



SNOWBOUND SERIES BOOK 2

*Snowbound
New Year*

Veronica Tower

Red Rose Publishing

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By

Veronica Tower



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Chapter One

The Airport

Kara's fingers tightened around Ron's hand as the plane swooped down toward the runway. She squeezed hard enough to hurt her new boyfriend, even if he would never admit it. She didn't enjoy flying in the best of weather, but the snowstorms that had pummeled New York and Detroit over the last few days had made her especially uneasy about the prospect. Ice and snow belonged in the Winter Olympics, not on the wings of planes and on the runway.

Ron patted her hand in what he probably assumed was a reassuring gesture, but Kara scarcely noticed it. She closed her eyes, leaned back in her seat so that her head pressed hard against the back of her chair, and braced her feet against the floor as she waited for that sickening skip that announced the plane had kissed earth again. It wasn't actually the skip that bothered Kara, it was the all too vividly imagined picture of what could happen next. A blown tire, an unexpected twist on the steering yoke, a lingering patch of ice or a sharp gust of wind at just the

wrong moment could all be followed by the screeching sound of impending death as the plane tumbled toward the airport.

Ron's lips kissed the top of her head—something that shouldn't be possible if he was in the proper landing position with his seatbelt firmly in place. She opened her eyes to scold him but the tires chose that moment to bump against the runway and then all of her fears evaporated as the sounds of rushing air increased and the speed of the plane obviously slowed.

"You see," Ron told her. "We're home safe and sound—nothing at all to worry about."

Kara tried to hide her embarrassment. "I wasn't worried," she lied.

Ron smiled and raised the hand she was holding. Her brown fingers remained clenched tightly around his white ones. "Good," he said, "then this just means you still like holding hands."

Kara forced herself to ease her grip. "Of course, I do," she said. "What woman wouldn't want to hold hands with you?"

"I think you've got that backwards," he said. "Didn't you mean to say, what man wouldn't want to hold hands with you?"

Kara rewarded him with a smile, even as a little voice in the back of her mind doubted his words. Ron was tall, broad and handsome with clear blue eyes and Nordic blond hair. He was also relatively young, twenty-five she guessed,

although she hadn't yet found the opportunity to ask him. She really wasn't certain what had attracted him to her. She knew she was attractive with her generous bosom, long dark hair and deep ebony skin, but she'd also seen her fortieth birthday and she hadn't quite come to grips with the turn of events that had just led her to spend three whole days in bed with this handsome young man.

It was unlike her, and it all seemed surreal even though she was still living the experience.

Four days ago, Bobby had dropped her off at the airport for her flight back to Detroit—without having the decency to mention he'd left a breakup note in her suitcase. She still hadn't seen that note. The arrival of a nor'easter out of Canada had paralyzed the airport preventing her plane from flying out. When Bobby had refused to drive back to the airport to rescue her—reference the still unread breakup note—Ron, her seatmate on the plane, had dedicated himself to resuscitating Kara's flagging spirits. And he was still reviving them as he sat beside her on the plane.

Kara wasn't completely comfortable with everything that had happened since Ron entered her life. Public sex and one night stands were not things she had been raised to believe were acceptable behavior. Except that it had been three nights—not one—and all the signs so far agreed that Ron was serious when he said he wanted to keep seeing her in Detroit.

If only he wasn't so much younger. Her mother was going to have a fit when she found out—and that would be before Kara told her Ron was white.

At least she wouldn't have to worry about Mama for a week or two. No one in her family had to know about Ron at all until Kara was certain there was something durable enough there to make it worth the fights his mere existence were going to cause.

"Shhhh, stop that," Ron whispered.

Kara blinked, twice. What was Ron talking about? Had she made some sound?

Ron rubbed his thumb gently across her lips, caressing the flesh, and even playing with them a little. "You're frowning," he explained. "The only time I want those lips to stop smiling is when they're kissing me."

The corners of Kara's mouth edged skyward. "You know I don't have to stop smiling when I kiss you."

"Are you certain?" Ron asked. "Maybe we should test that theory."

He leaned forward and pressed his mouth against hers. His lips were warm and hard; his tongue teasing.

Ron pulled back too soon, leaving Kara breathing just a little bit harder than she'd been when the kissing started. "I didn't see a smile," he told her.

"Maybe your eyes were closed," she suggested.

“Let’s try again.”

He leaned forward, but the plane turned left before their lips could touch again. Startled, Kara latched on to her armrest and braced herself.

Ron seemed less concerned about the plane’s movement. In fact, he seemed less concerned about everything—far more at ease with himself than Kara could ever hope to be. He lightly caressed the top of her hand, subtly encouraging her to loosen her grip on the armrest. “You do know that the worst we could do now is bump into the terminal or something? We’re quite safe.”

Kara released her grip feeling more embarrassed than ever. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” she confessed. “I’ve never liked flying, but I’ve never been afraid of it before either.”

Ron slid her newly freed hand between both of his. “These weren’t the best conditions,” he reminded her.

“Yes, but—”

“Hush,” Ron whispered as he leaned in to kiss her again.

This time, he didn’t stop kissing her until the flight attendant announced they’d arrived at the terminal.



“That one’s mine!”

Kara pointed at the brown piece of luggage as it appeared on the conveyer belt and Ron darted off through the crowd to claim it. He moved well, gracefully, like an athlete still capable of stepping onto the field to play the game—not just remember the big ones over a few drinks. He got ahead of the bag, snagged the handle and wrenched it off of the carousel. It was obviously heavier than he remembered because the bag lurched suddenly toward the floor before Ron compensated for the true weight and swung it up beside him.

He returned at a more leisurely pace but with no further sign that Kara's luggage presented any problem for him. That didn't stop her from feeling a twinge of guilt for having packed so heavily.

"All of my suitcases have wheels," she pointed out when Ron drew close enough that she didn't have to shout to be heard.

Ron set the bag down beside her other ones. "It's easier to carry it when I'm weaving in and out around all of these people."

Kara stepped up against him and slid her hand inside his open coat to feel his well-defined abs. The gesture made her feel very bold. "Are you sure you're not just showing off all of these muscles to impress your new girlfriend?"

"Well that depends," Ron said. He wrapped his own arms around Kara and encouraged her to lean tighter against him. Her arms slid around his back, under his coat. His torso felt hard and fit against her body. "Are you impressed?"

“Oh, most definitely.” She worked her cheek against his shoulder, searching for a comfortable place to rest it. “Who wouldn’t be?”

Ron kissed the top of her head. “You always know the right things to say.”

Kara looked up into his deep blue eyes, not certain how to answer him. Did she admit that she wanted desperately to say the right things? Or did she pass it off as something that just came naturally?

Ron removed the need for Kara to answer by kissing her again—zeroing in on her lips as she tilted her face up toward his. He started out tenderly, but in a very few moments his actions grew more urgent. His tongue thrust hard against hers, reaching deep into her mouth to make her whole body tingle.

Someone brushed against them on their way to the baggage carousel and Kara broke the kiss. She had to close her eyes for a moment while she reoriented herself and steadied her breathing. They were standing in an airport with the public moving all around them. There were limits to how far she’d let Ron take them. She wasn’t going to duplicate what they’d done in Newark. Not that there was any need to this time. In Newark they had been snowed in—trapped in the terminal. Here they were little more than an hour away from her home. They had all night to kiss and love each other—at least until it was time to get up and go to work tomorrow.

Ron evidently had other plans. His left hand cupped her chin and gently guided her face back toward his. He didn't seem even the slightest bit concerned about all of the people milling around them. His lips touched hers again.

"Why don't we go find your car?" Kara interrupted him.

Ron hesitated, then his eyebrow arched and he grinned. "Okay, if that's where you prefer. It's cold outside but it will be more private than this terminal."

Heat rushed to Kara's face. "I mean to drive us to my house!"

Ron's grin widened. "We can do that too—eventually."

"Ron!"

He responded to her tone by lowering his voice and bending his head past her cheek to whisper in her ear. "I want to kiss you now!" he told her. "I want to feel your lips pressed hard against mine while I slide my hands inside your blouse and feel your hot skin tremble beneath my fingers. And if you'll remember our Christmas Day Agreement, you promised to let me have you any day, any place and any time I have the urge."

Kara's knees quaked and she leaned more fully against her man.

Ron kissed her, sending his tongue deep inside Kara's mouth, encouraging her to mold her body against his as he breathed in her air. Her legs turned to jelly but Ron didn't seem to notice. He was strong enough for both of them, holding her against him as he made love to her mouth, letting his tongue show her how to

intertwine their souls. She could feel the pulse beating in her chest and in her throat, or was that his heart racing, sharing its tempo through their flesh, melding them into one body, one heart, one mind-

“Kara?”

The shocked voice penetrated the outer surface of Kara’s consciousness but failed to fully register in her brain. Ron continued kissing her, his strong arms encircling her, holding her body tight against his.

“Kara? Is that you? What are you—”

This time the voice of Kara’s sister registered. She broke the kiss and looked about her in surprise. “Ruth? What are you doing here?”

Her sister and brother-in-law stood three feet away with expressions too extreme to qualify as mere shock or surprise.

“Mama sent us to pick you up!” Ruth said. There was anger or maybe outrage behind her sister’s shock and an abrupt surge of embarrassment kept Kara from getting righteously upset about it.

She tried to back out of Ron’s embrace but he didn’t relinquish his hold on her. Instead he pivoted so that one arm slipped behind her shoulders and they could face Ruth and Al together.

Kara didn’t need his support. “I told Mama I had a ride home,” she said. “What are you doing here?”

Her sister smirked. “I guess you did. It’s just that she thought you were talking about a car service, not a...” Ruth paused for a moment, searching for a word to describe Ron. If Kara knew her sister as well as she thought she did, Ruth was probably consciously discarding words like *lover* or *playmate* for terms she found more publicly palatable.

“Not a *friend*,” she finally said to complete her dangling sentence.

Ron squared his shoulders and stepped forward to offer Al his hand.

“Name’s Ron,” he said.

Al hesitated for one excruciatingly long moment, then looked to his wife to see how he should answer.

Kara had had enough of this. What, were they all in high school again? “Oh for God’s sake, Al” she sputtered. “You can’t shake hands without permission? Ruth this is Ron, my new boyfriend.” That might have been harder to say if steam weren’t shooting out her ears just now. “Ron, this is my sister, Ruth, and her husband, Al.”

Al finally stepped up and extended his hand toward Ron. He looked embarrassed, but that didn’t make his expression friendly. He gripped Ron’s hand and squeezed, obviously playing the old *whose handshake is stronger* game.

Ron didn’t seem to mind.

Ruth decided to do the civil thing. “It’s nice to meet you, Ron,” she said. “I’m sorry you’re not catching us at our best. Kara should have told us she was bringing a new boyfriend home.”

“Oh, I would have,” Kara said. She wasn’t trying to kill her sister with her glare—just seriously injure her. “If I’d thought that there was any possibility of him meeting you tonight. I told Mama I had a ride. Why on earth didn’t you call me on my cell phone before you drove out here to meet me?”

Ruth puffed out her chest preparing to retort in kind.

Ron interrupted her. “I’ve got an idea. Why don’t we treat this little miscommunication as serendipity and take advantage of the opportunity to go out to dinner and get better acquainted?”

Ruth didn’t appreciate being interrupted. She wrenched her head around to face Ron and opened her mouth to tell him just what she thought of his manners.

Kara intervened. “That’s a wonderful idea!” she lied. “I was thinking we’d wait a couple of weeks to get together, but since the four of us are here, why don’t we grab a quick bite to eat.”

Kara’s agreement with Ron’s suggestion off footed Ruth. It clearly didn’t conform to the script she was writing in her head for their argument. “What?”

Kara took full advantage of the opportunity Ruth’s surprise offered her. She entwined her arm in Ron’s and turned up the wattage on her smile. “What? Did

you think I was hiding this relationship? I didn't tell Mama over the phone about Ron because once I told her I'd broken up with Bobby she'd want to spend a few hours telling me everything I'd done wrong in that relationship. I'd have put up with that if it was just me, because, well, you know how Mama is. But I wasn't going to spend hours talking about Bobby when my new boyfriend was sitting right beside me."

"What did happen to Bobby?" Al asked.

Both women turned to look askance at him. Ruth's sense of propriety worked in Kara's favor this time. "She just told you she didn't want to talk about him in front of her new boyfriend," Ruth snapped.

Al shrugged. "I liked Bobby," he said. "He was a little full of himself with his business degree, but he really knew his football."

"Lions?" Ron asked.

"Of course."

"College ball?"

For the first time Al smiled. "Every Saturday."

Ron smiled also.

Kara took advantage of the moment of male bonding to suggest dinner again. She didn't really want to go. What she wanted to do was take Ron home, rip off his clothes, and intimately introduce him to her bedroom. But she was

pragmatic enough to realize that Ruth and Al's arrival had already spoiled those plans. Her phone would ring off the hook tonight if she didn't start sating the family's curiosity about Ron and Bobby.

"So what about dinner? We can go get Ron's car and meet at T. G. I. Friday's or Houlihan's."

Ruth's frown deepened slightly. She was bright enough to know that the answers she wanted from Kara wouldn't come out over dinner. On the other hand, an hour or two with Kara's new man gave her a chance to learn things Kara might not even know yet. "I think we could do that," she agreed.

"Your mother is watching our kids," Al reminded her.

Ruth nodded. "We can't stay out long. You know how Mama is."

Kara did know. Mama loved her grandchildren, but she hated being responsible for them. She thought Ruth and Al had been far too lax as parents. An hour or two of the kids fighting over the remote control to determine whose television show they were going to watch would have steam shooting out of Mama's ears. She hesitated, not knowing what to suggest.

Ron came to her rescue. "It's your choice," he told Ruth. His fingers intertwined with Kara's. "I'm not going anywhere. If you can't make dinner tonight, we'll try again in a week or two."

Ron's suggestion empowered Ruth's contrariness. "Oh, we can make dinner tonight! We'll just have to make certain the place we go to is quick to wait on us."

"T.G.I. Friday's?" Kara suggested again.

Ruth nodded in agreement.

"Good," Al said. "Why don't we get those bags out to our car then?"

Ron stiffened slightly beside Kara. She knew exactly what was bothering him. "I'll be riding with Ron," Kara said, "but we'd appreciate a ride out to his car if you're parked close by."

Al looked at Ruth as if seeking instructions. He clearly was unhappy with Kara's request. Why was he being so difficult? She'd made it very clear that Ron and she were together and they weren't sneaking around. What business was it of his who she rode with?

Ruth also looked uncomfortable, but she covered it better than Al had. "Of course we can drive you out," she said. "Have you seen the lots yet? We really had a lot of snow and they've done a terrible job cleaning it up."

Chapter Two

The Ride

A terrible job didn't come anywhere close to describing how bad the parking lot looked. It honestly might have been better for Ron if they hadn't plowed. He had left his vehicle in a corner of the long term parking that seemed to double as a dumping ground for the trucks. It looked as if every time one of the big machines turned at the end of the lot it had dumped a little bit of its load behind the three or four cars in the corner and no one had followed behind with a shovel to clean up the mess.

