



SAMHAIN

TWO STEP
TEMPTATION

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EMMA JAY

They have a history. A future may be more than she's willing to give.

Haven Reynolds is stunned when her ex-lover Eric Viera turns up at their mutual friends' wedding. Her sources told her he was safely a continent away, doing his anthropology thing. Instead she's scrambling to figure out how to fend off his particularly potent brand of charm.

At least, that's what she tells herself.

Several months in a Costa Rican jungle hasn't dulled Eric's memory of the two weeks he spent with the sexy spitfire. He'd even enjoyed the challenge of breaking through her walls—the warm, passionate woman he'd uncovered had been worth the effort. He'd like nothing better than to pick up where they left off, except those walls are back in place, stronger than ever.

Much to Haven's dismay, Eric takes her in his arms for a rehearsal-dinner dance. In a split second, it all comes back—the memories, the lust and laughter, the intimacy and control she's never allowed any other man. Falling for him again is out of the question, but a weekend of hot sex is an indulgence she can't resist.

Except Eric hasn't come back to Texas just for the wedding. He's come for her.

Warning: Contains a sassy heroine, sizzlin' hero, toe-stomping two-stepping and secret encounters.

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Two Step Temptation

Emma Jay

Dedication

To Anne Scott and her infinite patience and skill at finding the diamond in the rough.

Chapter One

Haven Reynolds came to a complete stop at the bottom of the stone stairs of the Texas Hill Country Inn the wedding party had reserved for the weekend. Her blood froze. Oh, hell no. Eric Viera stood at the check-in desk across the limestone-walled lobby from her, his pose casual, his black leather duffel at his feet, charming the clerk as she handed him a room card with a coy smile.

No one had thought he'd make it, though he was still listed as a groomsman. She'd checked a dozen times, as discreetly as she could. Every one of her sources was certain that he would miss the wedding because he was out of town, in a faraway jungle studying some culture or another.

If she'd thought there was a sliver of a possibility he'd be here, she'd never have come downstairs like this, just out of bed in yoga pants and a hoodie, hair pinned up, no makeup, and desperate for coffee. No, the first time he saw her again, she was supposed to be wearing an incredible red dress and heels, be ten pounds slimmer. He'd drool in his soup.

Just like the first time they'd met, at Jared and Christine's engagement party.

Sex on legs, that was Eric Viera. The night of the celebration, she had been captivated by him—long, lean, close-cropped brown hair, sexy little goatee, fuck-me blue eyes. Her heart had pounded when he'd focused on her and asked her to dance. That had led to the most delicious night of sex in her life, the first night of a two-week-long affair that had spoiled her for other men for eight months.

Eight long months.

She'd thought she'd been worldly enough to accept a no-strings affair, and if it had only been that night, maybe she could have. But one night had morphed into a week, and a week into two before he left for Costa Rica. He'd slipped past all her carefully erected guards, without knowing it—because she hadn't allowed him to know it—and she'd spent the next few months nursing a broken heart and rebuilding the walls.

Shaking off the memory of his body against hers, his magical mouth, his clever fingers, she pivoted to head up the stairs before he could see her. His oh-my-God sexy voice rumbled across the limestone foyer as he thanked the clerk.

Please don't see me. Please don't see me. If she had to deal with him at this wedding, she'd do it on her terms, dressed to advantage, made-up, caffeinated, all her shields in place. Not surprised by him in the foyer.

"Haven?"

Shit. Shit. The option was to continue upstairs and not acknowledge him, at least until later when she was in a position of control. But running away was cowardly. So she stopped, curling her fingers around the banister as she gathered her nerve, pasted on a smile and turned. God help her, he looked even better than he had last summer. Her knees—and resolve—weakened a little.

“Hey, Eric. I didn’t think you were going to make it.” Thank goodness her voice was perfectly modulated, unlike her body, which was ready to go all traitor on her.

He hoisted his garment bag over his shoulder as he approached the stairs to stand below her. Okay, this kind of gave her the upper hand. She willed herself not to grip the banister so tightly that her knuckles whitened. Still, she couldn’t ignore how good he looked, his brown hair cut close to his scalp, eyes slightly shadowed with weariness, travel-rumpled cotton shirt and jeans that fit just right, low on his hips. She bit the inside of her lip to snap her attention away.

“I couldn’t miss Jared’s wedding. I flew in from Costa Rica this morning.”

She nodded at his mud-spattered boots. “I thought you were out of the country.”

He hooked the finger holding the bag in acknowledgement. “It took some juggling to get here, but I couldn’t miss it.”

A knot of anxiety formed just below her heart. Avoiding him wouldn’t be easy since he was part of the wedding party, not with all the activities Christine had planned. She forced a rueful smile. “Bridesmaid.”

His gaze traveled down the length of her body, and once again she fretted that she was dressed so casually.

But when his eyes returned to hers, they shone with appreciation. “You look great.”

She waved dismissively, wishing his approval didn’t send a wave of warmth through her. She’d accepted that what they had was over. At least, her head had. Her heart and body were having other ideas. “I was just...in search of coffee.”

“I’ll put my gear in my room and join you.”

“Eric, wait.” She touched his arm as he started up the stairs past her. His arm was warm and the hair beneath the rolled-up sleeve rasped her skin, sending pulses of heat along her nerves, scattering her thoughts. Looking into his eyes didn’t help. “No one knows about what happened last year.”

His eyebrows flicked upward. “Okay.” He dragged the word out as if waiting to see what she’d say next.

“This is Christine and Jared’s weekend and they’ve worked hard for it. I don’t want to take anything away from that.” She could get him to go along with that, she was sure.

“I don’t intend to.” He stroked his finger down her cheek. “So. Coffee?”

She grasped the out he gave her, though she wanted to lean into his caress. “Tons to do. I’m going to grab my coffee and go back upstairs. I guess I’ll see you later. Christine and Jared are taking us for a picnic

along the river today.” The whole wedding party and Christine’s family would be along. She would have an easier time keeping her distance. She needed to be in control or risk her heart again.

Haven walked out onto the big patio behind the resort, feeling better. Her favorite denim capris and cap-sleeved T-shirt boosted her confidence, and she was with friends, ready to celebrate. She wouldn’t let Eric’s presence twist her up. After all, he’d been perfectly sweet to her in the hall, like an acquaintance, not a lover. This was going to be fine.

Her gaze rested on him without conscious thought. He’d added a battered Longhorns cap to the same clothes he’d worn earlier and stood with Jared near the rail, their heads bent together. His face was split in that breathtaking grin, all white teeth and crinkled eyes, and everything female in her quivered. He lifted his head and met her gaze, and his smile shifted, becoming a bit softer, more intimate.

Lust pounded through her. She’d seen that smile before and it promised wonderful, wonderful things. She spun away to join the women, who were debating if Jill’s footwear was appropriate for a walk along the river.

“It’s a picnic, right?” Jill asked, defending her choice of leather sandals. “You’re not tricking us into a hike or anything.” She eyed Christine’s boots suspiciously. “Just because you love the outdoors doesn’t mean the rest of us do.”

“It’s a picnic,” Christine conceded, still skeptical. “But it’s not a park.”

“Haven’s wearing sandals too,” Jill pointed out, looping her arm through Haven’s.

“I only brought sandals,” Haven said. “We’ll be fine. Don’t worry.”

Christine started to turn away in surrender, then swung back. “Neither one of you had better be in a cast for my wedding, got it?”

“Got it,” Haven and Jill agreed, and headed for the steps leading to the trail, arm in arm.

“Hey, did you see Jared’s friend Eric turned up after all?” Jill asked. “Good Lord, is he gorgeous or what? I hate to be the cliché, a bridesmaid hooking up with a groomsman, but wow. Have you seen that ass?”

Up close and personal. Haven’s face heated with—was that jealousy? She didn’t get jealous. Okay, she might envy someone’s new pair of shoes or figure or hairstyle, but she’d never been jealous over a man.

Jill jiggled the arm still looped through Haven’s. “So? What do you think? Should I go for it?”

How could she answer without sounding suspicious? She hadn’t told her friends about their affair at the time because while it was going on, she’d wanted to keep it private, something for just the two of them. Telling them after the fact would have only hurt more, when they’d offer sympathy. Now, well, she hadn’t

been lying when she told Eric she didn't want their drama to disrupt the weekend. Besides, this way the affair was still something that belonged to only the two of them, and the idea of that warmed her.

"He's been in the jungle all this time," she told Jill. "He may not have much staying power."

As soon as the words were out of her mouth, he passed her on the trail, turning to stare, his eyes wide. Before she could wish herself into a hole in the ground, Jill burst out laughing.

They reached the picnic area where the resort staff had laid out an elegant arrangement, white cloths on the ground, silver buckets icing champagne, trays of fruits and cheeses artfully set on the linens. Nearby a cooler held bottled water and wait staff stood by ready to serve sandwiches.

"This is my kind of picnic." Jill split from Haven and hovered near Eric, as if waiting to see where he'd sit.

Haven didn't. She sat near Christine and helped herself to a strawberry as Jared opened the champagne. When she glanced up, she saw Eric sitting across the linen from her, looking at her. Great.

Jared motioned with the bottle of champagne. Ignoring Eric, she leaned forward, holding out her flute so Jared could pour. She sat back, her weight on her hands, and grinned at Christine, who lifted her shoulders in an exaggerated sigh, though Haven noticed that she kept an eye on the servers to make sure everything ran smoothly. Affectionately, Haven patted her friend's thigh to remind her to enjoy the weekend. But with Eric present, it took her a bit—and two glasses of champagne—to relax. Finally the teasing among the groomsmen penetrated her nerves and she let the tension ease from her own shoulders.

"It was a science experiment," Eric protested when Jared brought up the smoke bombs in the boys' restrooms.

"To what? See how quickly you could get me suspended?" Jared shot back.

"To see how fast the fire alarm went off," Eric replied. "Took a damned long time, as I recall."

"And two seconds after that, the principal was hauling us out by our ears." Jared shook his head, smiling fondly at Christine.

"Wouldn't have been so bad if she'd looked like Haven," Eric said, his eyes glinting at her. "I might have gone to the principal's office even more often."

"You couldn't have gone more often," Jared countered. "And she looked like what she was, a former WAC shoved into a purple suit."

Eric leaned across the linen toward Haven. "She was shorter than some of the fifth graders but could kick their asses with one look. No lie."

"How often did she kick yours?" she asked, unable to hide a smile. When they'd been together, she hadn't seen him interact with his friends and hadn't realized what she was missing.

He eased away with a smile of his own. "Every damn day."

The walk back to the resort was more relaxed as the four bridesmaids, four groomsmen and Christine's family headed back up the hill. Haven still kept her distance from Eric, concentrating instead on

listening to Christine enumerate the tasks that needed to be done before tomorrow. The bride's tone was sleepy and she weaved a bit on the path. Haven reached out to catch her elbow, and her foot slipped out of her sandal, twisting beneath her.

With a grunt of frustration and pain, she landed on her ass on the dusty path. Before she could catch her breath, Eric crouched before her, his hands on her ankle, which was beginning to throb.

"Are you okay?" he asked, his fingers smoothing over her skin.

