy is proposing,” Gerry added. His lip muscles twitched, contorted and settled into a pursed arrangement that seemed to be trying to contain laughter. He tried once to speak, choked, thumped his chest and then finally spit out, “I’ll bring him right in.”

She glared at him. “This better not be one of your practical jokes!”

“I swear it is not.” Gerry held up three fingers in the scout salute.

Angela had desperately hoped the ribbing phase was over. She was a professional with a business degree, dammit, and was as qualified as the three male loan officers who treated her like their clueless younger sister. She tugged her blazer closed and buttoned it. Even a new conservative wardrobe, granny glasses and short haircut in an attempt to look older than her twenty-two years hadn’t curbed their teasing.

The tall, slim man Gerry escorted into her small office a few minutes later was younger than she expected, definitely under thirty, with broad shoulders that strained the fabric of his outdated navy blue suit. She rose to shake his hand, noting his curly hair needed a trim, but that he otherwise seemed perfectly respectable.

Not handsome, she decided, yet his grip was firm and his bold assessment of her warned that it wouldn't be easy to turn him down for a loan. He'd be persistent.

"This is Dr. Harry Richards," Gerry said, mouth a-twitch, before backing out of her office. "He's an inventor," he added before the door snicked closed.

Her radar on full alert, she invited the potential client to sit. "How can I help you?"

"I'm a biomechanical engineer with Medi-Technologies Incorporated," he began, earnest dark blue eyes fixed on hers. "We design and manufacture prosthetics, including robotic limbs, pacemakers, hearing aids, implants and many similar mechanical devices."

She knew of the firm. Its stock was doing very well, making it highly unlikely that such a prosperous company would be approaching Frederick Financial, and her in particular, for a loan. She nodded for him to continue.

"I have acquired a patent for a particular device—"

"But surely your employer owns the patent."

He nodded. "Although I developed this device on my own time, I am obligated as an employee to offer the company the opportunity to patent the idea and commercialize the device. However, they are not interested and signed over the rights to me. I patented it under my own name."

"However," she intuited, "you have no money to develop it into a marketable product."

"Correct. I tried to find investors but have had no luck. So here I am." He shrugged those broad shoulders and smiled, but it was not a pleasant smile. She detected frustration. An unwillingness to give up. Perhaps some bitterness.

"Can you describe this invention?"

"Better than that, I can show you." He reached into the inside pocket of his suit jacket, pulled out a very familiar feminine undergarment and laid it on her desk.

"A bra?" She surged to her feet. Those guys... She'd kill them.

"It's not what you think." He held it up by the straps. "It's much more than a bra. I call it the Nipple Stimulation Unit, or NipStim for short. Feel the cup."

It appeared to be a plain white padded bra. When she rolled her eyes, he added a heartfelt, "Please."

He'd seemed so darn normal. Still, every crackpot at least deserved a hearing before she kicked him out of her office. She reached across and gripped a padded section between a thumb and forefinger.

"There's metal inside." She snagged the bra and settled into her chair to examine the bra more closely.

"That's the massaging unit. A certain percentage of women can achieve orgasm simply through manual stimulation of their nipples."

"Is that so?" She felt a flush stain her cheeks. Not that she'd reveal this in a billion years, but she herself had *extremely* sensitive nipples. To her chagrin, this inventor's hands-free massage concept intrigued her sex-starved alter ego. She wiped a sweaty palm on her sensible wool slacks. The guys were going to give her a *really* hard time and the longer Dr. Richards stayed in her office, the more persistent and probing the teasing would be.

Recklessly, she plowed deeper into forbidden territory. "And how do you know stimulation has this effect on certain women? Research?"

"Indeed." Dr. Richards didn't blink, didn't smile. He presented it as merely a statement of fact, implying he'd performed said research in his lab coat, taking notes. Or perhaps he recorded the "experiments" on video.

To her supreme discomfort, an image flashed. Dr. Richards sitting cross-legged in front of his topless subject, camera light on, as he massaged taut, budded nipples with long, slender fingers... Oh gawd. She wiggled her butt deeper into the chair to ease burgeoning tension between her thighs.

"How does it work?"

He pointed to the silver button between the cups. She pushed it and the thick fabric over the tips of the cups began to pulse and move. Her eyes widened. She drew one finger across the inside of the cup. Swallowed. A question escaped from her suddenly dry throat. "What about lubrication?"