"Crap!" Ron cursed, drawing a sharp glance from Ruth. He got out of the back seat of Al's car and surveyed the problem. There had to be more than four feet of snow piled up behind his vehicle and that was in addition to the eighteen inches that had settled between Ron's car and the ones beside it, or the foot more that had settled on top of it. "This is going to take forever to dig out."

Al got out of the driver's side door and stood shivering in the wind. "It almost looks like they tried to bury you," he said.

This observation restored Ron's good humor. He chuckled. "No, I've actually seen examples of the plows trying to bury a car. It's a lot worse than this."

Kara gritted her teeth and got out with the men. She didn't want to. The brief walk to her sister's car from the terminal had demonstrated that the temperature in Detroit was about twenty degrees cooler than it had been in Newark. Lake Michigan was responsible, she assumed. The lake got blamed for just about everything weather related in this part of the country.

She hugged her coat more tightly around her and carefully made her way through the snow to stand beside Ron. Even the salting of the pavement in this spot was subpar. "How are we going to get it out?" she asked.

Ron slipped his arm around her and tried to shield her from the wind. "I have some tools in the back of my jeep," he said. "It will take me a while to get to them without dumping all of this snow in the back of my vehicle, but after that it's just a matter of digging."

Ruth got out of the car. "I don't mean to be rude, but we don't have a lot of time," she reminded them. "Is there any way we can go to dinner now? Maybe you could come back for the car tomorrow."

Ron shook his head. "I have to go to work tomorrow and I need my car. Look, there's no need for the three of you to wait here with me. Why don't you go ahead and get a bite to eat while I handle this?"

This time it was Kara's turn to shake her head. Not only was it not right to leave Ron to deal with this alone but she really didn't want to ride home with her sister. "I want to stay with you!"

Ron grinned. "And what? Freeze? You're shivering already and it hasn't been two minutes yet. Let your sister take you someplace warm. I'll call you when I finish digging myself out. Maybe we'll be lucky and it won't take too long."

Looking at the size of the job confronting Ron, Kara knew they weren't going to get lucky—pun intended. It was already late and this was going to take forever. If she helped him, maybe they could still salvage the evening. She bolstered her resolve, wishing she hadn't worn a skirt which seemed to welcome every frigid gust of wind to explore between her legs. "I can help," she said. "It will make things go faster."

"No!" Ron said. His voice left no room for compromise. Under normal conditions this would bother Kara, but seeing as she really didn't want to spend the evening shoveling snow, she changed her tactics. "I could wait in your car with the heater on."

Ron cupped her cold chin with his gloved fingers. "Kara, it's sweet you want to stay with me, but why don't you go and get warm? This isn't goodbye. It's just an interruption."

Kara conceded defeat. It was so damned cold that a question and answer session with her sister was starting to look good by comparison. “When am I going to see you again?” she asked.

“Tonight, I hope,” Ron said. “I’ll call you when I’m out. This isn’t going to change our original plans.”

Kara smiled. She should have remembered she was dating Ron now and not Bobby. Ron was never too tired and always interested.

An unusually strong gust of wind penetrated her coat and added some urgency to her words. “Alright then! You’ll call me as soon as you’re done?”

“It’s a date!” Ron promised. He leaned in to kiss her. His lips were cold but his tongue was warm and inviting.

Kara remembered her sister and brother-in-law were watching her and broke the kiss much too early. “I still feel bad about leaving you,” she said. “Al could—”

Al had shown no signs of wanting to help and Ron obviously noticed this. “Al needs to get home too,” Ron said. “I’ll be fine. I’ll see you in a little bit.”

Uncertainly, Kara returned to the car. Ron looked so cold standing there waiting for her to leave. At least he had gloves on. That was something, anyway.

She waved tentatively through the window. The car heater was already removing the chill of the parking lot.

Ron waved back.

“Are we ready?” Al asked.

He didn’t wait for her to answer before he started to drive away.



“So where did you meet this *young* man, Kara?” Ruth asked.

Kara had been dreading these questions. And now she had no choice but to sit back and let her sister intrude into her life. She had to struggle to modulate her voice so that she didn’t sound defensive. She wasn’t certain that she succeeded.

“We met at the airport. Our seats were next to each other on the plane and when the flight was cancelled we sort of stuck together.”

“In the airport,” Ruth repeated. “So he’s a stranger.”

Kara rolled her eyes, even though her sister couldn’t see her do it. “Ron was a stranger,” she clarified, “now he’s my boyfriend.”

“Hey, what happened with Bobby?” Al asked. “I really thought the two of you would get married one day.”

Ruth turned on her husband. “Al, I’m handling this!”

“No, it’s okay, Ruth,” Kara said. Then the full meaning of Kara’s response sank in. “And you’re not *handling* anything. There is, in fact, nothing to be *handled*. Who I date is none of your business!”

Ruth turned around in her seat so she could look back at Kara over her shoulder. "It's just he's so much younger than you," she said.

"And he's white!" Al said. He didn't sound angry, just perplexed. "Didn't you used to say that you thought sisters should marry black men?"

"No, that was Liz," Ruth corrected her husband. "And she probably still thinks that, she just doesn't say it as often. And didn't I tell you to stay out of this?"

"For God's sakes, Ruth, not that I want either of you asking me about these things, but why the hell can't Al ask a question?"

"Thank you," Al said.

"I'll thank you," Ruth said to Kara, "to not interfere in a matter between me and my husband."

"And what are you doing?" Kara shot back. "You're trying to interfere with Ron and me."

"That's different," Ruth explained. "I'm trying to help you. It's obvious that you're rebounding after your break up with Bobby and I don't want to see you make a fool of yourself."

Ruth had knowingly just struck at the heart of Kara's own doubts, but she wasn't going to give her older sister the satisfaction of letting her see she had scored some points. "I don't think you have to worry about that," she said. "Did you get a good look at Ron? There's nothing to be embarrassed about there!"

“Of course there is,” her sister said. “What is he, twenty years younger than you?”

Score another point for Ruth, Kara thought, but she didn’t think she let her sister see that she was winning. “He might be twenty years younger than *you*, Ruth, but he certainly isn’t twenty years younger than *me*!”

Ruth bristled, but before she could respond, Al interrupted again. “So what did happen with Bobby?”

“Can’t you keep quiet for five minutes?” his wife asked.

“Bobby found a new girlfriend, but he didn’t have the courage to tell me that face to face, or the decency to tell me over the phone before I flew out to New York.”

“Oh,” Al said. For a moment or two, he was clearly searching for something more to say. Finally he settled for, “That really sucks, Kara. You deserve way better than that.”

“Thanks, Al,” Kara said. “That means a lot to me.” And it did. She’d never been close to Ruth’s husband, but his sympathy was clearly genuine.

“And that just reinforces my point,” Ruth said. “You’re rebounding. Bobby mistreated you and now you’re taking up with a man half your age—”

“So how did he do it then?” Al interrupted.

Ruth wheeled upon him. “Will you stop interrupting me? I’m trying to have a conversation with my sister!”

Al’s voice dropped in volume as if he were trying to make his point without starting a fight. Kara had always thought that Ruth wore the pants in her marriage, but watching Al stand up to her sister now, she was no longer so certain. “No, babe,” he said. “You’re lecturing her and trying to make her feel bad when what I think she needs to do is talk about how Bobby mistreated her.”

“But I—”

“Need to think about Kara right now. There will be plenty of time to talk about Ron later.”

“But—”

“Later,” Al repeated. If anything, his voice had grown softer as he spoke to his wife. There were no exclamation points, no macho posturing, and Ruth’s voice had dropped in volume with his.

“But Mama will—”

“Your mother can get her own information. And while Ron’s age may bother her, it’s not going to be her primary complaint. Why don’t you and I give Kara and Ron a couple of weeks to see if they really want to date before we go making life harder on them?”

Kara leaned forward in the backseat and patted Al on the shoulder.

“Thanks,” she said. “That’s really very thoughtful of you.” She turned to Ruth. “Ron is just a really sweet guy who makes me feel wonderful. I need that right now. I don’t know why you want to make such a big deal about it.”

Ruth didn’t seem to know what to say next, so Al stepped back into the conversation. “So how did you find out that Bobby had a new girlfriend?” he asked. “You didn’t catch them together, did you?”

“No, nothing that bad,” Kara said. “When my flight got cancelled I called him from the airport and asked him to come pick me up. He didn’t come. When I called him back in a couple of hours he asked me if I’d read his card. He—”

Ruth’s temper flared again. “Are you saying he broke up with you by card?”

“Apparently so,” Kara said. “I can’t say for sure because I haven’t seen it yet.”

“What?”

“When I phoned him the second time, he started to explain about the card and then his new girlfriend got on the phone and told me to shove off.”

“Oh, that’s bad,” Al said.

“It could have been worse,” Kara said. “As you pointed out, I could have caught them together.”

“But if he was already with someone else, why didn’t he stop you from coming out?”

Kara had asked herself this very question about ten thousand times in the past couple of days. “I guess to be fair, he tried to. Bobby was never enthusiastic about this visit. If you recall, it was his turn to come visit me and he kept putting it off, so I decided to go to him. I feel so stupid!”

Al’s voice was no longer quiet. “This is not your fault and you have nothing to feel stupid about. If Bobby was even half a man he would have told you up front he was seeing someone else. He sure as hell wouldn’t have let you fly halfway across the country so he could get a last fuck!”

“Al, watch your language!” Ruth snapped. “You’re talking to my sister not your employees!”

“It just really makes me angry!” Al said. “Bobby’s damn lucky he doesn’t live in Detroit anymore or I’d go visit him and make sure he understands how badly he’s screwed up this time!”

“Language!” Ruth snapped again.

Al’s short tirade began to make Kara feel better about her frustrations with Bobby. Al had liked him. If he could take her side, then she really must not be to blame. “Oh, I guess it’s for the best,” she said. “Long distance relationships are hard, and Bobby really was kind of old for me.”

Kara’s eyes widened as she realized what she had just said.

Her sister nodded knowingly.

Chapter Three

Phone Calls

The phone rang not three minutes after Kara took her coat off. She hadn't gotten the television on yet, so the caller ID information was not displayed on the big screen as she hurried across her small living room to reach the receiver. It was only as she hit the little button that connected the call that she remembered that Ron didn't have her home phone number—just her cell.

"Hello?" she asked, already fearing she knew who would be on the other end of the call.

"What's this I hear about you kissing a white boy in public?" her mother asked.

Kara sighed. She knew she shouldn't do it, but she couldn't suppress the impulse.

"Now don't you go giving me any of your attitude!" her mother snapped.

"Hello, Mama," Kara said. "Yes, my trip turned out rather nicely, thanks for asking."

“Don’t make me repeat myself!” her mother said. “I deserve to be treated with respect!”

Kara sank down onto her sofa. “So do I, Mama. I’m forty years old. You’ve no cause to talk to me like I’m sixteen.”

“Well you’re acting like your sixteen from what I hear. Dating a white child! What could you be thinking of?”

Kara smiled—an image of Ron’s broad naked chest flashing before her eyes. Not that she could share that image with Mama—or the other images now flashing through her brain. “He’s not a child, Mama. He’s an adult man! And I’m not a child either!”

“Ruth says he’s young enough to be your son!”

Oh did she? Kara wondered. It was completely possible but it wasn’t certain either. Her mother could not be trusted to tell a story straight. “Ruth is just jealous,” she said. “I’m not certain you can trust anything she says on this.”

“So he’s not younger than you?” her mother asked.

“Of course he’s younger, but I’d have had to be awfully young when I got pregnant for him to be my child and I’m pretty certain you raised me better than that.”

“I raised you better than this too!” her mother said. “What are you trying to do? Embarrass all of us? Black women should not date white men!”

Kara felt her temper stirring. She always tried to restrain it with her mother because no one won a fight with the old woman. “What’s there to be embarrassed about?”

“Letting this white man take advantage of you!” her mother shouted.

At least she had evolved to calling Ron a *man*. “Isn’t the older woman the one who’s usually accused of *taking advantage*?”

“Now don’t you get flip with me! I won’t have it!”

“Respect is a two way street,” Kara said.

“I said I won’t have it!” her mother shouted.

The opening lyrics to *Independent Woman* began to play in the kitchen where Kara had left her cell phone. “Hold on!” she told her mother then scrambled to her feet and hurried to answer it.

“Don’t you dare put me on hold!” her mother shouted.

Kara ignored her, snatched the cell phone off the kitchen table, and clicked the button with the image of the little green phone on it. “Hello?”

“Hello, yourself, beautiful, how would you like to help warm up a poor frozen engineer?”

“Are you just—”

She broke off when her mother began shouting through the other phone again. “Don’t you dare ignore me—”

She disconnected the line, knowing she would pay a price for it later but not wanting her mother to spoil things with Ron.

“Are you just finishing getting your car clear?”

“No, of course not,” Ron said. “I’m actually driving in the general direction of your house. With any luck I can be there in twenty minutes.”

“How do you know where I live?” Kara asked.

“I don’t precisely, but you said it was somewhere in Westland and so that’s the direction I’m driving.”

Kara’s landline began ringing but she consciously ignored it. “And you waited to call me because...”

“Because I wanted to make certain you were already home before you talked to me. Your sister didn’t seem too pleased that we’re dating and I didn’t want to give her the chance to change your mind about letting me come over and make love to you tonight.”

A rush of heat surged through Kara’s body. “I’m glad you waited,” she said. “I wouldn’t want anything to discourage you from coming over.”

Her phone began ringing again and Ron clearly heard it.

“Is that your other line?” he asked.

Kara sighed. “It’s my mother. Apparently Ruth got on the phone the moment I got out of her car and told her about you.”

Ron hesitated a moment before saying, “I see. And am I to assume that like your sister she’s less than happy to learn of my existence?”

Kara sighed again. “I’m sorry, Ron. I think they’re going to try and make this hard on us.”

“That’s okay, I guess. I mean, we don’t know how my family is going to react yet either.”

Kara felt the muscles of her throat constrict making it difficult for her to speak. She hadn’t been thinking about how Ron’s family would react to their son dating an older black woman. Of course they wouldn’t be pleased.

Her phone started to ring again but she ignored it. “Do you think they’ll have a problem with me?”

“It’s hard to say,” Ron prevaricated. “Even if my mother disagrees with us dating, she’ll probably refuse to say anything because you’re black. She’s very liberal and she’ll be afraid that any hesitations she has about us dating will be misinterpreted as racial prejudice.”

Kara took a moment to digest that. It was often difficult to tell if a woman like Ron’s mother really was prejudiced or not. “So you think she’ll have a problem, but not tell us?” She asked.

“Definitely not with your race,” Ron said.

“But?”

“But she might have a problem with your age,” Ron conceded. “She wants more grandchildren and...”

“And I’m old enough that she can’t be sure I’ll give them to her,” Kara finished.