Haven stopped herself from jerking away from that touch, so familiar that her hormones were dancing, appreciating the tingle his callused fingertips sent from the tender skin behind her ankle to the apex of her thighs. But to react strongly would only alert everyone to their previous relationship. "I wasn't paying attention to where I was going." She drew her knee up, breaking contact and breathing a sigh of relief. She looked past him to Christine, who bent over his shoulder, tucking her hair behind her ear and furrowing her brow. "Don't worry. Nothing is going to stop me from walking down that aisle tomorrow."

Christine lifted her gaze to Haven's and smiled. "All that matters is that you're okay."

"I think so." Eric took her ankle again, his thumb brushing over the hollow above her heel. He grinned at her, temporarily making her forget all about the pain, making her think—other things that she shouldn't be thinking in front of her friends. She lowered her gaze, choosing the pain over the—well, the pain. "We'll get you back and get some ice on it, you should be good as new."

"Better be," Mr. Padalecki said with a wink. "Dance lessons tonight."

Eric grasped her arm and helped her stand. She tried to put her weight on her foot and winced. "You don't want to aggravate it." Eric looped his arm around her waist, his hand resting below her breast. His touch seared through the thin fabric of the T-shirt as if she wore nothing. "Lean on me."

"No, really, I can—"

"Better this way." He released her and turned his back. "Jared, give her a boost."

Haven wished she could melt into the ground as everyone in their party watched. She stared at his broad back. "You aren't going to carry me."

"It's only a little ways."

"Uphill." And she'd have to smell him and feel his muscles move and remember. "I can make it."

He looked over his shoulder at her and must have seen her desperation for this all to go away, because he nodded. "You can lean on me if you want."

"I'll be fine," she said again, but each step sent a twinge through her. So she held on to Jill.

"Dummy," Jill muttered. "I would have ridden that all the way home."

Eric's breath caught in his throat when Haven walked into the dining room—not limping, thank God—of the inn a few hours later. He hoped no one was watching him because he was pretty sure his

tongue was hanging out. Her simple black dress had a swath of fabric that looped around her neck, leaving her shoulders bare except for the brush of her long dark hair against it. Jesus, just the idea of her hair brushing his skin tightened his groin. He'd itched to get his hands on her, well, for eight months, but especially since he'd seen her this morning, fresh out of bed and so gorgeous she took his breath away. The brief touch he'd managed out on the hiking trail had him fantasizing about her riding his back the rest of the afternoon.

She scanned the room, her gaze glancing over him, then she smiled at someone behind him and lifted her hand in acknowledgement.

He twisted around and saw a nice-looking guy return the gesture.

Well, hell, that had not been something he'd taken into consideration, that she'd be with someone else. Of course, months had passed. Why wouldn't she be with someone else?

The idea irritated the shit out of him, the thought of another man touching her, another man hearing her soft sighs, breathing in her scent. Still, she didn't approach the guy. Instead she crossed the oak-floored open room, lit with rustic iron chandeliers, and joined a huddle of females near a table with a beautiful flower arrangement. Haven rested her hand Christine's shoulder. All the women inclined their heads to look at Haven's foot, clad in shiny high-heeled sandals. She lifted her leg, flexing her foot, and Eric was mesmerized with the play of muscles in her calf.

He was at fault for the guards she'd erected again, more impenetrable than ever. Eight months ago, he'd been fascinated by the combination of adventure and stability she'd shown, an elementary school principal who loved camping and travel, appealing to both sides of himself. She'd armored herself pretty well, was good at it, but he was too intrigued not to pry underneath—he was an anthropologist, right, and lived for mystery. Once he'd found her soft, gooey center, he was trapped.

Then he'd had to leave, though he hadn't stopped thinking about her.

The dinner began and Haven took a seat at one of the other round tables, out of his line of sight behind a floral centerpiece. He wondered if that was on purpose. Eric thought about moving so he could keep an eye on her, but he'd give her this reprieve, since the rest of the weekend he intended to be relentless. At least she'd never approached that guy she'd waved to, or any guy. So she was here alone. That could be used to his advantage.

Wine and conversation flowed freely, but Eric grew restless, wanting a glimpse of Haven. Every now and then her laugh carried down the table, and his gut tightened in anticipation. He'd made her laugh on the picnic, a good sign, but he wanted to hear her laugh just for him.

Christine's father, Mr. Padalecki, stood at the head of the table and called for attention. "We've arranged for the band to come in tonight and work with you on some of the dances for tomorrow. I know not all of you are lucky to be Texan, and I don't want you to embarrass yourselves out on the dance floor. So grab your partners and come this way."

Eric rose and glanced at Haven. She sat still for a moment, then looked up when he approached, hand extended.

“I think that means us.” Had Christine told her about the change in the lineup?

Again she hesitated and a blush tinted her cheeks. That small reaction she couldn’t hide sent a pulse of hope through him. She straightened her shoulders and rose, stepping around his proffered hand.

Respecting her wish to play it cool, he let his arm fall to his side. He could study other cultures and understand the whys and wherefores, but God help him when it came to women. He gestured to her ankle. “Good to see you recovered.”

“Yeah, thanks. You were right. The ice helped.”

“Had a twisted ankle or two in my time. Never recovered enough to wear heels the same day, though.”

Her dark-eyed gaze lifted to his, startled, and he grinned. She relaxed marginally, a half-smile of her own curving her generous mouth, and turned away. He followed her into the reception hall making a conscious effort not to look at her ass.

The room was identical to the dining room, only without the tables, and with wide French doors opening onto a balcony overlooking the Pedernales River. Eric joined the others in a semicircle on the dance floor and folded his arms as he watched Christine’s parents join together to demonstrate the “Cotton-Eyed Joe”, the schottische, the “Boot-Scootin’ Boogie” and a cumbia, with the help from the band. When it was time to join in, Haven kept her distance for the line dances, but he was fine with that. Watching him screw up might be fun for her, but he wasn’t sure his ego could take it on the heels of her cold shoulder.

Then Mr. Padalecki swung his wife into his arms for a Texas two-step. Aw, that looked easy enough. Others in the bridal party, those who had been married or dating for a bit, including the bride and groom, partnered up quickly and joined the Padaleckis. Eric sought Haven over the top of his friend Gabe’s head. She didn’t meet his gaze as he approached, not until the last minute when he took her hand. Anxiety lined her face, and he didn’t think it was worry about the dance. Was she thinking about the last time they danced? He sure as hell was. They’d turned each other on so much, she’d given him a blowjob in the car on the way back to her house. Christ, she was the sexiest woman he’d ever known. Unable to wait to touch her, he tucked his other hand at her waist, pulling her closer than was probably wise since he had no idea what he was doing. He was going to stomp all over her pretty toes. Then she really wouldn’t be able to walk down the aisle.

Okay, he knew how to dance, but not a dance with particular steps. He knew how to use it as foreplay, and had with Haven, more than once. He’d wanted his hands on her any way he could and she’d been willing. Jesus, had she been willing.

“You smell good,” he murmured. “Different.”

Something flashed in her eyes, a kind of vulnerability, but she covered it quickly.

“Do you know what you’re doing?” She curved her fingers over his shoulder.

“Not at all. You?”

She tossed that pretty dark hair back to look up at him, and this time he recognized the gleam of pride in her eyes. “I’ve lived in Texas all my life. What do you think?”

He gave in to the urge to smooth his palm over the curve of her hip, just above her ass. She drew in a little gasp through those rosy lips that he wanted to taste, and he knew she could feel his cock grow against her belly. Yeah, he needed to stop thinking like that, or someone besides Haven was going to notice his hard-on.

“Show me,” he said.

“Start on your left foot.” Her hand on his shoulder drew him forward a bit, as if he’d forgotten which was his left side. “It’s quick-quick, slow-slow. Ready? Quick-quick—ow!” She jumped back and rubbed her offended toe.

Mr. Padalecki appeared beside them and pressed his flattened palms between them. “It’ll work better if you have some space between you as you’re learning. It’s quick-quick, slow-pause, slow-pause. Don’t be trying to flirt here, Eric,” he chided the younger man. “Listen to the music and count in your head. You can make time later.” He winked.

“No, he can’t,” Haven muttered as the older man moved away.

“What are you so prickly about?” Eric asked as he slid his hand around her waist, bringing her a little closer than Mr. Padalecki had suggested, but not as close as he wanted. “That I showed up? That I left? You knew I couldn’t call. I thought that was what you wanted.”

“It was. It is.” She bit her lower lip, then released it and met his gaze. “You being here just—caught me by surprise.”

“Ah. Not a fan of surprises, as I recall.”

A small smile curved her lips. “Not so much.”

He eased her a little closer, ignoring the steps of the dance altogether. “So should I have called?”

“When you left, we agreed it wasn’t necessary.”

Something in her tone, the softness of it, an almost wistful quality, alerted him. “Did something change?”

She looked up sharply. “No. What would have changed?”

But the guarded look in her eyes made him think otherwise.

“Eric and Haven! You’re not even trying,” Mr. Padalecki scolded from the other side of the dance floor.

But now that he’d gotten Haven to loosen up a bit, Eric found himself able to move better. He focused on the roll of her hip beneath his palm, the heat of her breath against the open collar of his shirt, the scent of her, heightened by the heat rolling off her body with their exertions, since Mr. Padalecki ran them through

several different songs with different tempos. Approval lightened her eyes as he caught on to the rhythm and guided her about the wooden floor with confidence, his hand at the small of her back like an old pro.

“Come with me,” he said, breaking away from her as the music ended.

“Eric.”

His name was a protest, but he thought he heard a longing too. Of course, she knew he was aroused. “Just out there. I just—I want to talk.” Liar. He wanted to kiss her, to feel her body move against his, to know he had a chance.

She edged away, not toward the terrace doors where he wished she’d go, but the door to the lobby, escape clearly her goal.

But Jill hurried forward and grabbed Haven’s arm. “Torture’s over. We’re heading to the bar.” She turned to Eric and tilted her head in an invitation beyond the trip to the bar. “Let’s go, handsome.”

Haven opened her door with a shaking hand. She’d moderated her drinking, and her attraction to Eric while they’d celebrated, but neither had been easy. God, why had he come here? Why was he so focused on her?

How was she going to resist him for the next forty-eight hours?

She walked into the luxurious room, dominated by a king-sized bed made of raw pine and piled with a thick duvet and pillows in a deep crimson. Perfect for rolling around with Eric as the moon shone in the huge arched window. Shaking off the thought, she stripped off her dress and stood before the mirror for a moment. She considered taking the edge off herself, but knew she’d only fantasize about Eric making love to her, as she’d done the past eight months.

If only she could move forward. No other man had shared the same intimacies with her. They’d essentially lived together those two weeks after the engagement party. Eric had no place of his own and was waiting for funding for his trip to Costa Rica. She’d been on summer vacation from her job as elementary school principal. They’d made love in every way imaginable, yes, but had woken up together, gone to bed together, done everything in-between together. She hadn’t expected the mundane tasks like grocery shopping with a man could be fun. Favorite brands of deodorant and aversions to baked chips were things she had never cared to know about another man. No wonder Eric had gotten under her skin.