"I thought of that." He tossed his head, as proud of himself as if he'd invented the telephone. "The fabric on the interior of the cups is moisture-proof. When you press the button and hold, lotion squirts out of a little pouch on each side."

She began to comply with the instruction then dropped her hand. She'd begun to take this nut seriously.

Gerry wandered by the glass panel and nonchalantly paused to straighten his tie, obviously a deliberate ploy to catch a glimpse of the interview. And the bra on the desk between them. *Quite the prank, Gerry*, she steamed inwardly, well aware she could not allow this to drag on any longer—for the inventor's sake as well as her own.

"Dr. Richards," she said in her most controlled, professional tone. "In order to receive a loan, and we are talking here of a minimum of several hundred thousand dollars if not seven figures, you'll need a business plan, manufacturing capacity, distributors and significant evidence that there is a market for this product. I can't see you taking this on without other investment partners."

She took a breath, stood and avoided his gaze, firm in her resolve but not wanting to see disappointment crush the poor guy. "Frederick Financial Services requires collateral. And furthermore, because this is likely your first entrepreneurial venture, the probability that you will succeed is low. I'm sorry, we do not provide high-risk loans."

"Try it."

"Pardon me?"

The flat rejection hadn't fazed him in the slightest. Those intelligent eyes regarded her steadily. To her dismay, he made no move to leave. Instead, he'd suggested that she attach the contraption, make it squirt lotion and then have the mechanical fingers massage... She shivered. To even entertain the idea was extremely unsuitable for a

professional in her position. Which made it extremely unfortunate that the offer totally turned her on.

He extended a long arm and pushed the bra towards her. "Take this home and try it."

She wavered, calculating the odds she'd get away with this without Gerry and his pals finding out. "What if it doesn't fit?"

"It's a 36B, which, if I am not mistaken, is your size."

Bang on. Heat flooded her cheeks. He'd obviously checked out her breasts. "What are you, some kind of breast expert?" she mumbled, not looking at him, not sure where to look. The only thing that kept her from fleeing this embarrassing situation was the itch to get that bra home to the privacy of her bedroom.

He quirked a brow, tipped his head to the side, thoughtful. "You could call me an expert, I suppose. I had to model hundreds of breast sizes and nipple configurations to make a prototype that would fit the average woman."

Her chin shot up. "Average?" Most of her friends were amply endowed either by nature or by surgical intervention. In her world, average was not a good thing.

"The average woman who hasn't had a child," he amended to soothe her ego. Those penetrating eyes didn't miss a thing. "You see, a lactating woman's breasts—"

Gerry strolled by her office yet again, coffee cup in hand. He'd give up his parking space for the opportunity to overhear their conversation, she had no doubt.

"Enough," she gasped, her skin so hot with discomfiting arousal that she'd ignite any second. "I'll try it if you'll just leave. Leave *now!*" She swept the bra into the top drawer of her desk.

Dr. Richards flipped a business card from his wallet onto the desk. "Give me a call on my cell phone after the test. I'll be at home this weekend."

To her great relief, he stood. Her eyes narrowed. What was his game plan? Sure, she'd try the bra for curiosity's sake, but that didn't mean he'd get the financing.

“It’s a test, not a commitment,” she flung at him as he walked to the door. “I turned you down for a loan, remember.”

“You turned me down for the loan, Ms. Easton, but you did agree to test the NipStim unit.” A knowing smile transformed his features—the first sign that a red-blooded male existed under the impersonal scientist façade. “You will not be disappointed.” He winked over one shoulder as he let himself out.

* * * * *

At six that evening, Angela elbowed open the door to her studio apartment and slung her heavy purse and a paper bag of fragrant Chinese takeout onto the tiny kitchen counter. After turning the deadbolt and attaching the chain, her gaze swung from the purse to the food. It made sense to eat first.

She grabbed the purse. Heck, what did she have a microwave for if not to reheat? In four seconds she’d closed the drapes, stripped off her blazer, blouse and bra, and tossed the clothing on the two stools at the counter that served as her dining table.

She stood in front of the foyer mirror, twisting left and right. The bra fit perfectly, just as the inventor predicted. Except for the metal button between the cups, it appeared to be a regular padded bra.