Ron tried to laugh the concern off. “It’s a bit early to worry about such things,” he said. “After all, we’ve only been dating for a couple of days.”

But they were such good days, Kara thought. She hated to think she might be losing more like them. “So what will your dad think?”

“Oh, my dad will be completely against us,” Ron said, then hurried to add, “but you can’t take that personally. He thinks marrying my Mom was the worst decision he ever made, and feels that his bad experience is an indicative of everyone else’s marriage too. Since marriage is evil and dating leads to marriage, he’s also completely opposed to dating.”

Ron’s story was so absurd that it made Kara start laughing. “That can’t be true!” she said. “You made that up!”

Ron started chuckling also. “I wish I did but unfortunately that’s exactly the way he is. When you meet him, he’ll probably explain all of that within the first minute or so.”

Ron adopted a gruffer version of his own voice. “I wish I could agree that it’s nice to meet you, Kara, but unfortunately it’s not. You’ve sunk your claws deep

enough into my boy to make him want to date you and now you'll be thinking about how you can ruin the rest of his life."

Kara laughed harder. "He would not!"

Ron stopped laughing. "Yes, he would. My prom date almost backed out of going to the big dance when my father said that to her."

Kara kept laughing. "So why doesn't he just divorce your mother—or she divorce him."

"They're Catholic," Ron said, as if that explained everything. "They'll die married. It may be with their hands around each other's throats, but they'll die married."

Kara couldn't control her mirth. "I'm so sorry, Ron. I know this isn't really funny but it's—"

"It *is* funny," Ron corrected her. "It's also sad, but it's definitely funny."

Kara's phone started ringing again. Mama certainly could be irritating.

"So are you going to give me your address so I can come rip your clothes off?"

She didn't hesitate at all before giving it to him.

Chapter Four

House Keys

Kara watched through the front window as Ron's Grand Cherokee pulled up to the curb in front of her house. It didn't look like a very practical car to her. Oh, it probably had four wheel drive which would be useful in the snow but somehow that removable top just didn't leave the impression of creating a warm interior.

He parked the car, got out and looked around for a moment checking the address. Kara went to her front door to reassure him that he had the right place. It was even colder outside than when she had come home and the fact that she was no longer wearing shoes or a coat did not help her. Her nipples hardened and an uncontrollable shiver wracked her body.

Ron had moved from the side of his car to the front of her driveway where the plow had left a significant wall of snow blocking the entrance. Someone, probably Brad Thomas down the street, had cleared her sidewalk with his snow blower, but he hadn't touched the apron of the drive or the driveway proper.

Ron shook his head before quickly traversing the barrier and trekking up to the clear path of the sidewalk. He made it look effortless. She, on the other hand, had almost fallen twice—first on her ass and then forward on to her face.

Ron reached the path to her front door and stepped in her shoe prints until he reached her. It took too long as he carefully placed his steps but then his arms came around her and his lips met hers. For the first time since they'd met, Kara felt disappointed. His kiss was all too brief and much too chaste. What was going on?

Ron answered her unspoken question immediately. "Where's your shovel?"

"What? No!" Kara said. She did not want Ron shoveling her property—especially not at this time of night.

"I have to clear your driveway," Ron said. "You won't be able to get to work tomorrow if I don't."

He didn't seem happy about it, but neither did he look particularly unhappy. "I thought we'd—" Kara began.

"Kara," Ron interrupted. "Let me get this over with before we lose the whole night. You've got to be able to get your car out in the morning and I'd rather not park mine in the street in these conditions."

On some level, Kara could see the sense in what Ron was saying, but this was not the romantic evening she'd been trying to imagine around her mother's

irritating criticisms of her new relationship. She tried a new line of protest. “I didn’t invite you over here to work for me!”

Ron suddenly appeared to grasp what was bothering Kara. “Hey!” he exclaimed. A wide grin lit up his face. “You’re ready to play!”

Before Kara could step back away from him, Ron scooped her up in his arms and spun her around so that they both faced her front yard. The movement pulled her out of the warmth of her doorway and fully into the frigid night. Wind nipped around her panty-hose covered feet and up beneath her skirt to chill her legs. Her thin blouse proved poor protection for her torso, but she loved the feel of Ron’s strong arms as he carried her out into the snow and then dropped both of them into the twenty or so inches of fluffy frozen whiteness that covered her front yard.

She sat bolt upright, stifling a scream as the cold snow clung to the back of her blouse and pushed against her legs and buttocks. Ron’s gloved hand cupped her breast as he used his greater weight to press her back down onto her back. The cold was excruciating, even if the circumstances were exciting.

The click of her front door closing reverberated across the yard.

“Oh, my God!” Kara said. She sat upright again, pushing Ron to the side so that she could cast a desperate glance at the front of her house.

Ron didn’t understand what was frightening her. He attempted to pull her back in the snow and begin kissing her.

“Wait!” Kara demanded. “You don’t understand! My front door is locked!”

Ron instantly lost his sense of playfulness and sat up beside her. “Oh, shit!”

“Oh shit is right!” Kara cursed. “What were you thinking?”

She struggled to her feet in the bitter cold of the snow, angry now that Ron had turned so impractically playful. Ron clambered to his feet beside her and together they ran for the front step.

Kara grasped the door handle and squeezed but her fears were completely correct. The door was firmly locked against her. “Shit!”

“I am so sorry!” Ron said. “I didn’t think. I just wanted to...please tell me you have a spare key.”

“There’s one in the garage,” Kara said.

“Good!” Unfortunately, Ron’s relief was premature.

“But it’s locked because I was going away.” Kara said.

“Oh, crap!” Ron said. “Why did you...what are we going to do?”

Inside of Kara’s house, the phone began to ring—an uns subtle reminder that she couldn’t get back into her home. The wind picked up and she began to shiver uncontrollably—violent shudders shaking her body. The snow clinging to her back, her skirt and her legs began to melt, making her even more uncomfortable.

Ron took off his coat and wrapped it around Kara’s shoulders.

“I don’t want your coat!” she told him. She was angry enough right now to be done with him.

Ron ignored her. “Who else has a key to your house? If we have to, we can go to my apartment, but I think you’d be more comfortable if we get you back inside your own home tonight.”

Kara cringed. “My mother has one.”

Ron’s answering shudder might not have been caused by the cold. “Are there any other options?”

The warmth of Ron’s coat must have been helping the blood flow to Kara’s brain again. “Oh, of course there is.” Then she hesitated imagining what it would look like to walk through the snow to her elderly neighbor’s house without shoes on.

“What is it?” Ron asked.

“My next door neighbor, Rose, has one, but I...”

“Which house?” Ron asked. “I’ll go there.”

This might be even worse from Kara’s perspective, but she really couldn’t walk to Rose’s house with her feet clad only in her pantyhose. “Oh, all right, I’ll call her,” she conceded. “Can I have your phone?”

Ron pulled his cell phone from his pocket and Kara dialed the number. Rose was approaching eighty years of age and still had an old fashioned answering

machine. The phone rang eight times and then the recorded message came on.

“Hello, this is Rose—”

Kara hung up the phone. She had to be there! Where could she have gone at this time of night?

She dialed again.

This time Rose picked up on the second ring. “Hello?”

“Rose? It’s Kara. This is a little bit embarrassing but I just got home and managed to lock myself out of the house. Do you still have my spare key?”

“Of course I do, dear. How was your trip? How is your gentleman friend?”

A shiver, even through the warmth of Ron’s coat, kept Kara from immediately answering. “The trip was...interesting. It’s all very complicated. Bobby broke up with me—”

“Oh, no!” Rose interjected.

“It’s for the best,” Kara assured her. “I’ll explain everything tomorrow after work. In the meantime, could I send the young man—” she cringed at the turn of phrase and simultaneously realized she didn’t want to tell Rose about Ron yet.

“Who gave me a ride home,” she continued, “over to pick up my key? I sort of locked myself out and I don’t have my shoes on.”

“You don’t have your shoes on?” Rose sounded horrified. “Send him right here. I’ll go get it right away.”

“Which house?” Ron asked.

“It’s that one,” Kara said, pointing at the house next to hers.

Ron hurried down to the side walk and then up to Rose’s house. Kara could hear him knocking. It was more than a minute before Rose opened the door and Ron came hurrying back to her. She took the key and opened her front door.

Ron followed her inside, immediately enfolding her in his arms as the door swung shut behind them. “Now where were we?” he asked.

His lips felt cold as they touched hers and she turned her face away from him.

He pulled back. “What’s wrong? I’m really sorry about the key but *no harm no foul* right?”

“I am so embarrassed!” Kara told him. “I don’t think you can stay now. Rose will notice. I—”

“You’re embarrassed of me?” Ron asked.

“No, of course not,” Kara lied.

Ron’s smile told her he knew she was lying. It wasn’t a happy look. “Yes, you are. I could see it with your sister and her husband. Is it because I’m white? Or because I’m twenty-five?”

Kara couldn’t look him in the eye. “I’m forty,” she whispered.

“No way!” Ron said. “I’ve seen your body quite close and personal. You aren’t forty!”

Kara felt a tear forming in her right eye. “Yes, I am.”

Ron considered her age for a moment and shrugged. “So, thirty-five or forty, it’s all the same to—”

“No it isn’t!” Kara said. “You’re going to be embarrassed of me too. When we get together with your friends or you bring me home to your family or—”

“What are you talking about?” Ron asked. “I could never be embarrassed of you! You’re gorgeous and I’m crazy about you. You know that, but if you want me to I’ll be happy to prove it again right now!”

He began to kiss the line of her jaw back beneath her ear.

Kara pushed him away again. “Stop! This is important!”

“So is this!” Ron told her. He pulled his gloves off and tossed them across the floor. Then he slipped his coat off of Kara’s shoulders so he could run his hands up her sides, brushing the edges of her breasts without stopping to pay direct attention to them.

Kara shivered with pleasure, then remembered what they were talking about. “Wait a minute!” she protested. “We’re still talk—”

“I’m done talking,” Ron whispered. “I wanted to take you in the snow but I’ll settle for having you right here in the foyer.”

His fingers began fumbling with the buttons of her blouse, but they were cold and not working properly. Kara covered his hands with hers and tried to quiet him. “You don’t have to do this,” she said. “It doesn’t prove anything.”

Ron frowned and ripped her blouse open sending buttons flying across the small entry chamber.

“Ron!”

His mouth found hers and bruised her lips open. His tongue thrust hard inside her as his hands entered her opened blouse and found her breasts. He squeezed them angrily, taking out his frustrations with Kara’s doubts on the soft flesh beneath her bra.

Somewhere in the house Kara’s phone began to ring again, reminding her of all the problems they faced if they were to try and date. She turned her face away from her lover’s lips. “Ron! Stop! That might be Rose...or my mother.”

Ron ignored her—or more accurately, paid no attention to what she was saying. His concentration was consumed with the cups of her bra as he slipped his thumb beneath the wire and pulled them up and over her breasts. His cold hands instantly covered her nipples making the blood surge to her tits. Her hips began to undulate in response, moving of their own accord to grind her pelvis against Ron’s groin. His hard meat was easy to discern, even through the fabric of his pants and her skirt.

The phone began ringing again, breaking the mood Ron kept trying to establish. Her mother's stern, disapproving face flashed before Kara's eyes. She couldn't make love under these conditions. "Ron, I have to—"

Ron pinched her nipples hard and thrust his tongue back into Kara's mouth. He pressed so forcefully that she stepped back away from him. Her back struck the wall of her foyer; her shoulder blades pressed against the white plaster through the thin fabric of her blouse.

One of Ron's hands dropped from her breast to her skirt, hiking it up so he could reach beneath and feel her. His fingers were still cold but that wasn't what made her body shiver.

His mouth drifted south to find her neck while his fingers explored upward, seeking out the raging heat between her legs.

"We...this isn't the right place...We should—"

"Hush!" Ron told her. "I need you!" Using both hands he dragged her panties and pantyhose down around her thighs. The cool air rushed in to greet her, making Kara squirm with pleasure.

Ron pulled his hands out from beneath Kara's long skirt and unfastened his belt. "I ought to bend you over my knee and paddle you!" he growled. His hands were already working feverishly at his pants. Now he shoved them down off his

hips so that his hard white dick stuck proudly up between them. “What do you mean pretending you don’t want this?”

“I—”

“I know,” Ron whispered. “You’re embarrassed. Good girls don’t want hard dicks in their hands.”

He guided her dark fingers to his cock and let her grasp the large bulbous head. It wasn’t really white. Swollen as it was the circumcised tip of Ron’s penis looked almost purple.

He was totally erect, his meat pulsing between her fingers, a little pearl of pre-cum squeezing into sight from the slit at the very tip of the dick.

“No, I—” she protested. “It’s not your...” she couldn’t finish the statement because part of her agreed with him. Good girls didn’t fondle the hard pricks of men that they’d only met four days ago. Good girls didn’t let those men finger them in airports, or take them back to hotels and tie them to the bed. Good girls didn’t-

“Tell me you want it!” Ron demanded as his hand quested back beneath her skirt and caressed the moist seam between Kara’s swollen labia.

Her knees buckled and she fell heavily to the floor. The movement pulled Ron’s finger off her pussy but it brought Kara’s face down to the level of his hard thick cock.

“That’s right!” Ron said. “You know you want it!”

She looked up into his eyes as her hand began to pump him. His flesh burned beneath her fingers even as his face flushed with the urgency of his desire.

“Tell me!” he insisted.

“I want you,” Kara whispered.

Ron caught her up beneath her arms and pulled her back to her feet. Then he got his hands on her ass and tried to lift her up onto his erection. Her skirt and her pantyhose got in the way—the first by serving as a physical barrier to his prick and the second by keeping her from spreading her legs as wide as she wanted.

“Louder!” Ron shouted. “Tell me louder!”

He braced her against the wall and used one hand to pull the skirt aside. Then he wrenched her high on top of him and tried to slide her onto his dick. The pantyhose and panties continued to cause problems. Ron picked Kara up and turned around so that his back was against the wall. He positioned his legs in front of him, stretched out almost as if he were sitting down. With this angle, Kara was able to get her knees on Ron’s thighs and her arms on his shoulders. With one hand he held her ass and with the other he finally succeeded in pressing the tip of his hard cock against the hot lips of her pussy.

“Tell me!” he insisted.

Kara spoke through her actions, easing herself down on his stiff pole, letting it stretch open her vagina and free her hot juices to roll down Ron's shaft.

"Oh, yes!" he shouted. "That's what I want!"

It was what Kara wanted too. She hauled herself up and back down again, easing Ron's hardness inside her, beginning to seek the rhythm that would bring her the pleasure he'd already taught her to crave.

"Tell me!" he said again.

When Kara didn't immediately answer he spun them around again, getting her back against the wall and driving himself up hard inside her. With one hand he kept that grip on her ass, holding her weight, guiding her body on his cock. With the other he pulled at the tangle of her pantyhose, giving her a little more room to spread her thighs and fuck him.