With a sigh, she turned from the mirror and picked up the robe from the end of the bed. She wrapped it around her and ducked into the bathroom to remove her makeup. Another shower would wash the sweat from her skin. Wash the scent of him from her skin.

She’d just finished removing her eye shadow and mascara when a knock sounded at the door. She padded across the plush carpet and turned the knob.

Her heart bounced hard off her ribs when she saw Eric standing there.

“No.” She stepped back, her hand on the edge of the door. “You have to go.”

“Haven.” He cupped her cheek, his touch so familiar, bringing all her desires to the surface. “Let me in.”

Voices carried up the stairwell. Jill. Haven reached out to yank Eric into the room. He stumbled past her and she closed the door, not wanting to have to explain why Eric was visiting her. She faced him and folded her arms over her robe, conscious that she wore nothing beneath it. Could he tell? She pulled the neckline higher and tried not to shiver. Eric was in her room, the bed only a few feet away. “What do you want?”

“You.”

The one word kicked up her pulse and she pressed her back to the door. “We agreed it was over eight months ago.”

He stepped closer. “You’re here, I’m here. We know what each other likes. We know everything about each other’s bodies.”

The pictures he drew in her mind were too enticing, and she wished she could close her eyes to erase it. That would reveal too much. “How long since you’ve had sex?” She lifted her chin, not sure she wanted to hear the answer.

He angled his head and smiled. “You tell me. Eight months?”

She couldn’t stop the quick intake of breath. Eric Viera, sex on legs, hadn’t had sex since he’d been with her? What the hell was she supposed to make of that information? And why did it make her so happy?

“You?” he asked softly, taking another step.

“Same,” she admitted.

A smug smile curved his lips. “Then?”

His fingers twined in the ends of her hair. Did he remember how much she loved that, the play of his fingers and her hair against her skin? She parted her lips and he took it for an invitation, covering her mouth with his.

This was something she couldn’t reenact. She could touch herself and imagine his mouth between her legs. She could fire up her vibrator and imagine him fucking her. But nothing could duplicate his kiss, the skilled play of his lips and tongue that seemed to remember all her favorite moves. His fingers trailed from her hair, down her throat to her shoulder and back, drawing her against him. Did he realize she wore nothing underneath the robe? He would, soon, because her legs parted of their own volition, letting his hips nudge closer to hers. Already she grew slick and swollen, and she barely stopped herself from tilting her hips to rub against him. How could her body betray her so fully?

She pressed her palm to his chest, intending to push him away, but her fingers had other ideas, clutching at his shirt, feeling his heart pounding, as affected as she was. He eased back and she opened her

mouth to tell him to go, but his lips found that tender spot below her ear, his short goatee adding another layer of sensation to the caress, and her pussy squeezed with anticipation of having him inside her.

Only that couldn't happen. She had to stop him.

Instead, her hand curved around the back of his head and she tilted her chin to allow him freer access to her throat. More than anything, she wanted to rub along the hard ridge of the erection he'd been sporting since they danced, wanted to make herself come apart in his arms, but she kept her feet flat on the ground, her hips still, willing herself to have some control of the situation, though she was fast spiraling away from that resolution.

"Missed you," he murmured against her skin, stroking his thumb over her shoulder through the thick terry robe. "Missed your taste, missed your voice, missed your laugh. Missed your body."

Send him away. Send him away now. You don't want to pine over him for another eight months. If only her hormones would heed her head. No, they were already seduced. She huffed a breath. She'd get him out of her system tonight. She wouldn't have time for him tomorrow in the flurry of wedding preparations. Even if they made love again tomorrow night, they'd part ways Sunday. Not enough time to get attached to him again.

"Just tonight."

He eased back, his expression wary. "I didn't just come here to make love to you. I want to talk about—"

She loosened the belt of her robe and let it fall to the floor. With a growl, he gathered her against him, one hand splayed across her hip, the other coursing up her naked thigh.

"God, touch me, Eric."

He curved his fingers around her breast, the calluses of his palms rough on the tender skin, the sensation making her wetter. Now she tilted her hips forward, seeking satisfaction by rubbing along his cock, still in his slacks.

He set her away from him, hands firm on her hips. "The bed," he managed as he unbuttoned the top few buttons of his shirt and dragged it over his head, then unhooked his slacks in record time and dropped them to the floor.

His magnificent body was better now than it had been eight months ago, lean, muscular, and God, his penis was long and hard. Suddenly she remembered every stroke, from every time he'd made love to her. Memories were powerful things. She lowered herself to the soft, pillowy bedding without taking her gaze from him.

"Condom?" she asked as he approached, cock bobbing with the movement. Funny how they both seemed to have lost the ability to speak in complete sentences.

"I knew I was going to see you, didn't I?"

“Mm. We have language,” she murmured, leaning back on her elbows and drawing up her knees. “Get it.” She nodded toward his pants on the floor.

“Not yet.” He braced his hands between her feet on the bed and parted her legs. “It’s been a long time since I tasted you. Christ, Haven, you’re wet.”

“Um.” His breath along the inside of her thighs didn’t help. She wanted his mouth on her more than she wanted to breathe. But, “I want to come with you inside me.”

“You will,” he said with that maddening grin and lowered his head.

But he didn’t put his mouth on her, just parted her and blew softly on her petals. She quivered, anticipation at once delicious and frustrating. His fingers stroked her outer lips, and he touched his lips to her clit.

Just that contact had her bucking her hips, and when he touched his tongue to her, she came in long, shuddering waves, moans tearing from her throat as her nails dug into the coverlet.

He didn’t stop, his tongue a little point that flicked her clit as he pressed his fingers into her channel. Two fingers? Three? Her body stretched to accommodate him and she could feel the ripples of her orgasm around his fingers even as the sensation built, carrying her to a plateau of pleasure.

Then sending her flying again when his thumb joined his tongue on her clit, adding rough to smooth, and his little finger probed her asshole.

This time the pulses of pleasure were endless, rolling one after another through her body, making it impossible to catch her breath, to do more than feel.

He lifted his head and removed his touch from her trembling body to brace over her and kiss her, filling her mouth with her own taste, letting her lick her flavor from his lips and tongue. One of his hands disappeared for a moment. She glanced down to see him stroking his cock, grip loose, the base of his fingers stroking the underside.

“Let me.” Her whisper was hoarse as she reached for him.

“Afraid I’m going to come the minute I’m inside you,” he said, his own voice rough.

“Then we do it again. Come inside me, Eric. God, I want to feel you.” Because as good as those orgasms had been, nothing matched the sensation of his cock stretching her, of his body over her.

After he managed the condom, he knelt over her, probing the opening of her pussy, nudging, sliding, filling. With a shift of her weight, she lifted her legs higher about his waist to bring him deeper, was rewarded with the feel of his groin nestling against her as he filled her completely. She ground up against him, her tender clit chafing against the rough hair at the base of his shaft at the same time sending pulses of arousal through her, slickening her passage. He ground back and began to move, rhythm steady, thrusts powerful, the tendons of his neck standing out as he struggled to hold on to his orgasm.

Since he hadn’t allowed her to hold on to hers, she danced her fingers down his spine to the cleft of his tensing ass. She slipped her fingers beneath his cheeks and found his balls, tight and hard. She played

her fingertips over them, scraped her fingernails against them, and he came with a shout, plunging deeply into her and holding himself over her on trembling arms.

“You’re the devil,” he muttered when he could speak, withdrawing from her and dropping onto his back, one arm draped over his forehead as he fought for breath.

“You may remember I like to be in control.”

“Next time, ask to be on top.” He propped up on his elbow, gliding his other hand over the skin of her waist, down to her hip before cupping her breast and toying with her nipple.

“Don’t worry. It’s been eight months. I’ll bet you have at least one other time in you.”

“I was expecting another crack about staying power.”

She snapped her gaze to his. “I knew you heard me talking to Jill.”

“Not something a guy wants to hear, even if I knew you were trying to steer her away from me.” He tweaked her nipple and grinned.

“I wasn’t—” She protested, shoving his hand away.

“Liar. Doesn’t matter, though. Only one woman here I have eyes for.”

Nostrils flaring with arousal, he leaned over and kissed her. She slicked her tongue over his lips as he fumbled between them, discarding the used condom and—hello? Was that the sound of him opening another? Surely not so soon. But then he pushed into her, not quite hard, but still stretching, filling, sending delight spiraling along her tingling nerves, easing part of her desire as he ignited another. She coursed her palms down his lean, hard torso as their mouths battled, teeth and tongues, before she eased her tongue over his lips, soothing.

Her fingers curled over his hard ass as he pumped in and out of her in a rhythm too slow for her growing arousal, but deliberate, the head of his cock rubbing against her inner walls in a delicious rhythm, the sound of him moving in and out of her teasing her senses more.

“Jesus, you’re so wet,” he said against her jaw.

“Make. Me. Come.”

His eyes crinkled in amusement as he lifted his head to meet her gaze and tightened his grip on her thighs. “Do it yourself.”

In one fluid motion, he turned onto his back, bringing her with him.

She was in control. Just the way she liked it. She waited a moment, spreading her fingers over his magnificent chest, feeling the sheen of desire and exertion coating his skin, his heart thudding against his ribs. His smile was so gorgeous he took her breath away, and he lifted his hips against her until she moaned. She adjusted to his cock, deeper inside her now, and clenched around him, eliciting his groan.

When she started to move, her strokes were long and hard, her pussy squeezing as she rose off him. He gritted his teeth and closed his hands on her hips, lifting into her, meeting her strokes, his muscles

bunching with effort. Power pulsed through her, partnered with desire. That she could reduce a virile man to this being of need was heady.

“Haven,” he said, his tone guttural, “make me come.”

She bent down, brushing her breasts against his chest as she kissed him, open mouthed. Her thighs burned with each stroke. His palms coursed up to the crease of her hips, his thumbs caressing the tender skin and—God, she needed his touch on her clit. She pushed his hand to her mound and rose up to watch him as he touched her, his thumb circling, making her channel tighten about him so they both gasped, then he gave her that grin that sent a pulse of warmth through her that had nothing to do with his cock inside her. Because that terrified her, she moved into his touch, letting the sensation push away doubt and longing, let the swelling orgasm carry her higher. She hovered on the precipice for a long moment. Finally she let herself look into his eyes, saw the heat, the desire there. Her climax washed her over, her fingers digging into his pecs as she pushed her hips against his, bringing him deep. Apparently not deep enough, because he tumbled her onto her back and drove into her quivering body, his powerful muscles flexing beneath her hands, his breath gusting against her throat, his pulse pounding beneath her lips. His strokes stuttered, and he stilled, buried inside her, as he came.

He held himself over her a moment before he pulled out and dropped onto his back.

“God, Haven,” he muttered, hooking his arm over his head and gazing at the ceiling. “Even better than I remembered.”

Panic tried to raise its head. She’d opened a door she’d determined to keep locked and she needed to shove him back through before she lost her heart.

He swept his hand down her arm and toyed with her nipple. The familiar glint in his eyes warmed her and she reached for him before she could stop herself. In a moment she found herself snug against his body, listening to his heartbeat slow, his breath come out in a satisfied sigh.

Maybe it wouldn’t matter if she lost her heart, since it seemed she’d already lost her mind.