As one finger tentatively lifted to push that button, caution kicked in. What if the mechanism gripped her boobs in a vice and wouldn’t release? Calling Dr. Richards to rescue her was out of the question. Even if he’d studied a *thousand* breasts in the name of research, she didn’t want *hers* added to his list. That left paramedics and 9-1-1. She dug out her cell phone, made sure it was on and propped it on the counter. For good measure she dragged the portable fire extinguisher from under the sink and set it on the counter.

Okay. Deep breath. Finger positioned. Now.

A circular plate inside each cup curved over the tips of her breasts, gently squeezed and began to rotate one way and then the other, back and forth like the agitator in a

washing machine. The material rubbed a little, but not in a good way. Her bottom lip pushed out.

Oh wait. She'd forgotten the lotion.

Two squirts and a couple of agitations later had her reaching to grip the edge of the counter. Slippery sensation jangled from her nipples to her toes, with a pit stop in her private parts. Her knees weakened. She staggered to the armchair near the window and collapsed backward as the mechanical cups worked their rhythmic magic. Nerves throbbed in time with the pulses. She ached down there. She —

Her chin tipped toward the ceiling. Oh heaven help her...

Exquisite release came in a glorious, effervescent, sparkly wallop.

She puffed out a long breath and pressed the button once to switch the unit off. Dr. Richards was a genius after all. The king of mechanical sex devices. Who knew?

A horrible thought occurred to her. He'd loaned the contraption for test purposes and he'd want it back. Her fingers closed protectively over the cups. No way. He'd have to rip it off.

She'd buy it. How much would he take for it? Hell, she'd buy one for every day of the week.

She gasped, both palms flying to clasp heated cheeks. If *she'd* buy the NipStim bra, so would other women. Thousands, maybe millions of women. Women from eighteen to eighty years old, all around the world.

The market was huge.

But conservative, risk-adverse Frederick Financial would never invest in an erotic apparatus. Dr. Richards didn't have any collateral. All the reasons she'd given the inventor still stood in the way of financing the manufacture of this very special piece of intimate apparel. Dr. Richards absolutely had to find a way to put it in stores, and she had to help him. She owed it to womankind.

With a groan, Angela pushed herself upright and staggered to the counter to retrieve the cell phone.

* * * * *

"I think I broke it," Angela whispered as she pushed a paper bag containing his bra across the coffee house table the next afternoon. "It stopped working."

Dr. Richards didn't seem worried. "How many times did you use it?"

Angela bit her lip. "Once or twice?"

His eyes twinkled. "The battery is drained after about a dozen uses."

Busted. Heat crept up her neck. Well, what else does a single girl have to do alone on a Friday night? "Battery? Where the heck is it?" It appeared to be a normal bra in every respect, save for the oh-so-special mechanism hidden inside the cups, of course.

"The underwire is thicker than normal and is actually a battery. That's another of my patents," he said smugly.

The inventor wasn't exactly a humble genius. "How does the battery get recharged?"

"There's a port for the power cord hidden in the fabric band."

She twirled the stir stick in her coffee. "How long does it take to recharge, Dr. Richards?" she asked as if it didn't matter.

He laughed and shook his head. "Call me Harry."

"Dr. Harry," she amended, complying to a point, intimidated by the huge brain under his mop of curls and embarrassed because her questions surely indicated she was a nymphomaniac. But she had to know. "I'm serious. Please explain."

"The batteries, of which there are two, recharge overnight. I'm hoping to adapt a fuel cell technology that is under development. But the technical barriers include..."

He proceeded to rattle on at length while she sipped her cooling coffee and watched his expression. He gestured wildly and expounded in absolutely incomprehensible

language for several minutes. The man had it bad for mechanical doodads and alternative fuels and micro-sized widgeits. The mashup of mechanic-engineer-physics professor lingo flapped over her head at cloud level.

She wondered if Dr. Harry had a girlfriend, and if she'd tested the bra. For a nerd, he had potential. Hmm. Tight butt, bulging muscles under the short sleeves of his white polo shirt, flat gut, even features, killer lopsided smile. She gave him a seven point five on the Easton Hotness Scale. With the right clothes, a nine.

His hotness, however, was immaterial to the situation. She'd adopted her hard-nosed grandfather's cardinal rule: keep business separate from emotional attachments. Or, more plainly, as she'd overheard Grandpa growl to her father while sucking on an after-dinner cigar, "Money and sex don't mix."