As she spread her thighs wider, Ron's cock touched something ultra sensitive inside of her.

Kara's pussy tightened reflexively, first strangling Ron's thick erection, then exploding in paroxysms of love.

"Oh Ron," she moaned, "oh!"

"You like that, do you?" he grunted. "You're not embarrassed? You don't want me to stop and go home?"

Suddenly, she could scarcely breathe. Ron really sounded angry—furious that she was thinking of keeping her pussy away from him. The strength of his desire further turned her on—intensifying the pleasure already rocketing through her body and complicating her efforts to keep riding him. Her whole body began to tremble, a distinct sensation from the orgasmic shocks she was already enjoying. Forming words in these circumstances was almost impossible.

“Do you want me to go home?” Ron repeated. He punctuated his question with an especially hard thrust.

“Please...no,” she managed.

“And you don’t care who knows about us?”

Right now, Kara didn’t care about anything but the hard prick setting her body on fire. “No,” she gasped. “Don’t care!”

“Good!” he panted. “Cause I want you, Kara! And I want *everyone* to know it!”

Two more thrusts and she exploded into a new orgasm.

Chapter Five

Shoveling Snow

Kara watched Ron through the kitchen window as he tossed another shovelful of heavy white snow over his shoulder and into the front yard. He'd been going nonstop for nearly forty minutes and he showed no signs of slowing down. He had just finished the driveway and was starting on the little apron of concrete which lowered the drive to the level of the street. It would be harder than the rest of the job because the plows had dumped a tremendous amount of snow into that little space, but it still wouldn't be all that much longer until Ron was finished and coming back in to join her.

She shivered beneath her warm terrycloth robe and it had nothing to do with the cold air outside or her still damp hair after her shower.

The phone rang. It had been ringing about every fifteen minutes since the initial conversation with her mother. This time Kara picked up the receiver and checked the caller ID—Liz, her little sister, another probable troublemaker. Why couldn't anyone in her family just be happy for her?

She accepted the call hoping she could get this over with before Ron came back inside. If she didn't the phone would probably keep ringing for the rest of the night. "Hello, Liz," she said. "If you called to yell at me you'll have to wait until tomorrow."

"Yell at you?" Liz repeated. "Why on earth would I do that? I'm proud of you sister! I just want to know if this Ron is as scrumptious as Ruth says he is."

Liz's response was an unexpected relief but it was the comment about Ruth that captured Kara's attention. "Ruth said he's scrumptious?"

"She did!" Liz confirmed. "She also said he's got the face of an angel with eyes so blue you could drown in them. I think she's jealous."

Now Kara knew Liz was having fun with her. "Ruth is not jealous and she did not say that!"

"Not in so many words," Liz admitted. "She just said *tall, handsome blue-eyed blond*, but what's the fun in that?"

"He *is* handsome," Kara admitted. "I really like him. Why aren't you mad?"

"Why should I be mad?" Liz asked.

"Because you always used to agree with Mama and say that black girls shouldn't date white guys."

"That's right," Liz said. "I don't think they should."

"Then why—"

“Oh,” Liz interrupted. “I see the problem now. You’re not a black *girl*, Kara. You are a black *woman*. And according to Ruth, Ron is a white boy barely out of high school. It’s a completely different power dynamic. It makes all the difference in the world.”

“Ron is twenty-five,” Kara told her.

“And you’re forty. You see my point?”

Kara’s initial burst of enthusiasm over her sister’s unexpected support began to fade. “So you’re only in favor of this because I’m so much older than Ron?”

“Pretty much!” Liz laughed. “I have to keep my principles, you know.”

Kara’s spirits ebbed further.

Liz knew her sister well enough to predict the effect of her words on her. “Oh, come on, you know I’m only teasing. Are you having fun with him?”

“Yes!” Kara confirmed. The certainty in her voice bolstered her confidence. “Yes, I am!”

“Good!” Liz said. “Because you know what? You deserve to have a little fun! Bobby was all work for you—you did most of the traveling, most of the planning, and then spent your time together taking care of him. I’ll bet you also did most of the *satisfying* in that relationship if you know what I mean. You deserve a little fun after putting up with all of that.”

Kara really hadn't had time to absorb Bobby's betrayal yet. In the airport when she first found out, Ron had stepped right up to distract her and he's been continuing to distract her ever since. She was certainly angry at Bobby, but she still didn't know how she felt about their time together.

"Bobby was...I mean...there were a lot of signs that things were going wrong. I just didn't have my eyes open, I guess."

"You had your eyes open," Liz said. "You just thought you had time to fix things. You thought you both wanted to fix things."

Suddenly Kara's exhaustion caught up with her. Days of waiting on a flight home would have been exhausting enough, but add to that the madcap excitement of meeting and keeping up with Ron on top of the crushing disappointment of Bobby's betrayal and she was physically and emotionally played out. She sagged against the kitchen table and plopped her head in her hand.

"So how did he do it?" Liz asked.

"How did he do what?"

"How did Bobby break the news?"

This made Kara sit up again. She'd just realized she still hadn't read Bobby's stupid card. "He stuck a note in my luggage," she said. "Hang on a second and I'll go find it."

She put the phone down on the table and went back to the foyer to get her suitcase, unconsciously smiling as she passed the place where Ron and she had just made love. Well, actually they had had hot sex. To Kara's mind, love making was a little bit more tender and slow paced than what they had done—at least in the beginning.

She picked up her suitcase and hauled it back to the kitchen table. Then she unzipped the front cover in search of Bobby's message.

She couldn't find it.

She opened all the other compartments and it wasn't there either. What could have happened to it?

She picked up the phone. "Sorry to take so long," she told her sister, "but I can't find the note."

"Maybe you stuck it in your purse," Liz suggested.

"Couldn't have," Kara said. "I haven't seen it yet. Bobby told me about it on the phone when I called him to pick me up at the airport because of the snow. Hang on another second and I'll get the other bag."

She fetched the other suitcase but still couldn't find a note.

"Look, I don't want to cause trouble between you and your new boyfriend, but did Ron know about this? Could he have taken the note?"

That idea didn't make any sense to Kara. "Why would he do that?"

“Maybe he thought he’d be sparing you pain,” Liz suggested.

Kara considered that for a moment before rejecting the idea. “No, I don’t think he did. First off, I can’t see when he could have taken it, and secondly, I think he was much more likely to have sat next to me and supported me when I opened it, then to steal it away.”

“So where is it?” Liz asked. “Is it possible Bobby didn’t really put it in there?”

“Now that is a better possibility,” Kara said. “I mean, we already know he’s a coward for wanting to break up with me this way. Maybe he chickened out at the last minute.”

But that explanation really didn’t work either because Bobby had wanted Kara to read his card rather than tell her over the phone that he was breaking up with her.

She began to dig through her clothes looking for the note. She found it at the bottom of her suitcase under all of her things. “He really is a coward,” she said.

“You found it?”

“Buried where there was no chance of me finding it before I got home.”

“I guess that makes sense from his perspective. I wonder if he had planned to change his phone number to avoid your calls.”

Kara wanted to laugh at that suggestion, but she couldn’t find any mirth inside of her.

“Are you going to open it?”

“I guess so,” she said.

The envelope was plain white with her name scrawled across the front. It wasn’t sealed.

“Oh my God it’s a *Farside* card,” Kara told Liz.

“Do they still make those?” Liz asked.

“He’s probably had it lying around his apartment for years,” Kara guessed.

“In case you’re interested, it has a flying saucer on the cover with a car tied to the top. Tied to the top of the car is a deer.”

“Hey, I actually remember that one,” Liz said. “I loved that comic.”

“I used to love it too,” Kara said.

She opened up the card. Scrawled in Bobby’s poor handwriting was a very brief note: *Kara, I’ve found someone else. I don’t think we should see each other anymore. Bobby.*

The lack of effort this had taken him suddenly hurt more than all of the rest of the breakup combined.

“So what’s it say?” Liz asked her.

Kara read it to her.

“Wow, that’s harsh!”

Kara felt tears beginning to well up in her eyes.

Liz suddenly changed the topic of conversation. “Hey, do you have a window where you’re sitting?”

Kara sniffled and rubbed her eye. “Yes, why?”

“I want you to look out it for a second.”

“Okay.”

“Can you see Ron?”

“Yes, he’s just about finished with the mess the snowplow made in front of my driveway.”

“Good!” Liz said, before adding: “you know what? You should thank Bobby!”

“What?”

“In another few minutes, Ron’s going to come inside frozen from the snow and you’re going to get to warm up that luscious body Ruth told me about. Then he’s going to return the favor by fucking your brains out!”



“Man, it’s cold out there!” Ron complained as he stepped in through the front door and stamped the snow off his dress shoes.

“I’ve got water heating on the stove,” Kara told him. “I figure it’s too late for coffee, but maybe you’d like some hot chocolate or apple cider to warm you up?”

Ron stopped stamping and looked Kara up and down. She was standing close to him in her white terry cloth robe—technically covered but it was still just a bath robe.

He grinned. “Is that the best way you can think of to make me warm again?”

Kara smiled and stepped up against him. Her bare feet squirmed as they touched the little snow crystals which had shaken loose from Ron’s shoes and lower pant legs. She caressed his cold cheek with her hand, encouraging him to lean down and kiss her. He did *not* wrap her in his arms and pull her against his snowy coat.

The kettle on the stove began to whistle.

Kara broke the kiss but not the contact of her hand on Ron’s cheek. “Why don’t you go start a shower?” she said. “I’ll take the kettle off the stove and then come up and reward you for clearing my driveway.”

Ron immediately began to unbutton his coat. “I like the sound of that, but you’re going to have to show me the way to your shower.”

The teasing lilt in his voice made Kara feel certain that she would never get back to her whistling kettle if she led Ron to the shower now. It was a good feeling—a warm, snuggle up with your man by the fireside, kind of feeling. But she had to get the kettle off the burner no matter how much she wanted to start to play.

“It’s up the stairs to the left,” she told him. Then she winked, “Right next to my bedroom.”

Ron’s smile broadened. “So I’m going to see my girlfriend’s bedroom. This night just keeps getting better and better.”

“It was never a question of *if* you would see it,” Kara said. “It’s a question of *will you have enough strength left to use it when I get finished with you in the shower?*”

Ron’s grin couldn’t get any bigger. “You’d better get that kettle then, so we can get started. Don’t bother with the drinks. I don’t want to wait that long for you to join me.”

“You’d better go start the shower and get soapy,” Kara told him. She turned her back and slightly exaggerated the sway of her ass as she walked into the kitchen. She was so turned on! She didn’t think Ron could see it, but her nipples were rock hard beneath her robe and her pussy felt so wet she was afraid she might start dripping. How did he get her this excited just by looking at her and thinking lascivious thoughts?

She plucked the kettle off the stove and turned off the burner. So hot chocolate hadn’t been the best idea, she really couldn’t complain about his alternative. Ron wanted her! And wasn’t that more important than Mama and Ruth’s hostility, or Liz’s strange ideas?

She heard the shower start upstairs and smiled. She'd give him a couple of minutes to finish getting undressed. Then she'd climb those stairs and rock his world!

Chapter Six

Showering

Kara slipped into the bathroom, opening the door and closing it again as quickly as possible to keep from letting all the steam out. Ron's silhouette was visible through the curtain as he paused with the bar of soap in his hand and peaked around one end to look at her. "Hi."

Kara felt a wave of shyness pass over her. It made no sense. The things Ron and she had already done together should preclude any feeling of modesty between them. "Hi, yourself," she responded.

He crooked a finger at her and she stepped closer to him. The water from the shower head was mostly directed at his shoulder, but a small nearly invisible spray bounced off of his skin to mist against her neck and partially exposed cleavage.

Ron took hold of one fold of her robe where it covered her left breast and pulled Kara closer to him. His lips were warm and moist from the shower, just like the backs of his fingers where they rested against her bosom.

The shower curtain slid back further, letting the spray bouncing off Ron's body fly out onto the throw rug. He was completely exposed now: broad shoulders, tight abs, immense penis hanging limply between his legs waiting for Kara to bring it back to life.

His hands dropped to the belt of her robe and gently unfastened the knot. When he finished the garment swung open revealing a three or four inch swath of her dark brown flesh for Ron's inspection. He dragged one wet forefinger down the open track of her skin, through her cleavage, across her stomach and down into the tangle of hair that formed her bush.

Kara closed her eyes and fought to control her trembling. One touch, one look, and Ron weakened her knees and turned her muscles to jelly.

She opened her eyes in time to see him lift his hand again. Water dripped from his finger tip as he reached out and gently felt the inner curve of her breast where it was exposed between the sides of her robe.

Her heart pounded harder.

Her knees began to tremble.

A large drop of water slipped off of Ron's finger to run down her breast and onto her stomach before losing itself in the tangled hair of her bush.

Ron painstakingly inched the fabric of her robe aside until the thinnest sliver on the edge of her aureole peaked out at him. The puckered flesh looked

nearly charcoal black in comparison to the tootsie roll coloring of the rest of her breast.

He bent closer and licked the line where the aureole met smooth ebony flesh and Kara heard herself moan in appreciation. She reached her arm around his head to hug him tighter against her, ignoring the water now soaking the white sleeve of her robe.

Ron didn't object to her embrace, but neither did he let her direct his actions. Instead, he licked her again, running his rough tongue up the same line where the aureole met the breast, taking his time to enjoy the bounty her body presented to him.

His fingers touched her thigh three inches above her knee and water ran freely from his hand to her leg and on down her calf to the bathroom rug beneath her feet.

He continued to explore her nipple while his fingers drifted higher on her thigh. The warm water from the shower moved with his hand, making his touch feel even more magical. Unconsciously, Kara spread her thighs wider, encouraging Ron to reach higher between her legs and rediscover the hot moist lips longing for his attention. Her arms tightened reflexively around Ron's head, burying his face between her large breasts so that the fine sandpaper-like whiskers of his five o'clock shadow teased her as he sucked and licked her cleavage.

Ron worked his lips up to her throat as her fingers touched her swollen labia. The stream of warm water caressing her body thickened and raced down his arm to cross his hand and cleanse her sopping lips. Her trembling increased as Ron tried to match the light kisses he was placing on her throat with a gentle fluttering of his fingers on the outer surface of her pussy.

She pulled him harder against her, bracing herself as her body continued to respond to his caresses. She didn't know how much longer she could remain standing—didn't understand how the man who took her so forcefully in her entrance hall could be so patient and teasing now.

His lips pulled at the pulse of her throat while his free hand moved the wet terry cloth robe back off of her shoulders until it fell in a heap on the bathroom floor.

Completely naked, Kara let Ron guide her into the tub beside him. For the first time, the shower's spray drummed directly on her neck and breasts before Ron positioned himself to take most of it on his strong back. His finger continued to gently ride the slit between her legs, lightly fluttering against them like a butterfly's wings.