Chapter Two

Haven was incredibly loose as she came downstairs the following morning. Three times they'd made love, start to finish, not counting the blowjob she'd given him. She'd forgotten how resilient he was, how funny, how good he made her feel, not just in bed.

He was already in the dining room when she entered. She couldn't stop the smile that spread across her face when their gazes met. Oh, dear. There was no point in her sending him out of her room at four in the morning if they were going to be discovered exchanging knowing glances. She schooled her features to a more civil smile as she joined Jill and the two other bridesmaids at a table. He matched it, though his eyes still glinted as he set a cup of coffee in front of her.

"Non-fat soy, two sweeteners," he said, and sat two chairs away.

Warmed that he'd remember, she tapped the spoon on the rim of the cup, then tasted. "Perfect."

"How did you know that?" Jill asked Eric.

"Know what?" Eric asked, smile in place, though Haven could see the realization of what he'd done in his eyes. Not panic, precisely, but caution.

"How she takes her coffee."

"I—um—I heard her order it last night."

"You weren't sitting by her when we were in the bar," Jill pointed out. "And she didn't have coffee last night."

He frowned. "Are you sure? I had to have heard it. How else would I know?" He turned to Haven, the corner of his mouth quirked daringly. "How else would I know?"

Haven scrambled for an explanation. "I came down and got some when I couldn't sleep."

"Right. And I was in here." Eric sat back, relieved. "Drinking a beer."

"You got coffee when you couldn't sleep?" Jill asked.

"Decaf. Still tastes the same."

Jill regarded Haven carefully. "Well, it seems to have done you good. You look well rested."

"Yep, ready to go." She would not look at Eric as she said that, because they'd barely slept at all. God, she was going to blow it. Though if she was honest with herself, she'd admit that the secrecy added to the thrill. She popped out of her chair. "I think I'll see what they have at the breakfast bar."

Eric, damn him, followed her like a puppy.

“You’re not really one for discretion, are you?” she chided as she picked up a plate from the end of the buffet.

“I don’t care if everyone knows.”

She plopped a bagel on her plate. “Because you’ll be leaving and I’ll be the one who’ll have to answer all the questions about when you’re coming back, and if it’s okay to invite you to things, and why you don’t call. I don’t want to deal with that.”

His lips thinned. “So if someone does find out, so what? You think Jared and Christine are going to hate us forever? You know they won’t.”

“No, of course they won’t.” Honestly, she got the idea that Christine would be pretty happy. But that didn’t stop Haven’s desire to protect her heart, and shielding the happy couple from their drama was the best reason she could come up with. Funny that she’d been able to be honest with Eric last summer, but was having difficulty now. How could she tell him her feelings had been deeper than she’d intended? She couldn’t, that was the answer.

“So what does Jared have you guys doing today?” she asked brightly when one of the other bridesmaids, Colleen, joined them at the buffet.

“I think we’re going to play a few holes of golf.”

Haven rolled her eyes at Colleen. “Isn’t that just like men? Going off to have fun while we get our hair done and pedicures and all that.”

“I think that *is* fun,” Colleen protested. “Besides, we want to look our best, right?”

Like that would happen with the orange-sherbet-colored dresses they’d be wearing. Haven forced a smile. Colleen slid half a spoonful of fruit onto her plate and returned to the table.

“Thank you for not being like that,” Eric said.

“Like what?”

He pointed to Colleen’s retreating back with a serving spoon. “You eat. I like a woman who eats.” He dropped a serving of eggs onto her plate.

Warmth slid through Haven before she recognized it, and she squashed the feeling like a bug. “So do you really play golf?”

“Had to learn so I could schmooze people to get funding. I get more funding during a golf game than from a grant.”

“That’s sad.”

He lifted a shoulder. “Fact of life.”

“And now? Are you here going after more funding?”

“Not this time,” he said. “Biscuit?”

She had a feeling he was holding back, but she didn’t know how to push for information. She wasn’t sure she even wanted to know.

Haven lined up with the other bridesmaids on the balcony overlooking the wedding venue as the strains of a Vivaldi piece floated through the room. Eric and his fellow groomsmen flanked Jared at the altar. Damn, Eric looked fine in a tux, his broad shoulders accented by the jacket that skimmed his lean form. Something about the silk cravat made her want to rip it off and bare the muscled chest beneath.

As she expected, a smirk played on his lips, but something else burned in his eyes. God help her, she knew that look, and it sent a heat through her own body, a remembered pulse of desire that made her stumble, just a bit, in her high heels. The glint of humor in his eyes told her he knew what she was thinking.

Damn him. Her panties were damp from one glance.

Sure her cheeks were pink, she looked away. She aimed a smile at Christine's mom and moved up to take her place at the altar. Good. Eric was out of view. She turned to watch the rest of the procession, and though she had seen Christine in her regalia upstairs, she still caught her breath when her friend descended the stairs, white beaded dress billowing about her. Unlike Haven, the bride met the eyes of her love directly.

What would it be like to love someone with all one's being, to trust so completely, to give as big a part of herself to someone? She doubted she could ever give up that much control to find out. She certainly hadn't with Eric, even though she'd shared more with him than with any other man.

Jared brought Christine to the altar with him, as the two exchanged vows. Her heart, already swelling with romantic notions, kicked hard against her ribs when she met Eric for the recessional, as she looked into his ice-blue eyes. Her emotions were too close to the surface, and she certainly couldn't allow him to see them, so she averted her gaze as she tucked her arm through his. She found herself grateful for the layers of clothing, clinging to that to keep their distance, though he had to be able to feel her stuttering pulse.

She kept her focus ahead as they strolled down the aisle, and the moment they reached the foyer, she dropped his arm and moved to congratulate her friends with hugs.

She managed to keep her distance from Eric through the endless photographs, but remained on the edges of conversations, focusing on where he was so he wouldn't sneak up on her.

Jill waylaid her to talk about the cake-cutting duties, and Haven lost her Eric-antenna.

By the time Jill walked away to boss someone else around, he came up behind her and rested a hand on her shoulder, plucking at the slender strap of her dress. "What'd you do to piss Christine off?"

She'd forgotten her defenses and laughed despite herself, leaning toward him, her body following its own agenda.

"I've been asking myself that for weeks."

He stroked a finger down the silky fabric and the way his gaze followed the caress made her nipples hard.

“Don’t.” She gritted her teeth, using all her control not to move away. “Not here.”

Frustration darkened his eyes, but he nodded and stepped back to offer his arm to guide her into the reception hall.

The wedding party was seated at the front of the room at a long table, windows at their backs looking out over the Pedernales River, the paired bridesmaids and groomsmen seated together. Something niggled at the back of Haven’s mind, and she cast a questioning glance at Christine as Eric held her chair. Her friend smiled and waved, then turned her attention to her new husband. Of course. She didn’t have time to play matchmaker while planning her wedding. None of this was deliberate. Still, Haven didn’t know how she could keep up her façade of nonchalance while in such close proximity to Eric.

As Jared’s oldest friend, Eric was called to give a toast to the couple. He rose and affected a casual stance that had to have every woman in the place sighing.

“Marriage for love is a recent development in the course of human history,” he said, and Jared groaned. “What?” he asked, turning to his friend. “Don’t ask an anthropologist to speak if you don’t want to hear stuff like this.” He turned back to the audience. “Did you know that the tradition of best man, which you may notice I am not, derives from the days when warriors would kidnap the bride? He needed backup in case she was excessively feisty. The reason the bride stands on the left of the groom is so he could keep his right arm, his sword arm, free to fight off any who would ‘speak now’.” The crowd tittered. “The honeymoon comes from that time too. The warrior would have to hide with his bride when her family came after them. I don’t think that will be the case with Christine and Jared, especially not after this shindig.” He gestured to the room. “We’ve witnessed the exchanging of the rings that symbolizes Christine and Jared’s commitment to each other. In a little while, we’ll see the dance and the cutting of the cake, all which are outward signs to us what they already know. They are in love with each other, and committed to stay together until the end of time. To Jared and Christine.”

“To Jared and Christine.”

Eric took his seat. Haven grinned.

“What?” he asked warily.

“That was really—nice.”

“Did you think I was going to be a dick?”

She shrugged and turned her attention to her glass of wine. “I’ve never really seen you and Jared together. You and anyone together.” They’d been so exclusive with each other. She’d wanted to protect herself from what her friends thought, what investment her friends would have in her relationship with Eric. But in doing so, she’s missed a whole level in knowing him.

But that was the past, and this was just a leftover fling and after tomorrow he'd be gone and she'd be fine.

Not for the first time she wished she had someone to talk with. But she'd made the choice to keep this relationship to herself. She'd closed them out—too late to invite them back in just because her emotions were in a jumble.

Moments later, she joined in the applause as the newlyweds took to the dance floor. They looked gorgeous together, both tall, blond and fit. And the way they looked at each other, that shared secret look in their eyes... Okay, Haven admitted to a touch of jealousy. A touch of loneliness.

Eric stroked his finger over her shoulder and down her bare arm because he couldn't not touch her. That was who he was, a man who appreciated the physical. That was how they'd hooked up in the first place. "So you? What's new with you?"

"Do we want to do this?" she asked with a sigh, sitting back.

His gaze flicked past her, to where the rest of the bridal party was gathering to join the newlyweds on the floor. He closed his fingers around hers. "No. We want to dance."

Haven's nerves hummed like a vibrating string as he led her to the floor and turned her into his arms, one hand folded over hers and the other firm at her waist. The dance was a slow two-step that they'd practiced last night, but Eric stepped on her toe from the first beat. She tightened her fingers on his shoulder to remind him, and he shuffled his feet, overcorrecting. She skittered out of the way and stumbled.

"Screw this." He brought her against him palms pressed to her back, fingers spread on either side of her spine, pressing her into the long lean line of his body.

"Eric!" Her fingers curled in the lapels of his jacket. "If you'd practiced with me instead of trying to seduce me—"

"Shut up and put your arms around me," he muttered.

She hesitated, trying to tamp down the desire to lean into him, then gave in and glided her hands up his chest to rest on his shoulders, attempting to keep a distance between them. She certainly didn't trust Eric to behave himself. Aware he was watching her, she avoided looking at him. Instead she focused on his throat. Suddenly the taste of him filled her mouth, and the urge to kiss the strong column was nearly irresistible. She shifted her gaze over his shoulder, concentrating on the rest of the room, and not his thumbs drifting back and forth over her skin above the fabric of her dress. The casual touch made her nipples harden. She wanted to slide against him to ease the ache that now spread, making her sex throb.

All because he was touching her bare skin.

The lights dimmed further and he pressed her closer, so she could feel his arousal through the frothy layers of her skirt. Unable to resist any longer—after all, she'd only have him a few more hours before he was gone again—she looped her arms around his neck, allowing her fingertips to stroke the skin there. He drew in a breath, and she could almost taste him on her lips. Angling his head, he slid his palm to the small

of her back. His thumb rubbed casually up and down her spine, the innocent touch sending nerve endings racing to her sex. He'd touched her the same way after they'd made love last night, when she'd stretched out beside him, naked, her head on his chest. Did he realize that was what he was doing? God, she wished she could resist him instead of longing to drag him from the wedding and give him a tongue bath.