The brainiac inventor had potential as a partner, she decided, but sadly not in bed. Not in her bed, anyway.

When Dr. Harry began talking money, her ears perked up. Money, she understood—making money, investing money, spending money, loaning money at a profit. The maternal side of Angela's family was wealthy. She hadn't touched her trust fund, having decided to live off employment income and allow the interest to compound while awaiting the right opportunity to build or buy a business. More important than that nest egg, Angela had inherited the bloodlines and the bloodhound nose for generating a high return.

She smothered a grin of anticipation. Dr. Harry was about to discover that she, young, wet-behind-the-ears junior loan officer Angela Easton, had access to money. Pot of gold at the end of the rainbow masses of it.

And not from Frederic Financial Services.

* * * * *

Harry knew he babbled but couldn't do a damn thing about it. He ran a hand through his hair, out of his element, unsure how to shape the pitch.

The blonde woman perched on a wooden chair across from him surreptitiously shifted her gaze from his face to her polished pink nails, to the wall clock, to the door. But still she hung in there, listening to him try to convince her of the world-class status of the NipStim bra technology. The value of his patents. The design intricacies of the mechanism. She nodded politely, sipped her coffee, smiled vaguely.

His hands clenched into fists under the table, aware he was striking out big time. This uptown girl in her cowboy boots, butt-hugging jeans and tight sweater that defined perky mounds didn't care about the technical details. She blinked deceptively innocent blue eyes as she pretended to be interested, but he recognized the abstraction signaling that her mind clickety-clacked in some internal calculation.

He tried to engage her attention by speaking her language—costs, profit margin and potential return on investment—but every time his eyes dropped to her chest his train of thought ran onto a siding. He was a breast man, admittedly. The research on his own time to develop the NipStim unit had been a labor of love—of breasts—but the bra had sales potential.

What had he hoped to gain from loaning the bra to Angela Easton after she denied the loan? Testosterone had overridden brain function. The young, pretty blonde was in the perfect demographic to appreciate his invention. And if it wasn't possible for him to massage those handfuls of firm round boobs, there had been some twisted satisfaction that his bra would do it for him. Had done it last night. Several times.

He swallowed, thankful the table hid his erection. He hadn't been so turned on by a woman since his infatuation with Rachel on the TV show *Friends*. Grad school for him had meant long hours in a lab rather than hours in bed with a girlfriend. Ditto his job at Medi-Tech and after-hours research on the NipStim device. Beautiful women didn't bother to compete with an engineer's passion for his latest project. He was due, long overdue, for a relationship but, to his deep regret, Ms. Angela's body language expressed no sexual interest.

As Harry talked himself out of hitting on her and the sexual fog clouding his brain lifted, he sensed a gentle pulsing of the air around Angela. It was as if an internal piston pumped up pressure and caused her exterior to vibrate. It dawned on him that she had something to tell him and could barely contain herself.

He paused in mid-sentence. "Angela?"

She smiled, likely in relief that he'd finished his spiel. "You've convinced me, you know. In fact, the demo made the sale. But the name NipStim doesn't quite hit the marketing button. We need something more descriptive. I was thinking The O-Bra."

"We?" He'd missed something.

She extended her hand across the table. "Partners?"

"You said Frederic Financial turned me down."

"I didn't! I want to see your marketing plan."

When his expression betrayed his confusion, she slapped her hand on the table between them. "I have a business degree with a major in marketing. You have the invention."

"What about the financing?"

She waved one pink-tipped hand in the air to signal it wasn't an issue. "Members of my family and their social circle have oceans of capital invested in boring bonds and real estate. Not one would blink at a commitment of twenty-five grand each."

"You're saying your relatives are angel investors?" The term referred to people willing to invest in risky start-up companies in return for an ownership share. They gambled that the start-up would beat the one in ten or worse odds of success and ultimately become profitable.

"Well, they're not *exactly* angels, in any sense of the word." Angela laughed. "They're all rather old-money conservative and will need to be...persuaded. What I need from you are fifty O-Bras sized to fit my aunts, female cousins and their country club friends. A demo in the privacy of their bedroom suites will do the rest."

He shook his head, not ready to believe his dream was in reach. Her approach to collecting upwards of half a million in cold cash seemed too good to be true. "What do you want in return?"