His free hand found one of her dark glistening breasts and began to play with her nipple. He fondled her, gently pushing the thick dark tip with the ball of his thumb, maneuvering it back and forth like the toggle on a game controller. The

finger between her legs began to glide back and forth, easing itself into the crevice that formed the entrance to her vagina.

Another jolt struck her body as the pads of his hand accidentally brushed her clitoris. She lurched forward against his chest, hands ceasing to hang uselessly at her sides as she caught hold of him to help her keep her balance. His finger slipped deeper inside her even as the thumb on the other hand dug against her swollen tit. The finger between her legs eased back and forth, probing forward into her body before sliding back out again.

Kara's heart skipped a beat when Ron's hardening penis suddenly pressed against her stomach. She wanted to take hold of it, but his finger was moving in and out of her passage and she needed all of her concentration just to ride her mounting pleasure without falling. Her arms tightened around her man, struggling to ground her body against the surging tempo of her racing heart. Ron's fore and ring fingers trapped her labia between them, squeezing them tight against the base of his middle finger as he wiggled its tip deep inside her.

He lost his hold on her breast, freeing that hand to grab her tightly by her long wet hair. He pulled her head back, forcing Kara to look up into the shower's spray. The water beat down on her cheeks for an instant and then Ron's lips pressed down hard upon hers and his finger dug deeper inside her body. He

explored the moist satin flesh of both of her mouths before sliding his finger out from between her legs to greet her poor neglected clitoris at last.

Kara climaxed!

Pleasure exploded out of her clit and rocketed to every part of her body. Her knees buckled and Ron sank to the floor of the tub with her, yanking back harder on her hair so that the hot spray from above drummed against her neck and chest before he started kissing her again, sucking on the dark flesh of her exposed throat where the pulse raged closest to the surface.

Kara screamed out her excitement, hugging Ron's hard torso as he diddled the swollen nub of flesh above her pussy with the strong fingers of his right hand. She tried to back away from him, but only succeeded in falling back in the tub. Her own grip on Ron's shoulders helped keep him on top of her. His weight crushed her breasts flat against her chest and his finger never missed a step in its dance on her clitoris.

She screamed again, begging him to stop or praying for him *not* to. Her ass began to swish from side to side as her body sought to stem the wave of pleasure. She twisted and fought until she finally rolled onto her side but that only helped Ron cup her ass against his rock hard cock and did nothing to prevent him from fingering her to new and greater orgasms.

The water continued to rain down on top of him, further soaking their flesh and adding to the intensity of her excitement. Kara must have twisted about again because suddenly her hands and knees were beneath her and her large breasts were flattened on the sloping end of the tub. Then she felt Ron's large hands on her rear end, propping it high in the air before dipping beneath her to widen the angle of her thighs.

"Wait," she tried to mumble, "I need...to catch...my breath." But the fat head of Ron's cock was already pressing against her lips and then her mouth opened in sympathetic response to her pussy as that massive penis penetrated her vagina.

He took three half-tentative strokes to establish his rhythm. Then Ron's fingers dug hard into Kara's hips and ass and he began to ride her like a man possessed. Thrusting, grinding, and twisting with abandon while Kara struggled to keep breathing as her body adjusted to the needs of her man.

Ron had more staying power than she expected, but they had made love in the hotel this morning and again in her foyer an hour ago, so she shouldn't have been surprised. She struggled to match his rhythm—to complement his thrusts by pushing her ass up against him as he drove his penis forward into her body. The shower remained hot—a welcome stimulation that could end abruptly if they took too much more time. So she bucked her ass into each of his thrusts and reached between her legs to try and touch his swinging balls.

His breathing hitched excitingly—a sure sign that he was getting close to ejaculation. His pace faltered as he suddenly had to concentrate on not popping out of her body. Kara briefly touched Ron's big balls, then decided that she deserved to come again with her man. She slid her hand on her pussy so she could start massaging her clit and was rewarded with the feel of Ron's thick erection as it moved in and out of her over-stimulated body. He was so long, so hard, and so very deep inside of her...

"I...love you...Kara!" Ron gasped.

She pushed harder on her clit, anxious to join in his pleasure, wondering if he could feel the pressure of her fingers through her womb.

"I...need you...Kara!"

After all of her earlier orgasms, it should have been easy, but now the magic formula to climax eluded her.

"Let me...see you!"

Ron slipped out of her pussy and tried to turn her over, but his own coordination was gone.

Kara twisted on to her back, trying to raise her legs high enough to get one over his head so that he could kneel between them. Damn but he was handsome, his soaked blond hair matted to his head. His face flushed red from exertion. His

muscular chest heaving as he struggled to breathe. His long white cock fully erect and needing the comfort of her body.

He slid its head along her thigh in the quest to reenter her. Overshooting her coal black lips, he brushed the tangle of her pubic hair leaving sticky strings of pre-cum enmeshed in her black curls. Then the sperm-slicked head glided across her clitoris and Kara's body remembered how to orgasm. Her knees shot up toward her breast in surprise and Ron lost his own struggle to contain himself.

Spurting the entire length of her torso, Ron's cock sent string after string of milky white semen crisscrossing her body.

Exhausted, but still climaxing, Kara hands caught at Ron's ivory seed, smearing the sticky fluid against the ebony flesh of her stomach, breasts and pussy.



Kara twisted on her side vainly trying to find a more comfortable position in the tight confines of the tub with Ron's body lying beside and partly beneath her. The shower continued to spray water down upon them—still hot, thankfully, but still more irritant than help at this point. Ron lay half asleep, his cock shriveled up again to its smallest flaccid state.

She poked him in the side. “Hey, wake up, we need to rinse off before all the hot water is used up.”

Ron stirred, tried to roll on to his side away from her, then changed course when his knees bumped the top of the tub. He ended up on his side beside her—chest to breast and groin to groin—more or less. His eyes didn't open. His breaths were almost snores.

Kara poked him again. "Come on!"

When he still didn't move, Kara carefully got to her feet and turned the shower toward his face. Ron sputtered into a sitting position a couple of seconds later. "Wh-what?"

"It's time to rinse off and go to bed," Kara told him. "We've got work tomorrow."

Ron looked up into the spray for a moment, then scrubbed the water out of his eyes. "I hate Mondays! The bastards will probably have me traveling again."

"Really?" Kara asked. She knew that Ron traveled a lot with his job, but she hadn't expected it to be so soon.

Ron considered her question for a moment, then shook his head. "No, probably not. It's the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. Too many people take this week off to make a trip worthwhile."

He ran a hand up Kara's leg, slipping it around the back to cup her inner thigh. "Would you miss me?"

Kara nodded. "Yes."

“Even though I embarrass you?”

She cringed, wishing he hadn't brought this up again. The fact that he had must mean that the age issue bothered him too. She started to deny his accusation, but then settled for, “I really would miss you.”

Ron clambered to his feet, picked up a bar of Ivory soap and began to build a lather between his hands. “You know, I thought about this a lot when I was shoveling your driveway and I figured out why you're embarrassed.”

He stuck the bar of soap on a shelf and began to massage Kara's stomach, scrubbing at the spots of semen that had thus far escaped the shower's spray.

Kara ignored the wonderful feel of Ron's hands to focus on the point he was trying to make. “You have?”

“Yes.” Ron's hands found her breasts and spent an inordinate amount of time making certain that they were clean again. It felt wonderful to Kara. His soapy fingers glided over her smooth flesh, teasing her nipples to life again.

It was almost a minute before she remembered to answer him. “What did you...figure out?”

Ron picked up the bar of soap again and rebuilt his lather without answering. Then he set down the bar and began to massage Kara's bush, tickling her flesh and combing her curly tufts of hair with his fingers. “You're embarrassed,

because the only thing we've ever really done together is *this*." His fingers slipped down to her clitoris to reinforce his point.

Kara's heart raced. So much of her attention was focused on Ron's fingers that she had trouble following his words. "Wh-what do you mean?"

Ron bore down harder on Kara's clitoris making her knees shake and threatening to make her fall in the slippery tub. "*This!*" he repeated. "When your mother asks you what you like about me, what are you supposed to tell her? I'm good in bed? You like the way my fingers feel when I rub your clit? You like the way I can get you off in a public place?"

Ron's words succeeded in penetrating the mind numbing pleasure his fingers were generating between her legs. It was difficult, but she caught his wrist in her small hand and moved his fingers off of her pussy. It took a moment longer before she could gather enough will power to speak again. "So what are you suggesting?"

"That we start dating," Ron said, "and I don't mean just dinner. Let's go out and have some fun together: movies, ball games, parties..."

The idea delighted Kara. It was so simple and yet so obviously one of the keys to her problem with her family. "Museums, skiing, concerts," she added.

Ron took her into his arms. “Do you know that I don’t know the names of your favorite television shows, or your favorite restaurant, or even what you do for a living?”

“And I don’t know the name of your best friend, or how many brothers and sisters you have, or—”

Ron kissed her cutting her off with the feel of his tongue slipping back between her lips.

She returned the kiss even as her mind continued to list the things she didn’t yet know about him. Where had he gone to school? What was his favorite color? Did he like Chinese food?

Their lips parted. “Why did you do that then?” she asked. “I thought we were talking about getting to know each other better.”

“We are and I want to,” Ron told her. “But I also want to make it crystal clear that I’m in no way suggesting we stop having sex.”

Kara didn’t want that either. She inched closer to Ron so that her naked breasts touched the bare flesh of his chest. “I don’t want to stop having sex either,” she confided.

Ron’s cock stirred between them. “Then I suggest we shut off the shower, towel each other dry, and continue this conversation in bed.”

Chapter Seven

Making Plans

Kara felt so tired she wanted to lay her head on her desk and go to sleep.

Note to self, she thought for the thousandth time that morning. *Younger boyfriends have too much energy!*

Not that it had seemed like too much last night. Last night Ron's irrepressible dick served as never ending proof that he remained totally excited by her body. He'd eventually come again and he was anything but a selfish lover, licking and fingering Kara to countless orgasms of her own while his dick recharged for another round of fucking.

Still, today she was paying a price for all of that activity and if she remembered correctly, she'd promised Ron she would see him again tonight. She'd have to lay down a new ground rule. There had to be something they could do to make certain they both got some sleep.

Someone knocked on the outer wall of her cubicle and she twisted in her chair to find her friend, Abby, peering in at her. “Hey, Kara, how was the trip to— what the heck happened? You look terrible!”

Kara’s budding smile at her friend’s appearance turned into a frown. “What do you mean?” she asked. “I don’t look—”

“Do you think you’re getting sick?” Abby asked? “With those bags under your eyes, it looks like you haven’t slept in a week.”

Kara started to admit to a sleepless night when she stopped herself. She was exhausted, but being tired wasn’t an excuse to go home. “I do feel a little...stretched,” she said. “I wonder if I have a fever.”

Abby stepped into the cubicle and clinically felt Kara’s forehead. The woman had two children at home and plenty of experience in spot diagnosing illness. “I don’t think so,” she said. “Does anything else feel wrong?”

“I’m not sure,” Kara lied. “My stomach is a little queasy but I spent a lot of yesterday stuck in an airport trying to catch a flight back to Detroit so I thought it was just something I ate.”

She didn’t really like lying to Abby but the idea of going home was attractive, so she continued laying the groundwork for her sudden illness.

“You were still in the airport yesterday?” Abby asked.

Her friend's surprise made Kara chuckle. "I don't know if you noticed it, but we had a lot of snow just before Christmas."

"Yeah, but, wow! Your whole holiday must have been ruined."

Kara couldn't keep a wistful smile from forming on her face.

"What?" Abby asked. "What is it?"

"Oh, nothing," Kara said, trying to dismiss the topic.

"No, really, what were you smiling about? Most people who spent Christmas in an airport would be furious, not happy."

The overwhelming urge to confide in someone burst within Kara. She grabbed hold of Abby's hand and pulled her deeper into the cubicle. That wasn't very deep, but Abby got the idea and leaned closer so Kara could whisper to her. "I met someone. It was wonderful!"

"Ooooooh!" Abby squealed. "I want to hear all about it!" She suddenly straightened up and looked from side to side toward the neighboring cubicles. "But we shouldn't talk here. What are you doing for lunch?"



Lunch revived Kara and she decided to stick out the day at work. Ron still hadn't called her and she found that annoying. He had been sweet when they got up this morning, snuggling her as she got out of bed and making a touching—if pathetic—breakfast for both of them while she showered. Of course, it was also

nice that he forgot about the cereal and toast the second she came into the kitchen in her robe. Had she been one iota less firm in her resolve, he'd have taken her again this morning on the kitchen table.

Still, he should have called by now.

Of course, Kara knew that she could call too, but she told herself if Ron was too busy to phone her first then she didn't want to interrupt him at the office. She knew he dealt with a lot of clients by phone and could reasonably be expected to be incommunicado for lengthy periods of time. She, on the other hand, had a little bit more control over her schedule. As an accountant, she needed long hours without interruption to go over her books, but she could decide when she needed a break and wanted to stretch her legs or talk to someone.

Why hadn't he called? And was she really holding off phoning him out of respect for his work schedule or because she was too insecure to make the first move?

She took out her cell phone and looked at it. There were no missed messages. What was she going to do?

The opening notes of *Independent Woman* sprang from her phone and Kara answered it before a name could appear on the caller ID. "Hello?"

"Wow, that was fast!" Ron said. "I didn't even hear the phone start to ring."

Kara ducked her head in embarrassment. “I was just about to call you,” she confessed.

“Great minds do think alike,” Ron told her. “Do you want to tell me your news first or should I tell you mine?”

“I don’t have any news,” Kara told him. “I just wanted to hear your voice.”

“Is that my normal voice?” Ron asked before lowering his tone substantially. “Or my *sexy* voice?”

Kara began to relax. “I like both, actually. What was your news?”

“A friend of mine is throwing a New Year’s Eve Party,” Ron said. “Want to go with me?”

Kara perked up in her chair. “Is this the *first date* you mentioned last night?”

“Well actually, I was hoping we could go out—or stay in—a couple of times before New Year’s Eve. But the party would also count as a date.”

“So let me get this straight,” Kara teased. “Today is the 29th and you want me to go on three dates with you before New Year’s Day?”

“Well when you put it that way,” Ron said, “it does seem rather stingy of me. Let me check my schedule. Maybe we could throw in a lunch or two as well.”

The rush of excitement surging through Kara’s body made her absolutely giddy with pleasure. It wasn’t just her. Ron couldn’t get enough of her either.

“That does sound nice, doesn’t it? Of course, I’ve already eaten lunch today, but

maybe we could squeeze something in tomorrow. We can work out the details tonight on our first date. Have you decided where to take me yet?"

Ron hesitated. "To be quite honest, that's why I didn't call you earlier. I've been wracking my brains all morning and I can't think of what we should do tonight. The only thing I know for sure you like is ripping off your clothes and driving me crazy. My other ideas all seem boring by comparison."

"Mmmmm," Kara agreed. "Letting you rip my clothes off does sound encouraging, but you're whole point about dating was to put something other than sex on our relationship resume."