The scent of him, the hard length of his body, her own desire to enjoy her time with him relaxed her defenses and she moved closer, her breasts pressed to his chest, her fingers toying with the soft short hair at the back of his neck. She moved her belly against his arousal, because she could, her movements hidden by the full skirt. He drew in a sharp breath, his hand fisting in her skirt, and she could almost feel his mouth against her throat when—

“Hey! Romeo!” Jared smacked Eric's arm. “Line dance.”

Eric stepped back, releasing her slowly. Her body ached with longing as more people crowded the dance floor, jostling them apart. Dazed, feeling as if she'd been dropped into the middle of the party after being on a deserted island, Haven had trouble remembering the steps. Trying to keep an eye on Eric didn't help, but he drifted farther away. On one turn, she saw him, tie and jacket gone, sandwiched between two young women who seemed to be showing him the steps by standing much closer than necessary. Jealousy surged, unexpected, sending her off balance again.

He lifted his head and smiled at her, as if he'd known where she was all along. Her heart tripped and she returned his smile.

On the next rotation, he was beside her, still struggling with the steps but having fun with the rhythm, wiggling his ass playfully at her. She laughed and wiggled hers back on the next turn.

The song didn't end, but swayed right into the “Cotton-Eyed Joe”. He scooped her against his side and they moved in rhythm, kicking, sliding, stepping, shuffling forward, Eric and Jared trying to out-shout each other on the “bullshit”. Haven was laughing so hard she couldn't keep up as the band increased the pace, so Eric essentially dragged her across the floor, grinning down at her, his eyes warm with affection.

She wanted to be back in his arms so badly.

Her entire body craved his touch, and not just his fingers splayed possessively across her ribs below her breast.

A slower song followed the line dances, and Eric turned to her, relief and delight creasing his eyes. With one hand on her back, he drew her closer. With the other, he brushed damp hair from her neck, something that might have embarrassed her another time but now felt so right. She smiled and rested her palms on his shoulders, sliding them back and forth as she moved closer, anticipating the heat of his body.

“May I have this dance?”

Haven jolted when Christine's father tapped her shoulder. “Um. Sure, Mr. Padalecki.” She stepped back, regret shimmering through her entire body as she turned to face the older man.

“This one doesn’t know how to dance, anyway,” the older man scolded, bringing Haven into his arms with an expert move. “We’ll show you how it’s done.”

Haven sent Eric an apologetic glance, but he waved it off. “No problem. I’ll go get a beer.”

Eric leaned against the bar and watched Haven step smartly in the arms of the bride’s father. God, she was graceful and gorgeous, even in that nightmare of a dress. He couldn’t keep his eyes off her. She cast him a smile as she and the older man circled past, and he saluted her with a beer bottle. One of the young girls he’d been next to during the first line dance approached and invited him onto the floor. He declined gently. He didn’t want another woman in his arms. Haven was why he’d been so determined to get to this wedding. Her laugh carried as he watched her twirl and quickstep across the floor. Her skin shone with the exertion. More than anything, he wanted to claim her.

When the next song began, he strode toward her. The glow on her face when she looked at him shifted, became more intimate.

“I think I want to give it a shot,” he told Mr. Padalecki, his gaze focused on Haven.

“See that you don’t tread on her toes anymore,” grumbled the older man as he turned her over to Eric.

“Hmm.” Eric brought her into his arms, one arm snug about her waist, the other free to trail through her falling hair before taking her hand and tucking it between their bodies. She nestled against him, none of the tension in her that he usually felt when they were in public. When he bent his head, he breathed in her scent, damp, clean, female. He wanted to taste her but contented himself with watching her, smelling her. As they swayed to the music, her eyes darkened with awareness. Her nipples were hard against his chest and she moved against his cock with slow circles of her hips, deliberate, he knew. Her breath blew cool over his throat above the opening of his shirt and all he could think of was the feel of her skin.

“I need to touch you,” he said against her ear.

“You’re doing nothing but touching me,” she countered, but her voice was breathy, hopeful, and her hips pressed more firmly into his.

“I want to kiss you.”

“Not here.” She tightened her grip on his hand, as if she was thinking about running.

“Where?”

“Um.” She considered, her gaze darting about, before focusing on a door at the top of the stairs. “The bride’s room.”

He eased back, taking a step toward the stairs, her hand firmly in his. She balked.

“We can’t. Not together. Everyone will know why.”

“So?”

She shook her head. “I go first. You follow in a few minutes. All right?”

He didn’t think he could hold out a few minutes without her, but he nodded once, anyway. She lifted her skirts and moved to the edge of the dance floor, then up the stairs, not looking back.

Christ. His cock hardened at the thought of having her alone. If anyone was paying too much attention, they'd know exactly what was going on because he couldn't get his arousal under control, damn it. He waited, and followed her upstairs.

Haven jolted when he opened the door and pressed a palm to her chest. "That wasn't a few minutes. That was a few seconds."

"Didn't want to give you a chance to change your mind." He locked the door.

"I want a chance to clean up." She nodded to the restroom at the end of the dressing chamber.

"You're perfect." Because he couldn't stay away, he crossed the room to her, curving his fingers over her back, bringing her as close to him as he could get with all that damned fabric in the way. He slid his palm up to cup her head, angling her for his mouth.

God, she tasted like heaven, musky, with an undercurrent of sweetness from the champagne. She parted her lips beneath his, her arm hooking behind his neck, anchoring him as she explored his mouth. Just when he thought he couldn't get any harder, that kiss almost did him in. He traced his fingertips down her smooth arms and back up to her shoulders, keeping his caress feather-light. Her moan vibrated softly against his mouth and she moved closer, but he still took it slow, letting her set the pace. She coasted her hands down his back, up to his shoulders, down to his waist as their tongues played, teased, tasted. Clutching his shirt, she moved back so she leaned against the counter below the mirrors.

The entire wall of mirrors. Eric's balls tightened as he imagined what it would be like to make love to her there, where they could see everything. He wanted her naked, her back to him, her body stretched against his chest as he made love to her, watching her response to his thrusts reflected in the mirror. Unable to help himself, he nudged her just a bit with his hips. She pressed back and slid her palms up the front of his shirt. His breath caught in his throat as her fingers toyed with the buttons, then flicked one open, and another.

That signal he understood, and he found her zipper on the side of the dress. The bodice sagged against him. He eased back enough to loop the strap over her head so the dress puddled at her feet, leaving her standing before him in panties and heels. Speechless, he stared when she loosened her hair from its pins. He pulled her to him, his hand at the center of her back as he bent his head to her breasts.

So sweet, so smooth. He traced her nipple with his tongue as he plumped her breast in his palm. He sipped the tender flesh into his mouth. When she groaned and cupped the back of his head, he drew deeper, tonguing the bead of flesh and feeling her rub her thighs together as her desire built. He released her breast and turned to nuzzle the other, rubbing his lips over the soft skin, letting the short hairs of his goatee caress and arouse before he soothed the abrasions with his lips and tongue.

Her breathing was raspy now, and her scent filled his nostrils. His cock ached, needing her touch, her kiss, needing to be inside her. Had he put a condom in his wallet? Please let him have—except his wallet was downstairs, in his jacket.

With a groan, he straightened. God, she was beautiful, sprawled on the counter where hours ago she'd put on her makeup, now smudged from his mouth. Her breasts thrust up, her nipples reddened from his attention, hardened as if seeking more. Her arms were braced behind her, her thighs parted just slightly.

"What?" she asked.

"Don't have a condom."

"I do."

"What? Where?"

"My purse is in that drawer over there." She nodded to the other end of the counter.

Eric released her to retrieve it. "Why did you bring a purse? Your room is just upstairs."

"I had to keep my room key somewhere."

He opened the drawer to see half a dozen purses. Women confused the hell out of him. "So you kept your key here, in an unlocked drawer in an unlocked room?" He held up a purse, checking to see if it was hers.

She shook her head. "No one knew they were here, and they don't know whose purse is whose, so they don't know where the keys belong. See? Perfectly logical."

He held up another purse. Again she shook her head.

"The lemon-colored one."

"The yellow one," he corrected, selecting it.

She nodded and held out her hand. He strolled toward her, dangling it out of her reach.

"So why did you bring a condom?"

"Because I knew you'd be here."

"And?"

"And I have no resistance to you."

"I like to hear that." He passed her the purse, and she clicked it open to extract the condom. Gathering her close, he kissed her again, aware of both purse and packet falling to the counter behind her as she wound her arms around him, opening her mouth beneath his, pressing her breasts to his bare chest. He circled his thumbs over her hips, above the elastic of her white silk panties, and she moved her mound against him, back and forth over his erection.

Yeah, he wouldn't hold out long like that. Capturing her hands, he pushed them down over his belly to his waistband. She unfastened his slacks and reached inside, stroking the length of him with her palms, through his Jockeys. He grunted her name and she broke the kiss to trail her mouth down the planes of his chest, pausing to tease his nipple, his navel. His gaze was drawn to her ass in the mirror as she bent at the waist to trace her lips along the line of hair from navel to his shorts.

She knelt before him, tugging his pants and Jockeys down in the same movement. She curled her fingers around the base of his shaft and took him into her mouth in long, smooth strokes.

His knees shook as he rested his palm on the top of her head. This fantasy had played in his mind daily since he'd left her eight months ago. She loved to give head, or at least she loved to show enthusiasm for giving head, and she knew all his sensitive spots, knew where to apply pressure for the greatest pleasure, knew which rhythm pleased him. She teased the head of his cock with her lips and tongue, sipping the precome from his slit, gliding him deep into her mouth, to the back of her throat, her tongue darting over him, her left hand squeezing, her right hand stroking his balls. Jesus, he was deep and her mouth was hot and slick. He watched her bobbing movements in the mirror, watched her take all of his cock, then slide along the length of him before swallowing him deep again. When he felt her hum around him, he knew he had to pull out or risk coming in her mouth.

"Maybe later," he managed, his voice shaky as he backed away from her. "I want to be inside you."

She stood, all lithe grace, and gave him the condom. As he rolled it on, she stepped out of her panties. God, he could smell her arousal, see how damp the fabric was.

"Lean over and put your hands on the counter."

She did, lifting her ass just a bit more than necessary. Her pussy was slick and swollen. He cupped his palms over her naked hips, positioned himself and glided into her channel.

The combination of her heat and her moan and the sight of her watching him fuck her in the mirror nearly made him come. He held on to his orgasm with sheer willpower and drew back, then thrust again. Her eyes glazed, her pupils dilated in the mirror as she watched his cock disappear into her pussy again and again. Jesus, he couldn't hold on long. He captured one of her hands from the counter and brought it to her breast. He squeezed it, before he guided it down her belly to her mound.

"Come," he said against her ear, his finger sliding with hers over her clit, both of them stroking in time to his rhythm, the little bud hardening under their ministrations, her pussy getting wetter and wetter, her breath coming harder and harder.