"We'll hire an accountant to work out a share offering. For assembling the financing and investing some of my inheritance, I'll want twenty-five percent of the company. You keep control with fifty-one percent. We sell off the rest." She waved a hand in the air. "Relax. We'll work out the details later."

Excitement built in his gut. It might work. What did he have to lose, as long as he maintained control of the company they formed? He half rose.

"I could kiss you!"

Angela giggled. "Save it for my Aunt Grace. She's a sucker for a handsome man." She tapped a finger to a full bottom lip. "We'll need to buy some clothes, dress you in Armani. They'll love you!"

The brush-off. He got that. Still, he'd be working closely with Angela over the next few months. And inventors weren't quitters.

This time when she extended her hand, he grasped it and shook. Hard.

Chapter Two

Angela pushed open the country club kitchen door and walked in on bustling chaos. The caterer's three wait staff, muscled college football players in impeccable black and white, assembled trays with an hors d'oeuvres selection of smoked salmon, brie, stuffed mushrooms and caviar. A barman and his helper had a short assembly line going to fill champagne flutes. Fifty personalized gift bags, each containing an O-Bra and an investment prospectus, were stacked on a trolley in the corner.

Angela blinked to moisturize her contact lenses. She'd ditched her dowdy professional disguise for tonight's cocktail-hour reception in order to fit in with the affluent guests. A manicure, dyed eyelashes, hair highlights, professional makeup and new stilettos had cost a small fortune.

The low-cut black silk dress barely contained her boobs, but Harry insisted flagrant exposure was important to the reception's marketing pitch. "Show them off tonight," Harry had requested that afternoon in the small office they'd rented after she quit her job to become CEO of their company. "They're the point of the whole evening."

Over the previous two months she and Harry had researched, planned and heatedly debated every detail of the strategy to bring the O-Bra to market, gaining respect for each other's intelligence and areas of expertise. On the subject of breasts, she unreservedly deferred to the expert.

Angela slipped away to the intimate drawing room. A wood fire crackled in the stone fireplace, candles flickered in diamond-faceted glass bowls on round tables laden with several copies of the investment prospectus, and fresh-cut flowers everywhere set a romantic stage for the pitch she and Harry had rehearsed.

Cool hands rested lightly on her shoulders. She swiveled to find her nose inches from Harry's black bow tie. She sniffed the exorbitantly expensive aftershave she'd chosen for him. "You smell yummy."

"You look beautiful." His eyes briefly flashed desire before he covered with a lecherous grin.

To her annoyance, her knees weakened. Mentally, emotionally, she had no intention of ruining a really great business relationship with casual sex and inevitably a double breakup, personal and professional. Her track record with boyfriends was less than stellar. None had ever lasted more than six months. A lot rode on this investment of her time, money and energy. Her priority had to be to pour every scrap of passion and energy she possessed into the business and ensure the partnership with Harry survived for the long term. No side trip down dead-end Relationship Road for her.

Too bad her body refused to obey her brain. Harry, the conniving geek, amused himself with a surreptitious seduction game. He touched her at every opportunity—a casual warm hand on her lower back, a muscular arm thrown over her shoulder, a finger wiping away pizza sauce from the corner of her mouth as they labored over paperwork late into the night. It drove her achy mad, especially when he pretended the touching was perfectly innocent. As a result, her personal O-Bra received a regular workout. She called it her contribution to product durability testing.

Angela pulled away. "My sister Sophia and cousin Lucy have arrived. We're on."

Harry adjusted his tie. "You make it sound like an entertainment," he grumbled. "Raising money is serious business. The fate of our company rides on tonight."

She raised a brow, swept an arm at their firelit reflections in dark, floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the pond at the eighteenth hole. Smooth jazz cascaded from ceiling speakers. "We've set the stage. We've hired extras, also known as waiters. We've rehearsed our parts. All the world's a stage, my friend." She slapped him on the butt. Payback. "Relax. Enjoy being surrounded by rich, beautiful women for one night in your life."

Two hours later Angela bitterly regretted those encouraging words. He'd taken them as an order. Dr. Harry, all six feet of him in his deliciously fitted rented tux, his smooth trick of touching and focusing his attention on each woman as if they were alone in the room, and his sexy techno-speak explanations of the O-Bra functions practically charmed the lace thongs off their guests. She'd had to break-up a champagne-fueled tussle in the women's washroom over who had first dibs on taking him home that night. What was he, a gigolo, for heaven's sake?