"I know," Ron agreed, "but can I help it if I have trouble imagining sitting next to you without letting my fingers roam?"

Kara laughed. "It's not bad if you imagine it, but it could be a problem if you can't actually control yourself."

"So what do you want to do?" Ron asked.

Kara considered that for a moment and decided not to let Ron off the hook. "I want you to pick me up at 7:00 P.M. and take me out for a night *you* think would really be fun."

She could almost hear him smiling over the phone. *Why were they both acting so damn insecure?*

"Is that really what you want?" Ron asked.

“Yes,” Kara assured him. “I want to learn something about you tonight.”

“Alright then,” Ron said. Any trace of hesitancy had completely disappeared from his voice. “I’ll pick you up at 7:00 P.M.”

There was a certain finality in Ron’s tone that made Kara think he was about to hang up the phone. She hurriedly inserted an important question. “Wait a minute! What should I wear?”

“Nothing too fancy,” Ron said. “We’re going to have fun after all.”

“What’s not *too fancy*?” Kara asked, but Ron hung up the phone without answering.

Chapter Eight

The First Date

Kara decided on blue jeans.

It was a difficult decision, for in her opinion, blue jeans were under dressed for just about every occasion. But she was too conscious of the fact that her ideas were conservative even for her own generation. With people Ron's age, it was hard to run into a woman who didn't love her blue jeans. The thin ones flaunted themselves in painted on versions while the heavier ones relaxed in more comfortable models. But they all wore them and so Kara bowed her head to fashion and pulled on her pair as well. She had to squeeze her stomach slightly to fasten the button, but after that they fit well enough.

She hoped he appreciated them.

For a top she wore a blouse which she was forced to tie at the waist because there was no room to tuck it into her jeans, but for shoes she abandoned all pretense of finding *nothing too fancy* (not to mention comfort) and put on a pair of

black four inch spikes which she'd bought to excite Bobby but never found the right occasion to wear.

Checking herself out in the mirror, she thought she looked damned sexy—even for a forty year old woman dressing like she was twenty-three.

The doorbell rang and Kara's heart skipped a beat. She glanced at the clock: 6:47 P.M.. She'd had no idea it had gotten so late. She ran out of her bedroom struggling to keep her balance in the unusually high heels. There was a window at the end of the hall which looked out over her driveway and sure enough, Ron's Grand Cherokee was parked there in plain sight. How had so much time passed since she'd gotten home tonight?

Still having a little bit of trouble with the heels, Kara made her way downstairs and opened the front door. Ron stood outside in the cold smiling at her. "Hey, you ready to go? I left my engine running so the car would stay warm."

Kara looked him up and down. To her relief she saw that he too was wearing blue jeans beneath his parka. That meant she'd probably chosen right.

"Just let me get my coat out of the kitchen," she told him.

He stepped in behind her and closed the door. "Hey I didn't get my welcome kiss!" he complained. He didn't seem that upset about it, because he quickly added, "but I like those jeans! They really show off your ass!"

Kara felt the heat rising to her face. "You said to dress casually."

“And I whole-heartedly approve of your choice,” Ron insisted. He walked into the kitchen behind her so he could continue admiring her body. “Not to mention those shoes. High heels are *very* sexy! You sure you want to go out tonight? I can think of a few dozen things we could do right here in the kitchen.”

This comment made Kara glance back at him over her shoulder. “You were the one who suggested we start dating.”

“And it’s an excellent idea,” Ron said. He stepped up behind her and ran his hands up her stomach until he cupped her breasts. Then he leaned in close and whispered in her ear. “It’s just your so damn beautiful I forget about all the other types of fun we can have.” He squeezed gently, sending a thrill of pleasure through her breasts, and pulled her back against him. “When I see you, all I can think about is the feel of your body beneath my hands, the way your lips press against mine when I kiss you, the little gasps you make when I first start to turn you on.”

Kara relaxed against him luxuriating in the pleasant heat suffusing her body. Ron’s strong arms supported her. She felt comfortable and safe and ready to follow his lead whatever he wanted to do tonight.

Ron released his grip on her breasts and helped her straighten up. “But then I think about how much I want to show you off tonight. How proud I’m going to be to have you on my arm.” He turned her around and cupped her chin. “And how much I enjoyed making you come in the airport.”

Kara shivered with a mixture of fear and intense excitement. “We’re not going to have public sex, are we?”

Ron winked. “Full blown sex might be too much for our *first* date, but it’s not beyond the realm of possibility.”

This time Kara’s shiver was strong enough for Ron to take notice. “You like that idea, do you? I thought you might. Is my sweet little Kara a secret exhibitionist at heart? Beneath that proper exterior do you like the idea of getting fingered in public or going down on my rock hard cock?”

“I, um, don’t know what you’re talking about,” Kara lied. “We’re not doing anything in public.”

Ron winked again. “That’s what you say now,” he told her. “Let’s see how you feel in a couple of hours.”

Kara shivered again. *What on earth could he have in mind?*

“So are you ready?” Ron asked. He stepped around Kara to pick her coat up off the back of a chair and held it for her while she slipped it on.

“What are we doing tonight?”

“I’m not telling you yet,” Ron said, “other than to say we’re going to one of my favorite places.”

It was strange how a statement could simultaneously make Kara feel warm and loved, but also frightened and insecure. *One of his favorite places?* She thought.

He'll have friends there. How are they going to react to me?

Ron seemed to be having some misgivings of his own. "It's not fancy," he warned her, "but it's really a lot of fun."

"Well let's go then," Kara said. "I really want to see what you like."

She offered Ron her hand and he led her out into the cold night.



It looked like a bar to Kara—large, not particularly modern and not really all that clean. The lights illuminating two of the letters in its sign had burnt out, but she could still make out the name: The Church Key. She looked the building over, uncomfortable with the idea that this might once have been a house of worship. Then the real meaning of the name struck her and she began to smile. She hadn't used a church key in years. Now when she needed to pop the cap off a bottle she used the back end of her cork screw.

Ron came around the jeep and opened her door. The cold air immediately rushed in around her. One advantage to blue jeans was the wind didn't find its way up her skirt. She slipped out of the car and let Ron embrace her. "Mmmm, it's getting colder," she said.

"Did you hear it's supposed to snow again on New Year's Day?" Ron asked.

“No!” Kara said. Honestly, even though good things had resulted from the last storm, she was awfully tired of the fluffy white stuff.

“They really don’t know how much we’re going to get yet,” Ron told her. “The reports I’ve heard vary from six inches to two feet.”

“Damn!” Kara didn’t like to curse, but she really was tired of this weather.

“It won’t be so bad,” Ron told her, “as long as I’m snowed in with you.” He kissed her briefly, pulling slightly on her upper lip with his mouth. “But if we’re snowed in apart, that’s really going to be terrible.”

He kissed her again, taking his time this time, using his tongue to play with her mouth. It warmed Kara’s world despite the sharply dropping temperature. She was sorry when he stopped.

“Now why don’t we go inside, get something to eat, and have some fun.” He slipped his arm around her back and turned with her toward the front door. A tall man in a cowboy hat opened it as they watched and stepped inside.

“Is this a western place?” Kara asked.

“Not really,” Ron said. “It’s eclectic.”

“Because I have boots if I need them,” Kara continued, “if we want to come back.”

“Well I don’t know if you need them,” Ron said, “but you’re welcome to wear them anytime. Boots are sexy.”

They began to walk together toward the front door. “I thought you said high heels are sexy.”

“Anything you wear is sexy,” Ron said.

Kara snuggled up closer against him. “But which do you prefer? Heels or boots?”

Ron stopped walking as if answering this particular question required all of his powers of concentration and he didn’t want to risk falling down. “Heels, I think, long spiky stiletto heels.”

The news slightly disappointed Kara. She hated the four inch spikes she was wearing. Boots would have been so much more comfortable.

Ron must have sensed her displeasure because he suddenly grinned as if to prove everything he had just said was a joke to him. “No, seriously, I don’t care what you wear as long as I get to see you.”

“But you prefer—”

Ron cut her off. “I prefer you!” He slipped his arm back around her and resumed leading her toward the entrance to the Church Key.



The interior of the Church Key was much like the exterior—unpretentious in the extreme. A very large big-screen television set showed a basketball game—the Pistons versus somebody. A half-dozen pool tables filled much of the floor

space. The walls were in need of a paint job and the wooden floor was often discolored as if spilt beer had sat there too long. The lights were dimmer than they should be without actually making the bar dark. Tall stools were scattered about the place, sometimes accompanied by equally tall, round tables, but just as often not.

“Hey Ron,” the bartender called out. He was very thin with long blond hair. “Come in out of the cold. Is this lady with you or are you just being a gentleman?”

Two dozen faces turned to look at Ron and Kara as they entered the bar and shook off the cold. It made her feel odd to suddenly be the center of so much attention, but the people were clearly curious—not hostile. There were black faces in the crowd as well and like the whites, their ages ranged from flirting with being too young to drink to a man who was easily more than sixty years old.

Ron led Kara toward the bar. “Nick, this is Kara, my new girlfriend. We met in Newark waiting for our flight to be cancelled. Kara, this is Nick. He owns the place.

Nick wiped his fingers on a hand towel then reached across the bar to shake her hand. “I’m pleased to meet you. Welcome to the Church Key.”

Kara shook his hand. He had a nice firm grip but didn’t crush her fingers. “It’s nice to be here,” she said.

“What can I get for you two, Ron?” Nick asked.

“Guinness for me,” he looked at Kara but didn’t wait for her to say what she wanted. “Bass for the lady, an order of wings and...would you like carrot sticks?”

Kara hadn’t gotten past the beer order. “I don’t think I’ve ever had Bass before.”

“It’s an ale,” Ron explained, “and I think you’ll like it. Besides, combined with my Guinness we’ll make a Black and Tan.” He seemed to think this was very funny, but Kara didn’t get the joke.

Nick sensed Kara’s confusion and stepped back into the conversation. “A Black and Tan is almost a mixed drink,” he explained. The dark Guinness floats on top of the amber ale. Why don’t I make you both one so you can see what Ron’s talking about?”

“Hey, if you don’t mind going to the trouble,” Ron said. “It’s not like it’s St. Patrick’s Day, after all.”

“Hey Nick,” one of the other patrons called out, “if you’re making Black and Tans can I get one too?”

Nick shrugged good naturedly. “Why not? We’re not busy.”

He took a glass and half filled it from a tap marked Bass Ale. Then he picked up a large spoon, held it over the glass against the side and moved to the Guinness tap. The dark stout splashed off the spoon and settled on top of the amber ale.

When he was finished both liquids were clearly discernable floating one on top of the other in the glass.

Nick handed it to her. “Try this.”

Kara took a tentative sip and stopped almost immediately. “Wow, I didn’t expect it to taste—creamy. That’s almost too heavy.”

“Try to take in a little bit more,” Nick suggested.

She didn’t really want another sip. Heavy beers had to have tons of calories. But she did as the man suggested because it would be impolite to do otherwise. This time she took a whole mouthful and was pleasantly surprised when the more bitter ale swirled around with the heavy Guinness in her mouth.

She put down the glass and wiped her lips. “Wow! That is good!”

Nick smiled broadly. “I’m glad you like it!” He immediately picked up a glass and started pouring Ron’s drink. When he finished, he said, “Why don’t you two go pick a pool table? Cass or I will bring the food to you when it’s ready.”

“You play pool?” Kara asked Ron.

Nick laughed. “He’d be a veritable hustler if everyone here didn’t already know how good he is.”

Nick put his hand to his mouth as if he’d said something he shouldn’t have, but his eyes continued twinkling with humor. “Oops, hope you weren’t planning to bet on anything tonight,” he said. “I may have just forewarned your victim.”

Ron laughed. “All you’ve done is change the handicap.”

He took a long drink of his beer. When he finished a foam mustache covered his upper lip. He offered Kara his arm. “Let’s go find a table,” he suggested.



“Is this what you usually eat for dinner?” Kara asked. The plate Nick brought them was heaped high with buffalo wings. It looked messy and tasty, but hardly nutritious. A smaller plate heaped with carrot and celery sticks looked better, but again felt more like a snack than dinner.

“A couple of nights a week,” Ron admitted. “Did I screw up? Don’t you like this?”

“It’s fine,” Kara rushed to assure him, even though she didn’t really think it was. If they came to the Church Key again, she’d have to insist they went to a proper dinner first—someplace they could sit down and relax and maybe have a glass of wine.

“Because if you don’t like—”

“It’s fine,” Kara repeated. “I’m just trying to learn more about you.”

She wasn’t the only one. Unless her woman’s intuition was completely failing her, an anorexic young woman leaning against the wall was working up her nerve to come over and talk to Ron. That made Kara angry, but Ron seemed oblivious to the woman. His eyes were only on Kara.

“That’s good,” he said. “Shall we rack up a game?”

Kara liked pool—although she knew Ron had no way of knowing this. Her daddy had taught her the game and while she didn’t play enough to keep her skills very sharp, she wasn’t going to embarrass herself either. “Go ahead,” she said. “I assume we’re playing eight ball?”

Ron grinned. He picked up the triangle and began to pull the balls out of the table pockets. Kara helped him by retrieving the nine and the twelve and rolling them down the felt to him.

Ron racked the balls, removed the triangle, and then snagged himself a buffalo wing while he led Kara over to the pool cues. “Most of them are in pretty good shape,” he told her, “but there are a couple of real duds to watch out for.”

Kara chose a cue that looked straight and true while Ron pulled a chunk of meat off his wing. Then he grabbed his own cue and the two of them walked back to the table.

The young woman Kara had noticed earlier had come to stand near their beers. She had dirty blonde hair about the length of the bartender’s and what Kara grudgingly admitted was a cute figure poorly covered in low riding jeans and a high riding t-shirt.

“You want to make it a three way game?” the woman asked.

“No, thank you,” Ron responded. “We’re going to play eight ball.”

The woman shrugged. "You mind if I play the winner?" she asked.

Considering what Nick had said about Ron's skills at the pool table, Kara had to believe the woman did not expect the winner to be her. She bristled at the rudeness, but Ron acted before she had to defend herself. "Hey," he said, "Kara and I are on a date here. I'm sure there are plenty of other guys around who'd love to pick up a game with you."

The woman's eyes narrowed as she considered Kara for a moment.

Kara stared straight back at her. She wasn't going to let some twenty-something anorexic white twit come between her and her man.

"Hey, Cass!" Nick yelled out from the bar. "I could use some help over here!"

Cass turned and stared sullenly at the bartender before grudgingly making her way over toward him.

Ron shook his head. "Sometimes," he said, "I don't think Cass is all here in the head."

Kara disagreed with him. "She knew what she was doing. She doesn't like me dating you and wanted to come between us."

She could tell by the expression on his face that Ron did not believe her. "I've been coming here for two and a half years," he said, "and she's never hit on me."

"Until tonight!" Kara added.

Ron looked confused.

“She never hit on you until tonight,” Kara clarified.