She slammed her ass against him, her inner walls rippling around him, her orgasm pulsing against his fingers. He drove into her soft flesh, the sound of his groin slapping her ass arousing as hell, the sound of her wet pussy gripping his cock making him insane, just before he came in bursts that had the lights dimming, the earth shaking. But he was claspng Haven and all was fine with the world. Hands still on her hips, he lowered his mouth to kiss her shoulder, already planning the next time. He swirled his thumbs over the tender skin of her back, and savored her shudder. She still wanted him. If he played his hand right, he could make her want him back in her life.

She lifted her head to meet his gaze in the mirror, and her lips started to curl in a smile, as if she knew just what he was thinking.

Suddenly she straightened, smile gone. "Oh, God."

"A little after the fact, don't you think?" He chuckled, withdrawing and dealing with the condom.

“I have to serve the cake! Jill is going to kill me.” She snatched her dress off the floor and fumbled with the tangled straps. “How did this work?”

“Here.” He took the dress from her, but the slender silky straps were incomprehensible. “What the hell? You don’t remember?”

“Not at all.”

“Huh.” He shook out the dress by the hem and held it upside down. The straps fell into a pattern. “Like this.”

“Right. Thanks.” She snatched the dress from him and pulled it over her head, slipping her arms through the straps. Frustrated, she pulled it off and tried again when she didn’t get them right. “Here, can you get this?” She turned so he could zip it, then adjusted her breasts in the bodice and leaned forward to look in the mirror. “God, I look terrible.”

He folded his arms around her and smoothed a hand over her hair. “You look beautiful.”

“For someone who just had sex, not someone who should be serving cake.” She shoved him away and sniffed her fingers. “I smell like you. I need to wash up.” She hurried across the room to the restroom.

Eric bent down and picked up a piece of the frothy orange fabric. He held it out to her. “Where does this go?”

Moments later, Haven dashed downstairs, wrapping the stray sash around her waist, though she was pretty sure that wasn’t where it had started out. She slid into place behind Jill as Christine and Jared cut the cake.

Jill glared, then did a double take. “What did you do to your dress?”

Chapter Three

Haven paced her room as she waited for Eric. After she had served cake to countless guests, Eric had dragged her into the kitchen and licked her fingers clean, dark promise in his eyes.

“Your room or mine?” he’d asked.

“Mine.”

His frown was exaggerated. “I’ve barely been in my room this weekend.”

The caterers had chased them out. Jill had grabbed Haven and shoved her onto the dance floor with the other unmarried women to catch the bouquet. Eric had nearly busted a gut laughing when she let it fall at her feet.

They’d seen Christine and Jared off, and Haven slipped away while Eric was still socializing with his friends. Once she’d returned to her room, she debated how to wait. She shed the hated dress, tangling up in it one last time before she managed to get it over her head. She’d left her panties in the dressing room, damn it, and they were her favorite pair. Someone was bound to find them and wonder whose they were.

She considered her options. She hadn’t expected to be in this situation, so hadn’t brought any seductive clothing. Condoms were one thing, a just-in-case, but sexy nighties were planning. Besides, she hated sleeping in the damn things.

So she could wait naked beneath her robe, or in her yoga pants and hoodie.

After being in that dress, the latter won. Not like he wasn’t going to be turned on, right? Not like he didn’t know why he was coming to her room.

A soft rap sounded at the door. She crossed the room and opened the door before anyone saw him in the hall. He stood there in his ruffled tux, head tilted sexily, holding two bottles of champagne by the neck in one hand and two glasses in the other. Despite herself, she looked past him to see if anyone was around before she drew him into the room.

“Ashamed of me?”

“Just don’t want any questions.” She closed the door and turned to him, sweeping her hair from her face. “I can not drink that much. At least not if I still want to have fun. I don’t think holding my hair back is anyone’s idea of hot.”

“I thought we’d drink some.” He set the glasses down on the table near the window, then ripped the foil from the top of one bottle. “And play with some.”

“Play?” Intrigued by his fingers’ sure movements on the wire cage, followed by the cork, she moved closer. She winced at the pop, but snatched up the glasses to catch the overflow.

“Mmm.” He set the bottle down on the table and took the glass she offered. His eyes glinted as he traced a finger over the hollow of her throat. “I want to drink it from here.” He glided his fingers down between her breasts to her navel, above the waistband of the knit pants. “And here.” The finger traveled farther south. She parted her legs with a gasp. “And here.”

He dropped his hand away as if he hadn’t just stolen her breath and drenched yet another pair of her panties with anticipation. His focus on her, he took a casual sip of champagne. Without looking, he set his glass down on the table and curved his palm over her jaw, rubbing his thumb lightly over her cheek before kissing her, so soft, so tender, with such longing she shivered. His lips glided over hers, sweet with the champagne, his tongue teasing, his touch innocent. He was savoring her, and the thought made her heart ache. This was their last night together.

She brought her hands up to his chest, her palms skimming over the smooth fabric of his shirt, feeling his heat beneath. She traced his jaw, toyed with his goatee, before she glided her touch down his throat to his shoulders, all the time her mouth fused to his, tongue teasing.

His hands slid down to her waist and pulled her closer, thumbs easing under the hem of her sweatshirt, stroking the tender skin of her waist. Even that innocent touch sent heat pooling between her legs.

“You know what I always loved about this?” he asked, his breath sweet and warm against her mouth as he toyed with the zipper of her hoodie.

“Hmm?”

In response, he tugged down the zipper in a fluid motion, letting the fabric part to reveal the swells of her breasts. He slipped his fingers inside to ease the jacket off her arms, his gaze on her nipples.

“Your skin’s so soft.” He brushed his lips across her jaw and slid his palms down her naked back to draw her close. “So soft,” he repeated as her breasts cushioned against his chest.

His gentle kiss deepened when she began unfastening his buttons, her fingers trailing along the skin she bared. The pulse of his arousal beat against her belly. His fingers squeezed her waist and he broke the kiss, his breathing heavy. He stepped back and pulled off his shirt, then unfastened his slacks, his knuckles brushing against the skin of her belly. She eased away to slide her pants down and straightened, close enough that the crown of his cock bobbed against her. Her pussy swelled in anticipation. Would he want to make love standing? From behind like before?

He scooped her into his arms and cradled her against his chest for a moment. The movement startled the breath from her. This was new. He carried her to the bed and set her upon it with a bounce, and returned to the table for the glasses and the bottle, all lean muscle and grace. Her mouth went dry as she watched him. When he returned, he handed her a glass, set the bottle on the nightstand and sat by her feet.

“To tonight,” he said, saluting her with his glass.

She clinked her flute to his and drank as he did. Then he dipped his head and took her nipple into his mouth. The chilled wine hardened the peak painfully and she gasped, her head back. As his tongue soothed the bud, he dripped champagne on her other breast. Her nipple contracted and she sucked in a breath as the liquid dribbled down her stomach. He released one breast to lick the champagne from the other, tongue moving quickly, warming her now. She moved her thighs together as her pussy spasmed in response.

“Lie back,” he whispered against the rise of her breast.

She did, hoping to feel his weight over her. Instead, he lifted the bottle and splashed a little right at the hollow of her throat. She tensed. He bent to lap it up, his tongue teasing the sensitive skin before caressing the erogenous skin of her throat, his goatee scraping, his lips soothing, his teeth nibbling. Wanting to feel his body against hers, she bowed off the bed toward him, but he held his weight on his arms.

The bottle scraped on the nightstand again, and she braced herself for the cold splash, this time in her navel. She watched in a lust-induced haze as he dragged his tongue from the rise of her stomach to her belly button, his eyes focused on hers.

“Eric!” To entice him, she parted her legs. His eyes shone with humor and he scooped his hands under her ass, angling her hips before picking up the bottle again and drizzling champagne on her pussy.

The combined sensation of cold and bubbling was exquisite. Her clit hardened, her channel grew wetter. Never taking his gaze from her, he covered her with his mouth.

His tongue circled her entrance before slicking up to lap the wetness from her folds and tease the base of her clit. He lifted his head and poured more champagne over her, watching it drip along the length of her slit before he lowered his head again, repeating his caress, this time dipping his tongue inside her vagina. His breath was hot against her pussy, his upper lip firm against her clit, and the irregular rhythm of his tongue inside her—

She came in pulses, lifting her hips against his mouth, threading her fingers through his hair, her thighs trembling, her body quaking with the intensity of the sensation.

With a graceful shift, he broke away and rose over her to cover her mouth the same way he’d covered her cunt. She lapped at his lips, savoring the taste of herself and the champagne that filled his mouth. He pressed a foil wrapper into her palm.

“Put it on me,” he said against her lips. “God, soon.”

With shaking fingers, she opened the packet, then caressed the length of him before rolling the condom onto his cock and snugging it against the base of his shaft.

“Fuck me,” she pleaded, tilting her hips up.

The words had barely faded in the room before he thrust into her, long and hard, her channel clasp around him, clinging to him when he withdrew to push forward again. He stayed deep for a moment, his mouth seeking hers in a searching kiss before he pulled out, his rhythm becoming more and more

determined, his cock stroking along nerve endings already heightened. She ran her hands over his back, to his ass and thighs, back up again, bringing her hips up to invite him deeper, harder. Yes, there. God.

“Eric!”

The orgasm washed over her, the waves of it pulling her under, tossing her emotions about. She arched her neck for his mouth as his fingers dug into her ass. Obliging, he ran his mouth up and down the line of her throat, adding another layer to her pleasure. He stilled, burying himself in her quivering body. His fingers threaded through her hair and he angled her head up so she could meet his gaze. His breath caught when she did, as the throbbing of his orgasm pulsed deep inside her. He thrust two more times, three, then lowered his forehead to hers. Her own heart stilled at the familiar intimacy, deeper than the lovemaking, at the mingling of their breath, their sweat, but she didn't have the will to break the contact. Finally he withdrew to lie beside her on the bed.

“That didn't last nearly as long as I'd hoped,” he said at last.

“No?” She turned toward him and trailed her fingers over his chest, pressing a kiss over his thudding heart, savoring the scent, the taste of him. “Well, we have all night.” And that was all they would have. She ignored the twinge of regret and nestled her head under his chin. Why was he making her want so much more?

Even if he stayed, would she be able to allow herself to have it? Or would she always be waiting for him to walk away?

Haven woke cradled in Eric's arms. His room was dark. She lifted her head, careful not to wake him, to look at the clock. Six twenty a.m. Plenty of time to retreat to her room before she was seen.

They'd moved to his room a few hours ago because her bed was damp and sticky from the champagne. And though she hated to admit it, lying in bed with him, snuggled against his side, was cozy. She couldn't remember ever being so relaxed with a man.

So it was going to be hard as hell slipping out and returning to her room. She considered giving it a bit more time, but feared she'd doze off again and run into Jill in the hallway as she was leaving.

“Where you going?” he asked groggily when she slipped from beneath his arm.

“My room. Everyone will be up and about soon.”

“So?” He propped himself up on his elbow as she picked her clothes off the floor.

“I don't want to explain why I'm sneaking out of your room in the morning.”

“You won't have to explain. They'd figure it out. Come back to bed, Haven.”

He looked delicious, naked among the sheets they'd tangled. His bare skin would be warm—she should know, she'd snuggled into it all night. She turned away from the temptation and stumbled, trying to get into her pants, her heart squeezing. After today, she wouldn't see him again. But she didn't want him to

know how she felt so she lowered her gaze to the floor, turning light now with the dawn. “You don’t understand. You don’t see these people all the time. You’ll be gone and I’ll be answering questions that I don’t know the answer to because that’s not what this is.”