Eight p.m. couldn't come soon enough, she thought grimly. Many of the guests had tickets to the theater and the rest no doubt had made dinner reservations. A line of Mercedes-Benz, BMWs, Porsches and Cadillacs filled with husbands and boyfriends already idled in the curved driveway.

She rolled the trolley loaded with gift bags into the entrance foyer, directing one of the waiters to ask for the name of each departing guest and then distribute the appropriate beribboned, tagged bag.

Meanwhile she returned to circulate among the women who'd comprised her social set before she'd been hired by Frederic Financial after college.

As Angela moved between conversation clusters, her sister tagged her arm. Slim, elegant in a knee-length silver sheath and matching Jimmy Choos, Sophia motioned her over to a quiet corner beyond the fireplace where their cousin waited.

Lucy, the daughter of a Venezuelan oil-company executive, tipped a champagne flute in her direction. "Nice party, Angie."

Angela narrowed her eyes. "You didn't get me over here to compliment me. Gorgeous dress, by the way. Where did you—"

"Paris." Lucy skimmed a hand over the flame-gold brocade covering one curvy hip. In the designer dress, her caramel skin glowed like burnished gold. Mischievous and flirty, Lucy was a devil with double Ds—38Ds, to be precise. Sophia and Lucy had been college roommates, cementing an incongruous friendship as students and then socialites.

Tonight Sophia had something on her mind other than clothes. "Are you respecting your code, Angie, and refusing to mix business with pleasure?" She flipped long, straight black hair over one shoulder in Harry's direction.

Angela glared at one, then the other. "You're dating Tex and Chad," she accused.

Sophia wagged her brows. "For now."

It was true. The two women went through boyfriends like tissues. Angie casually swiveled to follow their gaze. Over beside the bar, Harry preened in the midst of a gaggle of women. He was loving this.

"You want him?" Lucy's careless query did not disguise her interest. "I've never dated an inventor." She winked at Sophia. "Yet."

"I should have invited the men," Angela murmured under her breath. To her sister she said, "What about you? Don't tell me you already gave him your phone number."

Sophia laughed. "Darling, I watched half the room slip their cards into his pocket, including a few cougars over forty."

"Including your card?" she persisted.

Sophia tilted her dark head meaningfully at Lucy. "He's a breast man."

"Right." They stared at each other glumly, on the same page for once. Neither sister could compete with Lucy in that department.

"We're screwed," Sophia commiserated. "Or in this case, not likely to be screwed."

Angela lifted her chin. "It's a free country. The man can make his own decisions."

"So you're not interested in Harry." Lucy never poached another woman's man. That was *her* personal code and, to her credit, she maintained it despite tempting invitations. She refused any man who'd cheat to be with her.

"We're business partners, nothing more." It was the truth, but Angela hadn't expected to deeply regret the statement. At a vision of Harry entwined with Lucy, green ice stiffened her veins. Logic dictated that if it weren't Lucy it'd be another voluptuous woman in his arms. But logic flew out the window when it came to love.

Love.

Oh, dammit. She'd fallen for Dr. Harry without even realizing it. Glad for the low light that hid her shock, understanding flashed that while she and Harry built the company, they'd been building a solid friendship. Contrary to her prior intense-but-shallow relationships, she and Harry had come to appreciate each other's personalities, strengths and character without emotional complications. The touching hadn't meant anything. Tonight proved he indiscriminately touched every woman.

"Angie, are you all right?" Sophia wrapped an arm around her waist.

"I just realized I have no chance with him," she breathed low into her sister's ear. Tears threatened to float the contacts and wash them down her cheeks.

"Oh, baby." Sophia gave her a squeeze.

Angela straightened. She'd made it crystal clear to Harry that she wasn't interested in a sexual relationship. Then, to her chagrin, she'd inadvertently set him up with a smorgasbord of gorgeous women, in effect playing matchmaker.

Worst case scenario, she'd be trapped in a close business partnership with Harry, pathetically lovesick while he dated her very own cousin and fell in lust like dozens of smart young men before him. With Lucy's incredible figure, how could he not?