“She wasn’t...was she?” Ron asked. He twisted around to look at Cass where she stood listening to Nick lecture her.

Ron shrugged his shoulders. “I think your way off,” he said. “Not that it matters—I’m here with you!”

He picked the white cue ball up off the table. “You want to break first or shall I?”



Ron broke to start the game and promptly shot the one, three and seven balls into three different pockets. Then he missed sinking the six—on purpose Kara believed—setting her up with an easy shot at the other end of the table.

She leaned over the felt, very conscious of the fact that Ron was appraising both her skill and her body, and lined up her cue. Daddy had taught her to play when she was eight years old, and all three of his girls had loved the game until Daddy died and Mama sold the pool table.

She took her time with this first shot. It had been a long time since she’d played a game and she didn’t want to mess up.

She tapped the ball high with the tip of her cue stick and watched with satisfaction as it rolled forward and knocked the thirteen in.

“Nice shot!” Ron told her.

She offered him a smile, then tried her hand at a more challenging shot, quickly firing the cue ball across the table to sink the ten ball.

Ron’s smile broadened. He looked very pleased as if the evening was going to be a lot better than he’d imagined.

He stood back, examining Kara’s ass in her tight jeans while she lined up and missed her next shot. Then Ron sank a couple of balls before missing again. As Kara chose her next shot, Cass led a fat guy with a bushy beard over to the table beside them and started to rack up the balls.

“Hey, Ron!” the fat guy greeted them.

“Charlie!” Ron said as he offered the big guy his hand. “Let me introduce my girlfriend, Kara.”

Kara delayed her shot in order to shake Charlie’s hand. On closer inspection, she could see that he was two or three years older than Ron and obviously less in control of the beer gut. His beard had a Grizzly Adams look to it—six inches long and combed only with his fingers.

“Hey, Kara,” Charlie said. “Good to meet you! It’s about time Ron started bringing a woman around here.”

He took a swig of his beer—some amber liquid—not a Black and Tan like she and Ron were drinking. “Come to think of it,” he said, “it’s about time I started bringing a woman around here.”

Cass said nothing in response to this. It was quite obvious that she and Charlie were not together, even if they were matched up for their game. She finished racking the balls and then broke without saying a word.

The sound made Charlie glance down at the table. “Oops, it’s my turn,” he said.

When Charlie turned his attention to his own game, Ron stepped up beside Kara and watched as she bent over to line up her shot. She was pretty certain that she wasn’t going to make this one, and it didn’t help her concentration when Ron began surreptitiously feeling the cheek of her ass.

She missed the shot and straightened up against him.

He squeezed her cheek more boldly. “Mmmm,” he murmured. “Are you still opposed to taking quickies in the restroom?”

Kara smirked at him before walking around the table to pick up her drink. She was having fun and feeling remarkably bold and just a little bit naughty. “I might be game for something less than private,” she said, “but you’re going to have to think of a much better place than that.”



The night just kept getting better. Ron was funnier than she'd realized and he definitely enjoyed flirting with her. And he was good at it—the knowing look, the innocent brushes against her body, the anything-but-innocent graphic suggestions murmured in her ear.

Kara quickly rediscovered that she enjoyed flirting also.

Three times now she'd purposely missed a shot so Ron would lean over behind her and *instruct* her on how she should have lined up her cue stick. His arms encircled her, guiding her hands, and after she took the shot she could stand up and lean back against him for a much better embrace. Before tonight, she'd always favored skirts, but she was beginning to understand the attraction of tight jeans rubbing up against each other when her man stood close behind.

When Ron went to get their third beer, Kara excused herself to use the bathroom. She was a little bit leery of the facilities but she'd drunk enough that she really didn't have a choice. So she took a chance on cleanliness and went to relieve herself.

The bathroom looked better than she had expected and she did her business quickly. Then she decided to touch up her makeup in the mirror above the sink.

The door opened and Cass walked in.

Kara chose to ignore her and finished reapplying her lipstick.

Cass came over beside her and leaned against the sink, sizing Kara up without any attempt to conceal it. Finally, she spoke. "You ought to use a lot more foundation," she said. "It's the only way you're going to cover up those ugly age marks on your cheeks."

Kara knew that she didn't have any age spots. She decided to be catty, not defensive. "Jealous, honey?"

"Oh, please!" Cass responded. "Is that the best you've got?"

"Because that's what everyone out there thinks," Kara said. "What's the matter, a man doesn't look good to you until he's with another woman?"

Cass smirked. It did not make her look more attractive. "It does make it more fun, doesn't it? Taking someone who's someone else's property?"

Kara found the woman's attitude disgusting, but she hoped she didn't show that. It would just encourage her. But she had to answer something. "I don't own Ron," she said. "He's free to leave me the moment he gets bored."

"I'd have thought that would have been ten minutes after meeting you," Cass said. "I think without the beer and the pool table he'd already be looking for someone else."

Images of how she usually spent her time with Ron flashed through her mind. There weren't a lot of clothes in those memories. She couldn't help but

smile. “Well, I’m sure that when you gain a few more years experience, you’ll start to understand why it’s younger women who are more boring.”

She put away her lipstick, took out a tissue and blotted her lips.

“You think you’re something special,” Cass said, “but I could take him from you any time I decide I want him.”

The younger woman’s matter of fact dismissal of Kara’s appeal irritated her. She knew she shouldn’t encourage the woman, but she couldn’t help herself. “If that were true,” she said, “he’d have left me five minutes after we walked in.”

Cass bristled. “I can take him.”

“You just keep thinking that,” Kara said before picking up her purse and walking back into the bar.

Chapter Nine

Public Sex

“Hey,” Kara said as they got into Ron’s car, “I thought you said we were going to have public sex tonight.”

Ron gave her a sly look. “That’s not exactly what I said, but if it’s something you’re wanting I’ll be happy to take you back inside.”

A delicious shiver worked its way down Kara’s spine. For the moment, she could believe Ron was serious. He couldn’t be, of course, but looking at him right now she could almost believe he’d take her back inside and fuck her on the pool table. And wouldn’t that stick in that bitch Cass’ craw—and she’d deserve it after the way she had tried to ruin their evening.

Kara finished sliding into her seat and closed her door. “You missed your chance, big boy,” she teased.

Ron’s door remained open. He gestured back toward The Church Key. “I’m quite serious,” he told her.

Kara started to laugh, but the door to The Church Key opened and the silhouette of an anorexic figure with long hair appeared.

All mirth left her. “There’s that skank that kept coming on to you all night,” she said. “Why don’t we get out of here?”

Ron closed his door, glancing at Cass as he did so. “I really think you’re misreading this,” Ron said. “I’ve known Cass and her brother for two and a half years. She’s had plenty of opportunity to seduce me if she were interested.”

Ron’s obstinate defense of the woman really pissed Kara off. “And I suppose you’d have happily jumped into her bed,” she said.

Ron shrugged, then stuck the key in the ignition and turned on his car. The heat and window defogger sprang to life, beginning to counteract the chill. “Well, I am a guy and that’s a bar, but it still doesn’t seem likely.”

“And what is that supposed to mean?” Kara asked.

“It means I’ve gotten pretty drunk here lots of times, and it still hasn’t happened.”

Kara began to lash out at him again, but suddenly what he’d actually said partially penetrated her anger. “What? What did you say?”

“Anyone looks good when you’ve had enough alcohol,” Ron told her. “But I’d still have to be nearly comatose to want anything to do with Cass. She’s too damned troubled. I’ve seen her in a tank top and she’s got needle tracks on her

arms. Nick's trying to help her, but she's not going to get healthy hanging out in his bar."

Kara slid over in her seat and embraced Ron. He'd just made her so happy she didn't have words to properly express it. Ron, however, was clearly willing to let her try. There wasn't a lot of room in the front seat but he twisted toward her and encircled her with his own arms. Their mouths met, hungrily sucking at each other's lips, opening passages for each other's tongues to reach out and explore.

Kara let her hand inch back between them until she could slide inside of Ron's unzipped jacket. Her nails dragged across the thin fabric of his t-shirt, making him shiver with pleasure.

Kara's fingers obviously gave Ron some ideas of his own because he stopped embracing her and began working on the buttons of her long coat. Kara didn't want to give up control so she slipped her hands beneath Ron's t-shirt and began to trace the contours of his tight abs, working her way up toward his well-defined pectorals.

Ron got her coat unfastened and pushed it back off of her shoulders, momentarily forcing Kara's arms back behind her. He followed up on his advantage by leaning down to bite her large nipple through the fabric of her blouse and bra. With his hands holding her arms back behind her, her breasts made an easy target and he took full advantage of their exposure.

His teeth felt wonderful.

Blood rushed to engorge her nipple.

Kara shrugged her shoulders until she extracted her right arm from the sleeve of her coat, and then fumbled around next to the seat until she found the lever that let her slide the seat back several inches, making more room for Ron to work on her tit. Even though she had let Ron do more to her in public, her cooperation still surprised her. A week ago, she had been far more repressed than this.

A trick of the light revealed Cass several steps closer and peering hard at them. The sight almost caused Kara to sit up and push Ron away, but then a better idea struck her. She couldn't have done this before she met Ron in the airport, but was it so very different to let Cass see Kara get off with her man then it was to have the Goth girl in the terminal watch as Ron fingered her under her coat?

It would serve the skank right, after she had tried to drive a wedge between Kara and Ron!

She settled back in the seat a little bit surprised at her determination to put Cass in her place. She began to unbutton her own blouse. "Let me help you with this, Sweetie."

Ron had no idea that Cass was watching them, but Kara saw the blonde work her way closer, shivering in the cold because she'd come outside without her coat.

Ron happily pushed her tan blouse out of the way and then resumed his attack on Kara's breasts, gnawing at the nipple beneath the lacy bra.

Kara ran her hands through his hair, encouraging his efforts. Then got more frustrated with the bra than he was and reached behind her to unfasten it.

Her dark nipples were thick with desire, filling Ron's mouth as he sucked hard upon them. She caressed his cheeks as he worked on her, feeling the pressure build and ease before his tongue came out to titillate her.

It wasn't enough.

For the first time since she met Ron, his attentions weren't enough to satisfy her. She enjoyed his efforts and doubtless he would bring her to an orgasm eventually, but it irritated her that Cass was watching and not seeing how crazy Ron could make her.

She let go of Ron's face and slid her hands down to her jeans. Astonished at her own audacity, she unfastened the button securing them at her waist.

Ron suddenly realized what she had done. His mouth came up off her tit and started to ask a question, but Kara caught him with both arms and pulled him down to her breast again.

He happily complied, pulling her thick tit past his teeth and thwacking his tongue back and forth across it. His left hand slid down her bare stomach, paused momentarily at her panties and then dipped underneath to crawl through her bush toward her pussy. The jeans were still mostly zipped and they forced his fingers tight against her mons.

It felt exquisite.

His fingers crested her clitoris, first flattening it, and then squeezing it in a vice between two of them. His middle finger reached her moist lips and her hips began to gyrate in response to him.

Ron moved to her other nipple, leaving the first prickling from the cold air in the car. The defogger was working over time, trying to keep the windows clear as Ron made love to her body. Her right nipple leapt to attention at the touch of his lips and tongue and his hand maneuvered between her legs seeking the spots that would drive her crazy.

He tried to massage her pussy, but there really wasn't much room for him to work so he dipped inside her silky wetness and set her body quaking.

"Oh, yes, Sweetie," she moaned. "Oh, yes!"

Kara reached down and cupped Ron's hand with her own, encouraging her to finger fuck her pussy.

Ron began to pump his finger in and out of her, riding her clit as the tight jeans kept his hand close against her mons. His teeth nipped at her nipple, then suddenly got bored with that target and moved up to her mouth.

He had to change his position to properly reach her, swinging his legs in closer, forcing the zipper of her jeans open as he sought to both kiss and finger her at the same time.

Kara's hips began thrusting up against Ron's hand, pushing his finger deeper within her, driving his hand against her clitoris. His rough calluses ground against her most sensitive flesh. Her pulse pounded in her neck. Blood rushed to over engorge her labia and her clitoris. She wanted to scream, but couldn't quite catch enough breath to do so.

Ron began squirming himself. He stopped kissing her for a moment and began pulling at the front of his jeans trying to reposition his cock in his pants. He tried to keep his finger moving in her pussy, but the pressure inside his jeans became too much for him and he stopped fingering her so he could use both hands to pull on his pants.

Kara was too close to climaxing to let him stop now. She grabbed his hand and pulled it back to her pussy and when Ron had trouble working his way back under her panties she impatiently pushed the jeans and underwear down off of her hips to the level of her crotch.

Ron started to finger her again, but Kara was ready to crank things up a notch. She grabbed his head with both hands and wrestled him down onto her exposed pussy. His mouth consumed her clitoris and the warm wet suction finally pulled her into orgasm.

She tried to buck and writhe beneath him, but her movements were constrained by the narrow leg space in front of her. Then Ron made matters worse by sliding his thumb up into her pussy and wiggling it about while he sucked. She banged her knees on the underside of the dashboard and glove compartment. She wanted to see the look on Cass' face but her eyes were almost blind from the strength of her climax.

Suddenly she was blind for real as a pair of halogen headlights snapped on in the pickup truck parked directly in front of Ron, exposing her nakedness and Ron's mouth on her bush.

The concept of public sex instantly became less appealing. She couldn't see who was in the truck, but she was absolutely certain he could see her. The knowledge intensified her climax even as it motivated her to action. She twisted on to her side toward Ron and yanked at her open blouse. She only succeeded in covering one breast, but it was a definite improvement over total nakedness.

Ron sat up wiping his mouth on his sleeve, a sheepish grin splitting his face in half.

The pickup truck backed out of its space and then pulled next to Ron's jeep. Ron good-naturedly rolled down the window to talk to the man, while Kara tried to cover her nakedness beside him.

It was Charlie who had discovered them—the bearded friend of Ron's who had played pool with Cass at the table next to them in the bar.

Charlie was laughing so hard he almost couldn't talk. "Your girlfriend's got great tits, Ron," he said, "but shouldn't you take her home or something?"

Kara ducked her head as the other car peeled out leaving only the sound of the other man's laughter. She pulled her blouse tighter across her chest and managed to re-secure two of the buttons. "I am so embarrassed! How are we ever going to show our faces here again?"

Ron's head snapped around so he could look at her. "What?"

Kara didn't look at him. She was focused on getting her pants back up around her hips, worrying about what she'd look like when the next patrons arrived or left. What had she been thinking? What the hell did she care about Cass? Public sex? Had she lost her mind? What if a cop had pulled into the lot looking for drunk drivers? "Your buddy is going to tell every person in this bar what we just did!"

Ron nodded, obviously not understanding why that was such a negative. “We’ll laugh about it a couple of times and then someone else will do something to steal the spotlight.”

How could he not understand how humiliating she found this?

She got her jeans up where they were supposed to be but her panties remained bunched up uncomfortably down around her pussy. She could live with it. She sure as hell wasn’t taking her jeans down again to fix them. “Can you take me home, please?”