He rolled onto his back and folded his hands on that tight stomach. “Haven, they already know.”

She blinked up at him. “What?”

“They already know. Jared and Christine for sure, anyway. I told them a while ago. That’s why they paired us for the wedding as soon as I was sure I could make it.”

Her body felt like it was squeezing in on itself as she stared at him, and then the pressure bubbled up, ready to erupt. “And you didn’t tell me? When you knew I was trying to keep it a secret?”

“I didn’t know when I told them that you hadn’t told anyone.” He swung his legs over the end of the bed. “So when you said you didn’t want to spoil their weekend, I just went along with it.”

“I’ve been so stressed and this whole time everyone knew?”

“Not sure about everyone. The guys, yeah. Christine and Jared. His parents, her parents.”

“Just mostly everyone.” She pushed her hair back from her face and tried to reason out what to do. Her stomach was in a jumble. “They have to think I’m the biggest fool, sneaking around when they already knew.” She’d recover, maybe even find the humor in it, but now she lamented the wasted energy. She certainly wouldn’t have draped herself over him, of course, but she wouldn’t have been so twisted up about their casual touches and glances.

He rose from the bed in a fluid movement. “Haven, no one cares. They just want to see you happy.”

“How is this supposed to make me happy? I won’t see you again after today.” She took a step back and lifted her gaze to his, horrified. She hadn’t meant to let that slip, hadn’t meant for him to know she wanted more than great sex.

He stroked his hand down her arm. “Hey. I’m not going anywhere.”

That revelation sent her reeling in a new direction. “What?”

“I’m not leaving. I got a job as a professor at the university in town.” He trailed his knuckles down her cheek. “They’ll get used to seeing us together.”

She drew away, unable to comprehend what he was telling her. “You’re staying?” And he wanted a relationship? Shock blocked all other emotion as she stared.

His smile faded as he tried to measure her reaction. “Yeah. I—I got tired of moving around all the time and last summer when I met you, I thought, hey, here’s something special. So instead of applying for funding, I applied for a job. I found out last week that I got it.”

She jammed her hands on her hips. “And you told me none of this.”

“Ah. Yeah.” He moved back as well, looking uncertain for the first time since she’d known him. “I thought you might like it.”

She did, so much it scared her, but she couldn’t do more than stare.

He plunged ahead. “I wanted us to have a chance, you know, to see where this goes.” He reached out as if to touch her, then thought better of it and dragged his fingers through his hair. “I didn’t stop thinking about you the entire time I was gone, Haven. I missed you like hell.”

Her pulse thundered. Everything she wanted, and while her mind was too scared to take it, her heart wanted to grab on with both hands. He was saying all the right things, but she couldn’t wrap her head about what it could mean.

“I...need to think.”

“No.” He grasped her hand and pressed it to his chest, her knuckles against the warm skin there. “Don’t put that armor back on. Come back to bed.”

That would be a mistake. She loved the armor, as he called it. She needed it for her own protection. But his voice was soothing, and she looked up into those blue eyes.

The blue eyes of the man she knew better than she’d known any man, the eyes of a man who she trusted. The man she wanted to take this chance with. She opened her palm against his chest and lifted her face, inviting his kiss. His exhale relaxed the muscles beneath her hand and he bent his head, his lips first testing, then possessive in his victory. For once, she didn’t mind losing as she invited his tongue into her mouth, as she glided her fingertips over the smooth, warmth of his chest. His erection grew between them, brushing the bare skin of her belly. Smiling against his mouth, she moved closer, trapping his cock between them, wrapping her arms around his shoulders. His breathing changed and he folded his arms around her waist, pulling her flush to him.

The kiss changed, growing sweeter, somehow, his lips stroking across hers, his tongue teasing the sensitive seam, his fingers moving in rhythm along her spine. Everything in her melted—her resistance, her heart, her doubts, her fears.

Then she was beneath him on the bed, his cock pressing at the opening of her unfastened jeans, his hands cupping her face, fingers trailing through the fine hair at her temples as he did no more than kiss her. Seducing her when she was already seduced, giving her time to adjust to the shift in their relationship. She smiled again and surrendered to the joy of a new relationship with a man who wanted to be with her.

He released her mouth and trailed his lips across her cheek, to her ear and down her throat, nuzzling until she arched against him. His hand covered her breast, stroking over her nipple. She wanted his mouth there, at her throat, everywhere. He chuckled when she urged his head down.

“Slow. This time, I want to go slow.”

She wanted to ride the delight of her newly opened emotions, but again surrendered to his touch, his desires. He trailed his fingers down her waist, tickling her so she gasped, and he played his touch over the skin of her hip at the waistband of her jeans. Desire hummed between her legs as he continued his caress above the fabric of her panties, then moved no lower. Following his pace, she coursed her touch down his back, over all those lovely muscles, circling her fingers at the small of his back. He growled against her

breast and sipped her nipple between his lips. Finally, finally, he reached beneath the edge of her panties and stroked her mound, still not delivering his touch where she wanted it, where she needed it.

She cupped his very fine ass, and he closed his teeth over her nipple, looking up at her with lifted eyebrows. To see if she liked it or to send her a message that he was setting the rhythm? She couldn't bear it anymore and lifted her hips, shifting his touch. He lifted his hand away and she opened her mouth to protest, but he only moved to tug down her jeans, baring her, opening her, and lifting her hips to his mouth.

She thought she would go off the minute he touched his tongue to her, but she rode the ridge of pleasure, held her breath as she held his gaze. He glided his touch over her opening, wetting his fingers before sliding them down to her ass, teasing the sensitive nerves there.

And she came, came hard in an orgasm that tore through her, tore her apart. He didn't release her, continued his intimate kiss, sucked her clit until she was limp.

For just a moment, he pulled away to sheath himself. He returned and rose over her, pressing his hips forward, entering her slowly so that all her senses came alive again. Her body opened to him, her heart, until he was fully seated inside her, his groin pressed against her, his hands in her hair, his gaze on hers until he lowered his head to kiss her. As their mouths met, molded, she moved with him, into him, angling her hips to bring him deeper, her fingers stroking his hair. He lifted his head and she caught her breath at the intensity in his eyes. Pleasure creased his face and she traced her fingers over his temple, his cheek, his jaw. He grasped her hand and pressed his lips to her palm as he thrust, muscles flexing with the power of the movement before he stopped, flush against her, emptying his cock in strong pulses that she felt to her very core. With a shift of his weight, his groin pressed against her clit. She parted her legs wider, sliding against the rasp of his pubic hair, the pressure of his body, until she came too, rolling her hips to clasp him deep inside her as she rode out the pleasure. She'd been so wrapped up in watching him, in feeling him, she hadn't realized she was close.

But now she held him, stroked him as his heart pounded with hers, as his sweat-slick body slid along hers. As their breathing evened out, so much she wanted to say bubbled up. But before she dozed off, she managed only one.

“Glad I wasn't wearing my armor for that one. It might've gotten in the way.”

He chuckled and drew her closer to his side.

A couple of hours later, her heart was pounding for another reason. They'd slept until after ten, which meant everyone would be awake. She'd be facing her friends with Eric, the first time she'd ever done so with a man. She was nervous about their reaction, and maybe a little defensive that they'd known about their relationship all along and had let her stress about hiding it. To be honest, though, she hadn't given

anyone much of a chance to fill her in. Eric seemed to understand the significance, because he folded his hand around hers and opened the hotel room door.

“We don’t have to do this today,” he’d said as they’d dressed after their shared shower. “We can wait.”

She’d considered it, as she waffled between anxiety over letting everyone know about their relationship and the urgency to have it done. “No. I’ve put it off too long. The wedding’s over, we won’t be a distraction now.” So why was she so nervous?

They headed down the stairs, hand in hand, and she wondered if he was nervous too. It was wrong of her not to know—what kind of girlfriend did that make her? She glanced up at him before they stepped into the cafeteria. He grinned and lifted her hand to his mouth, kissing it.

Before she could catch her breath, a shout of greeting echoed through the room.

“We wondered where the two of you got to,” Mr. Padalecki said from the table by the window.

“No, we didn’t.” Jill approached from the buffet and leaned in to kiss Haven’s cheek.

Haven struggled to regain her balance. Jill backed off with a smile and, balancing a full plate and a cup of coffee, turned to the table where Colleen and the others sat. Haven scanned the gathering to see others smiling, but most of their attention was on their food, not on them.

Okay, then.

“So when were you going to tell me?” Jill asked, her voice pitched low.

“I didn’t tell anyone.”

“You might have mentioned that he was yours when I was flirting with him, let me know he was taken.”

Haven flushed at the light reprimand. “I didn’t know he was taken.”

“Do you know now?”

Haven reached across the table and found Eric’s hand unerringly. She heard him making plans with Brian for them to go to dinner together. Her heart full, she turned and smiled at him. “Oh, I know. I know.”

About the Author

Emma Jay has been writing for longer than she'd care to admit, using her endless string of celebrity crushes as inspiration for her heroes. She discovered her husband has way more tolerance for screensavers and hunk-decorated blog posts when she calls them her heroes. Emma, married twenty-four years (wed at the age of eight, of course) believes writing romance is like falling in love, over and over again. Creating characters and love stories is an addiction she has no intention of breaking.

He never thought his next wildfire would be wearing a red dress.

Lipstick on His Collar

© 2010 Inez Kelley

“Make me your goddess and I’ll take you to heaven.”

This sultry promise sparks a scorching, unforgettable one-night stand. The next morning Bram Winters awakes with a hickey and a head full of wicked memories—alone. His nameless goddess is gone without a trace, along with his shirt. And his heart.

Five months later, he stumbles across his mystery lady in a Laundromat, but she still won’t give up her name. Worse, she begs him to leave, no questions asked. Once he catches the spark of terror in her eyes, though, his firefighter training takes over—and he digs in for the duration.

Lady never wanted Bram to see her life’s ugly underside, but it’s too late—his socks are already in the washer. He was supposed to be her declaration of independence from her unstable ex, a bittersweet memory to carry into her new life.

Except the ex continues to stalks her. And Bram’s reappearance sends her emotions and desires tumbling over the edge. As the minutes wear on, sexual tension rises faster than the steam from a hot water wash.

And Lady’s ex watches from the shadows, growing more furious by the minute...

Warning: Scorching sex, icy scissor play and an anonymous woman taking a wet slide down one hot ex-fireman’s pole. Beware of hot flashes and spontaneous combustion. Correct change not required.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Lipstick on His Collar:

Behind her, Bram cleared his throat. Her eyes slid closed and she drew in a slow, empowering breath before turning. Both his arms were crossed and one thick ebony brow quirked at an inquisitive angle. “Well, that was interesting. Ex boyfriend or husband?”

“Boyfriend. Bram—” Pushing a stray hair off her forehead, she blew the breath away. “Look, I’m sorry—”

“Just break up?”

Her braid must be too tight. And the broken ventilation system had baked her brain. And maybe the bagel she’d had for lunch was past its due date. That was why her head was throbbing. It had nothing to do with the Jerry Springer-esque turn of her life.