* * * * *

Harry stripped off his black jacket and hung it on the back of a chair in the coffee shop on the ground floor of his apartment building. Until they'd rented office space, the coffee shop had served as their meeting place. Harry implied he didn't have time to make his apartment presentable and Angela's studio apartment was too cramped.

"How do you think the evening went?" he asked, an anxious frown creasing his brow, oblivious that he'd been the star of the show.

Under normal circumstances his naiveté would be sweet, but this unforeseen popularity with her friends dampened any elation Angela felt regarding the success of the evening. "Really great," she replied without the requisite enthusiasm.

“Do you think they’ll try the O-Bra tonight?”

“Saturday night is date night. Maybe tomorrow.” Angela wrapped cold fingers around a latte. “As soon as one woman tries the bra, the three Ts—Twitter, texting and the telephone—will do the rest. Thanks to the buzz, people will be begging us to let them in on this opportunity to double or triple the value of their initial investments.”

The chair scraped back and Harry sat, faced her squarely, and grinned. “Thank you.”

“For what, introducing you to all those wealthy women?” She focused on the foam in her cup, grumpy as all hell. “Apparently several gave you their cell numbers.”

“Wasn’t that the idea? They want to follow up on the investment opportunity.”

She shook her head. The brainiac still had a few things to learn “I’m quite sure they do want to follow up, but not regarding an investment.”

He shook his head, confused. “What other reason could there be? Some of those numbers belong to women old enough to be my mother. Your Aunt Grace, for example.”

“Gross.” She shuddered at the image of her spa-slicked aunt at art shows and the theater on the arm of a man half her age. “Aunt Grace is recently separated.”

“You mean—”

“They’re hot for you, Harry.” She paused, aware she needed her head examined for fulfilling Lucy’s request to find out if Harry might consider a date. “My cousin Lucy asked if you were available.”

“Which one was she again?”

“38D.”

He flushed. “Right. Now I remember.”

“You would,” she sulked.

Harry pushed back his chair and rose. "Come with me. I have something in my apartment to show you." He draped his jacket over her shivering bare shoulders and grabbed her hand to pull her out of the shop.

Up the elevator and inside the triple-locked door, Harry tapped a wall switch to illuminate table lamps at either end of a black leather sofa. He headed to the galley kitchen. "Have a seat. Would you like a glass of chardonnay?"

"Sure." Ignoring his suggestion to sit, Angela crossed thick carpet to large windows bare of any covering. Unlike her place, the view from Harry's twentieth-floor apartment offered a kaleidoscope of colored and moving urban light from windows, headlights, traffic signals and signage.

Curiosity pulled her away to peruse the living area. Opposite the sofa, a large flat screen hung above the fireplace mantle. On either side, floor-to-ceiling shelves sagged with thick books.

The coffee table subbed as a work surface. He'd left his laptop on with the screensaver active. The familiar image on the screen made her breath catch. Her photo, blonde head cocked to the side in the coffee shop downstairs, laughed up at her. Vaguely she recalled Harry fooling with the camera feature on his cell phone late one afternoon.

She retreated, confused, until the fireplace mantle dug into her back. A used paper coffee cup perched on the surface beside a collection of remote controls and a glass innovation award from Medi-Technologies Inc.

She picked up the cup. "Why didn't you want us to meet in your apartment? Other than this cup, your place is immaculate," she said when he returned from the kitchen with two wineglasses.

"Don't crush it," he implored.

"Why not?"

"It's a souvenir of our first coffee together."

“Pardon me?”

“The rim is coated with your DNA.” He set the glasses down on the coffee table, slid the paper cup from her grasp and carefully positioned it beside his award.

Crush. Two and two made four. “You have a *crush* on me?”

“More than a crush.” The small pools of light from the lamps left his face in shadow. “The other women don’t have a chance, Angela. That is what I brought you here to say.”

“But you’re a breast man and I’m not –”

“When it comes to breasts, size doesn’t matter.”

“Really?”

“Truly.” He grinned at her incredulous expression. “May I kiss you now?”

She plastered a palm against his shirt. “The DNA thing. Is that for real?”

“Every cell of you is priceless to me,” he confirmed, solemn.

“You geek.” Still, the affirmation warmed her insides, quelling the fear that other women posed a threat.

“The DNA aspect is stretching it. A little,” he conceded in a light tone.