“No. I left him back before we...in June. I broke up with him in June. He just doesn’t get the message. He always comes in about this time and I didn’t want...when you came... I never expected...I just... Seeing you again knocked me off-kilter. Sorry. I didn’t want you involved with something so...ugly.”

A twitch along his upper lip warned her of his gentle smile before it appeared. He relaxed his stance, leaning back on the counter and crossing his ankles. "It's okay. I didn't think I'd see you again either. But I'm glad I found you."

She couldn't breathe. He'd found her, they'd found each other again. It had to be a great big cosmic joke, right? Stuff like that doesn't just happen in real life. Life didn't hand out dreams and wishes like candy. Yet, there he stood.

Damn, he was fine. Half the time, she convinced herself that she'd prettied him up, made him more attractive in her memories, but staring at him now, she knew that mental picture was Kodak-clear. For one night, she'd been the center of his world. They'd shared more than sex; he'd listened, focused on her and heard what she had said. Being his lady, even for a brief moment, had been a precious gift. It had almost been too hard to slide from his bed the next morning. She'd learned to be careful what you wished for because letting the wish go once you'd held it sucked.

"How *did* you find me?"

"I needed clean socks." His smile should be listed on the CDC website because it sent her stomach into shivers and set her skin to tingling. "I'm working on the new 911 center over in Millerton. I didn't know you'd be here. You could've knocked me over with a feather when I saw you."

Feather? Yeah, that is not the force that slammed into her when he'd walked in the door. More like she got whapped with a horny stick. His china-blue gaze fringed with coal-black lashes caressed her from toe to nose and her nipples tightened. A warm pulse formed between her legs. How many sex acts had they done that night? She'd lost count and was sure that shower thing was a new position he'd dreamed up. God knows, he'd filled her dreams nightly for five months. She woke every morning sweaty, empty, and with a gnawing hunger only he had ever satisfied. Her libido growled, demanding to be fed, but she slid around him, waving goodbye to two customers.

He caught her just in front of him, his arm halting her path and drawing her closer to his frame. "So what *is* your name?"

The sultry purr in his tone drew her gaze up and vivid sexual longing sizzled between them. Oh yeah, he was hungry too. His eyes dropped to watch her tongue slick across her lip. Her mouth watered at memories and the buffet she saw unfolding in front of her now. No one said she couldn't she go back for seconds. She licked her lips again just to feel his chest rise with a deep inhale. Feminine power filled her, and she returned his purr, gliding her fingers along his biceps.

"Now, where's the fun in telling you that? I like being mysterious."

"Mysterious? You are that." Deep, dark and thick with desire, his voice melted like chocolate and a craving gripped her. Bram in the throes of orgasm was a luscious, intoxicating sound. God, he was delicious and she wanted more. He angled closer, until his warm breath whispered on her cheek. "You're not going to tell me?"

“No.” If she leaned two inches in, she could kiss him.

“That’s not fair.” Bram shifted one inch closer.

“All’s fair in... whatever.”

“It wouldn’t take me three seconds to find out your name. All I’d have to do is go next door to the”—
he turned his head and read through the window—“Flower Power Florist and ask.”

She poked his ribs. “That’d be cheating. Play my game, Bram.”

“Come on, you owe me. You stole my shirt.”

A smile curved her mouth. “Fair exchange. You ripped my dress.”

“So I did.” His low chuckle was tinged with sinful temptation. “Should I apologize?”

“I’d rather you didn’t.”

“Good. I don’t want to.”

She could plant her lips right on his and dip her tongue into his mouth. If she moved. One inch. A scant distance. He smelled of coffee, brisk wind and pure male. Her heart galloped in her chest, echoing a sudden pulse in her pussy. He oozed sex appeal like an over-wet sponge and she wanted to suck every drop. One damn inch was all she needed. She closed the gap.

Lust exploded. Her ears popped with the force of the attraction, and a low sigh heated her mouth before he deepened the kiss to indecent levels. She could distinctly recall three kisses in her life—Bobby Allegro behind the gym in fifth grade, Cliff Meyers on prom night and Bram, on a makeshift fire-department parking-lot dance floor.

In the long months they’d been apart, she hadn’t forgotten his kiss. She was so screwed.

Summer just got a whole lot hotter.

What She Wants

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Summer Chase has loved and lost, and she has no intention of ever going through that pain again. But when a Camaro-driving hunk shows up at her B&B looking for a room for the week, she sees something more than a hard-bodied guest. For the first time since her husband's death, her sexual interest is awakened—and she's not about to hit the snooze button.

P.I. Gage Knight is in desperate need of a vacation. An impromptu trip to Cape May, New Jersey is just what he needs to relax and unwind. But when he knocks on the B&B's door and comes face to face with its sexy owner, *relaxing* drops to the bottom of his to-do list. Now all he wants is a tasty Summer treat, and he plans to savor the curvaceous beauty one delectable inch at a time.

Gage's smoldering kisses turn Summer inside out, not to mention what he does to the rest of her body. But when it's time for him to drive off into the sunset, she comes to a horrifying realization—she's lost her heart.

Warning: This story contains a hard-as-nails, ornery, demanding, tattooed PI eager to please, a widow ready to get back to the business of living and loving, and the kind of hot summer sex that you just might want to bookmark for later.

Enjoy the following excerpt for What She Wants:

As the hostess led the way through the crowded restaurant, Summer turned back to Gage and whispered, "I really can't think of a better beach restaurant. Their crab cakes are fantastic."

When they reached their table, Gage held her chair for her and murmured, "I trust your expert judgment, sweetheart."

They were seated in the covered rear garden terrace. Summer's heart beat erratically, nearly drowning out the simple romantic beauty of the moment. It'd been so long since she'd enjoyed a meal with a member of the opposite sex in any kind of romantic way.

Though Summer had guy friends, friendship couldn't replace her need for intimacy. Tender touches and warm kisses—she hadn't realized how much she missed those things until Gage had shown up at her door. Sparks had flown. Being with him, even in such an innocent way as having dinner, caused Summer's juices to stir.

"So, Summer, do you come to this restaurant often?"

"I wish, but no, I'm usually too busy."

He leaned across the table. "You should never be too busy for fun."

Man, he was sexy. Summer's mind blanked as she gazed at him. In the muted light, his smooth, tan head shone. She'd never known how sexy a bald man could be until Gage. She had the urge to run her fingers over his scalp. His five o'clock shadow only added to his dark, masculine appeal. If she were bold like Tory, she'd reach out and stroke his firm jaw. Too bad she wasn't. He was so damn good-looking, and she really wanted to touch him. All over. For hours.

"Summer?"

"Oh, yes, I think you're exactly right," she breathed out. Lordy, even when she'd married Seth she hadn't been this excited. That thought gave her a momentary pang of guilt. Thinking of Seth and looking at Gage, she knew it was way past time for her to move on with her life. She'd been stagnant too long.

Seth would have never wanted her to pine away for him forever, living in the past and shoving the future further and further beyond her reach. He'd want her to move on, get through the grieving and get to the living.

With just a hint of an ornery smile playing at the corners of Gage's lips, Summer had a feeling he was the sort of man who lived life to its fullest. Even his profession was exciting. A private eye. Scandal and intrigue. Action and danger. Yep, definitely more exciting than running a B&B. What would it be like to make love to the roguish man? He was like a juicy steak sitting on the edge of the table, and she was the puppy dying to sink her teeth into the scrumptious feast. So close. All she had to do was reach out and she'd have him in her voracious mouth.

"Hey, Summer, care to share?"

"Share?"

"You looked pretty far off there for a second."

She waved his words away. "It doesn't matter. Tell me, what made you choose Cape May for your vacation?"

He picked up his fork and started back on his pan-seared cod. "My aunt made it sound pretty appealing." The fork stopped halfway to his mouth. His lips curved upward as he said, "So far, she was right on the money."

She took a sip of her diet cola. "You talk a lot about her. Are you close to her?" When she realized he'd stopped eating, she knew she'd said something wrong. "What did I say?"

"You don't know what happened to my parents?"

Her heart clenched at the obvious pain in his voice. "No, I'm sorry."

"They were killed at a carryout. Some guy high on acid came in and demanded money from the clerk. The clerk gave him what he wanted, but the asshole was so far gone he started shooting. Later he told the police he'd been trying to kill the *snakes*. Hallucinations. Mom was shot in the chest. She died instantly. Dad was shot three times. He died on the way to the hospital. The clerk took a bullet in the arm. He survived."

“Gage...I’m so sorry.”

He nodded. “It was years ago. I’d just graduated from college when it happened. Aunt Bev sort of stepped in and took over where mom left off. She’s been pretty great.”

“I’m glad you had her.”

“Me too. Anyway, that’s the reason I became a private investigator. I wanted to help people.”

Summer understood loss all too well. She also knew words were useless. She reached across the table and placed her hand over his. When he turned his palm up and twined his fingers with hers, the air around them changed, heated. Her comforting gesture had quickly morphed into something much more, much deeper.

Trying to act nonchalant, Summer slipped her hand from his and inquired, “So, how long have you been a PI?”

“I hung out my shingle five years ago. It was tough going at first, but now I can be choosy.”

“Do you enjoy the work?”

“I can set my own hours. I don’t have a boss breathing down my neck. The money is good. All in all, not too bad. Every job has its drawbacks, though.”

Just then the waiter came over and asked if they wanted dessert. She was about to refuse, but Gage spoke up before she could get the words out.

“What do you have in the way of chocolate?”

“Our chocolate pie is pretty popular.”

“Send us a big slice.”

“Us?”

He pushed his plate away. “I’m not eating it all by myself. You’re helping.”

Her stomach loved the idea, but her hips not so much. “Uh-uh, I can’t afford the calories.”

His gaze traveled to her chest and back up again. “A few bites of pie won’t hurt. Trust me.”

She laughed and caved. “Who am I to refuse chocolate?”

He winked. “That’s the spirit.”

As they drove home, Gage had to grip the steering wheel to keep his hands from reaching toward Summer. Damn, it’d been hell watching her eat the chocolate pie. The little sounds of satisfaction she made after each bite had his mind going straight to the gutter.

He took his eyes off the road long enough to see her stroking the smooth leather seat with a fingertip. Hell, Gage wanted that finger on the head of his dick. She wiggled as if attempting to get more comfortable. The movement caused her pretty breasts to jiggle beneath her beige tank top. To keep from

drooling, Gage focused on the road again. When he spotted her house, he pulled into the driveway and killed the engine, then turned toward her. "We're home."

"Yes, we are," she whispered.

His gaze roamed over her possessively before he leaned in and brushed his lips over hers. "Like satin. I bet you're like that all over, aren't you, sweetheart?"

"M-maybe you should find out for yourself."

Could he be hearing her right? "Summer?"

"I should be playing hard to get, I know, but I want you, Gage."

"I want you too."

She eyed his crotch and smiled. "I sort of gathered."

He stroked her hair, enjoying the soft strands beneath his fingers. "You go to a man's head, sweetheart."

"I'm glad."

He cupped her cheek and murmured, "You're sure?"

"Very."

Hell, yeah.



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