A heartbeat later he placed a finger on her lips, instantly serious. “Don’t say a word. I don’t need a response. But the truth is that I did keep the cup as a memento of the day I fell madly in love.”

Her mouth fell open.

He bent to press real, warm, firm, demanding lips to hers. As sensation slithered from lips to core, her arms crawled around his waist, clutched his back. His palm curled around her silk-covered left breast, making its acquaintance slowly, reverently. The tip of his thumb trailed lightly over the exposed curve, sensitizing her skin.

Time stopped. Bathed in an intoxicating torrent of relief, pleasure, desperate physical desire and excitement, Angela couldn’t recall any logical justification for denying them both this bliss. He loved her!

Eons later Harry lifted his head, levered his thumbs under her jaw to tip her face up to meet his gaze. "I waited patiently until you were ready." He hesitated. "You're absolutely sure you want this? You have that rule about not mixing business with sex."

Notwithstanding the mutual fervor driving them to make love, she realized her rule made no sense. Not when their joint business was all about giving pleasure to her and to millions of other women. She nodded. "Let's take this partnership to the next level."

He slid an arm under her knees, swept her up into his arms and carried her into the bedroom, elbowing another wall switch on the way.

The beauty of the scene that met Angela snatched her breath. Twinkling fairy lights blanketed the walls and ceiling around the white-shrouded bed, creating an ethereal space suspended between heaven and earth.

"LEDs," Harry explained as he gently lowered her onto the white down-feather comforter. "Light-emitting diodes. They consume a fraction of the energy of regular lights."

She rolled her eyes. "Shut up and kiss me." Grasping the crisp shirt fabric hovering within reach, she pulled him flat over her supine and oh-so-primed body. "I need you."

"I need you more." His primitive growl stirred her center's caldron of swirling sensation to a boil. "Don't move."

With the methodical precision she'd grown to expect from him, Harry shrugged out of his shirt, unzipped his pants, unbuckled his belt, removed his shoes and socks, and extracted a condom from the night table drawer while Angela watched, amused.

Then it was her turn. He stripped her slowly, reverently, and was gratifyingly appreciative of what the lace bra, panties and silk stockings concealed.

She felt cherished. Loved. His tongue tasted her nipples separately, lovingly, only speaking once before he entered her. "No O-Bra when we're together. These beauties are all mine."

She clutched the rails of his iron headboard as he took her, deeper, harder, higher. The lights blurred into an exultant, brilliant flare. She soared.

Toward three a.m. they lay spread-eagled on the bed, flat-out exhausted.

"Where did you learn those techniques?" Angela summoned the energy to ask.

"One doesn't invent a sexual stimulation device without doing masses of research. I studied the ancient Kama Sutra text and every sex manual published since."

"Research is good," she breathed.

"Practice is better." He reached for her.

"I forgot to ask how you feel about mixing business with pleasure."

A warm hand cupped her left boob. "I've invented a new rule for our partnership. Pleasure before business. Always."

"I love you." She'd expressed it a dozen ways that long night so may as well make it official.

"I know."

There was that know-it-all smugness again. "You're infuriating."

"You're going to make me a millionaire."

She rose up on her elbows. "You wanted me for the money?"

"I fell for you before we became partners," he reminded her. "Besides, we're a team. We've got each other and the next big thing."

The O-Bra might make their fortunes or it might not, but one irrefutable emotion connected them heart to heart, soul to soul. She snuggled close. "Darling man, we've already struck it rich."

The End

About the Author

Madelle experienced the romance of the north firsthand as an adventurous young construction engineer in Canada's Arctic back in the '80s. She "mined" those experiences for her debut novel, *Diamond Lust*.

By the age of 10, Madelle simply knew her destiny was to be a writer, but the time crunch associated with engineering studies, work and a baby boy buried that goal for a couple decades. Eventually she joined RWA, completed four manuscripts, and won or placed in several contests prior to publication. Thanks to a first-place win in the 2000 Launching a Star contest, there's a star in a remote sector of outer space named after her! To a lifelong Trekkie, that is so incredibly cool...

When not at her day job as a senior engineer and manager with the federal public service or in her home office writing, Madelle hangs out with her husband David and three cats and looks wistfully at an ever-growing pile of to-be-read books.

Madelle welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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Diamond Lust



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