She couldn’t look directly at Ron, but from the corner of her eye she could see his expression. *Concern* didn’t quite capture it. Neither did *worry*. Could he actually be angry? Didn’t he understand how embarrassed she was?

Part of Kara wanted to put her hand on his leg to reassure him but a combination of embarrassment and her own growing temper prevented her from doing it. What had she been thinking? She was forty years old! Too damn old to play kid games in a parking lot. “Just take me home,” she repeated. “We can talk about this more later.”

“Okay,” Ron said, “okay.”

He put the jeep in gear but before he could edge forward into the space just vacated by his friend, Cass appeared at the still open driver’s side window. “That’s

what you get from an older woman,” she said. “First they use you; then they try to change you.”

“Back off, Cass!” Ron said.

“It happens every time,” the anorexic white girl told him. “Now that she’s told you you can’t come back here, how long do you think it will be before the rest of your friends hit the chopping block?”

“Cass, shut up!” Ron snapped. He pressed the gas pedal and the jeep started forward going faster than he should have in the icy parking lot.

“She didn’t even get you off!” Cass shouted after them.

Ron rolled up his window. “Sorry about that. I had no idea she was out here.”

Kara didn’t tell him that she’d known about Cass. It made her outrage over the bearded guy seem absurd, if she admitted that she’d encouraged Ron to suck her tits in part because she knew that someone else from the bar was watching. She doubted very much that Ron would understand the subtle difference between the two witnesses.

“She really hasn’t ever paid attention to me before,” Ron said. “I have no idea what got into her tonight.”

“She likes to take guys away from other women,” Kara told him. It was obvious even before Cass had told her that was what she liked. Why guys couldn’t see things like that had always perplexed her.

Ron didn’t have an answer and they drove in silence for a while, taking back roads rather than the highway. Old snow was everywhere, heaped high by the plows on the side of the road. She wondered where they would put it all if they got another major storm.

Something Cass had said flittered back into Kara’s mind. Was she really using Ron? On principle, she ought to disregard anything that skank had told them, but this accusation surprised her. There was probably some truth to the charge of *changing* him. All lovers did that to some extent, but *using*? Kara really didn’t like the sound of that. Perhaps it was too close to what her sister, Liz, had said.

She thought back over the encounter. Obviously Cass had noticed that Ron hadn’t come. Heck, he hadn’t even gotten his cock out, but that was because his friend had interrupted them before she could return his attention. Wasn’t it?

She thought through their love-making again, remembering how he’d been fumbling with the erection in his pants and she’d pulled him back down on her pussy. But that hadn’t been using him, had it? She’d just needed to come. She’d intended to satisfy him after that.

A cascading slide show of their other sexual encounters flashed through Kara's mind. Her eyes flashed with sudden horror. Could Cass be right? Ron and she had never had an encounter that was primarily about his pleasure. They were going on a week now and they'd had sex a lot and never once had he come without seeing to her needs first and sometimes, like tonight, she hadn't filled his needs at all. How had she been so selfish? One of the things that had most frustrated her about Bobby was that he'd never cared enough about her satisfaction.

When they got home, she would have to do something about this—pull him down on the floor and jack him off or even blow him.

Cass' mocking accusations rang through her mind again. That little junkie wouldn't wait until they got home. She wouldn't let Ron wait to shoot his load.

"Pull over!" Kara said.

Her demand obviously startled Ron. "What's wrong?"

"Pull over!" she said again.

"Look, Kara, I'm sorry that Charlie caught me going down on you. I should have been more responsible and insisted I take you home first. But please don't break up with me over this."

"Break up with you?" Kara repeated. "Oh, Sweetie, we are not breaking up. But I need you to pull over right now in that parking lot."

Ron did as he was told, clearly not understanding what was on her mind. He turned into the parking lot of a strip mall and parked against a snow bank. Then he turned in his seat to face her. “What’s wrong?”

“Turn the engine off,” Kara said.

Ron did so, but he didn’t stop asking questions. “What’s happening?”

“And your headlights.”

Again Ron complied. “Are you going to tell me what this is all about?”

Kara answered by unbuttoning her blouse again, then sliding over next to him in the seat. “We have some unfinished business,” she said as she unfastened his seat belt.

Ron did not respond as expected by tweaking one of her nipples. He sat very still in his seat, clearly uncomfortable with what she was doing.

Kara slipped her hand down on to his inner thigh and squeezed lightly through his jeans. She snuggled close so that her bare breast pressed against his arm. “Why don’t you tilt your seat back,” she suggested, “so we can get more comfortable?”

Ron didn’t move. “Why are you doing this?” he asked. “Why not wait until I get you home?”

This really wasn’t the response Kara expected. “Why should you have to wait that long?”

She slid her hand up onto his crotch to feel his package. Even limp he was large—larger than any other man she'd ever been with. She smothered the impulse to check around them for witnesses and began to unfasten Ron's belt.

He squirmed about, more uncomfortable than ever. "You just got upset that we were doing this," he said. "Why don't we go someplace you're more comfortable?"

Part of Kara wanted to do precisely that, but a larger part needed to prove to herself that she could focus solely on Ron's pleasure—that she wasn't using him like Liz and Cass thought.

She pulled the belt free of his pants and tossed it on the floor. "I can't wait that long," she said. "I can't stand the thought of my man having to wait to feel the pleasure he just gave me."

She unhooked his jeans and pulled them open exposing the bulge inside his white briefs. She massaged him again, feeling his meat. She liked making Ron hard with her mouth but she'd never enjoyed swallowing semen. Tonight she was going to overcome her inhibitions and give him complete satisfaction.

She pulled at the waistband of his briefs so she could take his flaccid penis in her hand.

Ron caught her fingers stopping her. She couldn't figure out what was wrong with him. She pulled his hand up to her breast and pressed the fingers

against her nipple. Robotically at first, he began to play with her tit, rolling it back and forth between his thumb and forefinger, and occasionally pulling and squeezing the sensitive flesh.

It felt very good, but Kara couldn't let herself be distracted. She returned her attention to that limp dick in his briefs, pulling the waist band down as far as it would go with Ron sitting as he was in the driver's seat.

She lowered her head trying not to bang it on the steering wheel and licked the flaccid penis.

There was no immediate response. Ron was usually hard when she first got her hands on him. What could be the problem? He'd better not be thinking of Cass.

She licked him again then used her lips to *bite* the organ where the shaft of his phallus met the rim of the circumcised head. Her tongue flickered out and tickled him.

Ron's head snapped back and he sharply pinched her nipple—just a moment of a response but it was proof that she could get to him.

She licked again, taking a wide swath this time, finally feeling his penis begin to respond. It thickened first, then began to lengthen as she kissed and licked her way down the short shaft toward his balls.

Unfortunately, Ron's blue jeans obstructed her. "Let the seat back, Sweetie," she ordered.

Ron did as he was told, sliding the seat back to give her more headroom near his cock.

Taking advantage of the extra room his new angle gave her, Kara tugged his jeans and briefs down off his hips. Ron let go of her nipple to help her, shoving the tough fabric all the way down to mid thigh. His hand returned quickly to her breast: cupping, massaging, and tweaking her. When she lowered her face to his penis again, his left hand came up to stroke her hair and caress her cheek.

She wasn't exactly certain how to proceed so she chose the most obvious route, taking him into her mouth and sucking rhythmically on his penis. In a very few seconds he began to grow, lengthening considerably as he thickened in her mouth. Soon he was big enough for her to wrap her dark fingers around the base of his shaft while she licked and sucked the head of his dick like she would a dripping popsicle.

The fingers of Ron's right hand left her breast and snapped open her blue jeans. Her panties were still bunched uncomfortably so he had easy access to her pussy. His fingers cruised through her bush, glided over her clitoris, and dipped quickly into her steamy wetness.

Kara stopped sucking for a moment as she rode the resulting jolt of pleasure and Ron took advantage of her distraction. He slid his now wet finger out of her pussy and began to diddle her clitoris, swirling around the little nub of flesh, pushing it up and down and back and forth. It swelled quickly in response to him, enhancing the tingles of pleasure radiating through her body.

Ron made this look so simple—like flicking on a light switch. Bobby had never understood her body so well. He'd always had to fumble with the key for several minutes before fitting it into her lock and priming her pump, Ron had seemed to know all her combinations from that very first day in the airport. She loved the way he made her body convulse and shudder.

Ron's cock was hard enough now to press against her cheek—the outside of her cheek, which wasn't part of the plan. She tried to lift herself up to suck on him but a near orgasmic spasm cost her her resolve and her face dropped back down into his pubic hair. She was suddenly very close to climaxing—moving from nothing to the very precipice of excitement in what could only be a minute. Ron's fingers twiddled her expertly between her legs and somehow her own hands had left his shaft so she could twist and pull on her own hard nipples.

“Oh, Ron,” she groaned. “Please don't stop...ohhhhhh!”

Her mouth filled with pubic hair as she screamed out her passion. Ron's strong hands shifted her onto her side and her ass slid part way off the seat until

the console with the heater and the radio stopped her from falling into the foot space. He was fondling her harder now, his fingers moving more frantically, driving her mercilessly on the crest of her climax into ever greater weaves of ecstasy. Her mind went numb with pleasure. She was so overwhelmed by her orgasms that she couldn't even get her hand on his dick to ground herself. Her throat grew rasp from screaming. Her hands found Ron's as it worked between her legs, but she was coming so hard she couldn't muster the strength to move it.

The pounding of her heart deafened her while the pulse it sent raging through her body seemed to constrict her airways. She couldn't catch her breath. She felt as if she'd just run a marathon and now had to charge full speed ahead toward the finish line.

His fingers kept working her clitoris—driving her poor abused body through climax after climax. She couldn't turn away from his ministrations because her damned ass was trapped between the seat and the dashboard. Her fingers clawed futilely against the back of Ron's hand but her lover's only response was to continue fingering her to ever greater climaxes.

Chapter Ten

Doubts

When Kara finally regained her senses, she was half-sitting half-kneeling in the foot well in the passenger side of Ron's Grand Cherokee with her cheek on the seat and her long hair splayed across her face. Her blue jeans were stuck uncomfortably around mid-thigh, her open bra and blouse were twisted in disarray and she felt light-headed and disoriented. What was worse, the beer from the Church Key had caught up with her and she badly needed to go to the bathroom.

Next to her, Ron sat in the driver's seat playing with his dick—but not in a good way. He was still more than half hard and he was pushing the swollen phallus up off his groin with his thumb until it stood straight up in the air like a flagpole. Then he'd let go of it so that it thumped back in place on his groin. He looked bored, a little frustrated and anything but happy.

Kara knew she needed to help him, but the beer in her bladder needed to be dealt with first. No woman could feel sexy when she really needed to pee.

Ron realized she had awakened and straightened up in his seat. He reached beneath him and pulled his jeans up to his waist, suggesting he wasn't interested in more sex either. "How are you feeling?" he asked. Was she imagining it or did his voice sound hollow and distant? "You really went crazy there in the end! I think you like to do it in public."

Kara began to feel very embarrassed. She knew Ron hadn't meant it that way, but she couldn't help feeling like his comment was a criticism. "I don't know," she said. "I just...that was supposed to be about you."

"Oh, I enjoyed it," Ron assured her, but Kara realized she didn't believe him. Why hadn't Ron just let her give him a blow job? Why had he had to start touching her? She didn't want to use him. She was trying to be a good girlfriend.

Kara tried to get up into her seat but discovered her right foot had gone to sleep. It was, in fact, so numb that she couldn't get any push out of it, but fortunately in the cramped car seat her arms and left leg were sufficient to lever her into place.

The seat scraping across her bare bottom made her shiver, as did her open blouse rubbing against the sides of her breasts.

Ron slid over next to her and slipped his arm around her shoulders. His pants were still unfastened, an invitation she couldn't take advantage of right now.

He nibbled on her ear for a moment and whispered, "I love it when you go all crazy on me. Do you want to try it again?"

His fingers touched her bare thigh above the jeans and Kara had to move fast to stop him from triggering another little climax.

"What's wrong?" he asked, continuing to nibble on her ear. "I know you like it when I touch you and I want to get some too."

She knew she should just tell him she needed to release some beer. Her hesitation seemed absurd to her rational brain when she's just had this man's cock in her mouth, but talking about urination seemed so crude and indecorous that suddenly she couldn't bring herself to say it. It was as if some absurd part of her psyche believed that this was the final barrier she couldn't cross if she were to stay a *good girl*. "I...can we go home first?" she asked.

Ron straightened up beside her. This time he definitely sounded disappointed. "I guess...if that's what you want."

"I...I want more tonight, Ron," she said. She knew she was acting stupidly, but the wrong words kept coming out of her mouth. "But I really need to get home."

Ron turned the car on. The windows had completely fogged up and it took a few moments for the defogger to clear them. It was a learning moment, Kara realized. They should have turned Ron's car off before making out in the Church

Key parking lot, then the headlights wouldn't have shown his friend what they were doing—or at least not the *specifics* of what they were doing.

Ron backed up the car and got back on the street while Kara vainly tried not to think of waterfalls and fire hoses. She wasn't much for conversation. Instead she focused on getting her clothes back in place while not having an accident. Ron kept glancing over at her but he didn't say much either.

When he pulled into her driveway, Kara had her keys ready and the door open before the car had actually stopped. She was running to her front step before Ron had gotten his seatbelt off.

She fumbled her key into the lock, vaguely aware that he wasn't following her, and then the door was open and she was throwing down her purse and coat.

Two minutes later, she returned to the front door to find Ron hadn't waited on her.

Her driveway was empty.

Chapter Eleven

Second Thoughts

Kara didn't sleep well. She tossed and turned and kicked at the covers all night long. No matter which way she positioned herself she just couldn't get comfortable and when she reached out for Ron he wasn't in his newly accustomed place beside her.

She felt rotten. Liz and Cass were right. She'd used Ron and he'd gotten tired of it.

Now she was alone instead of sleeping with her man.

She had to find a way to make things right again.



The morning started out as poorly as the night had ended.

To start things off wrong, Ron didn't call and Kara didn't know what to do about it. She realized she should have called him last night, but she was embarrassed and hurt and even though she knew she'd screwed up, she didn't

want to be the first one to reach out. She kept thinking he would pull up again in her driveway and take out a six pack of beer or a bottle of wine that explained his sudden departure. In the week since she had met him, he'd always been there for her. She really couldn't believe that he'd just drive away from her now.

Kara was so distracted worrying over Ron that she snagged the zipper on her favorite top and had to spend fifteen minutes fiddling it free again. By the time she finished her coffee had gone cold and she was running late and didn't think she had time to make more. Add to that, the bathroom mirror showed dark circles under her eyes that added ten years to her age and she'd forgotten to go to the store yesterday so she still had nothing in her refrigerator to make her cold coffee palatable.

But what was really bothering her was that Ron had gone home and she still didn't know what she was supposed to do. Was this his way of saying it was over? Had they broken up on that drive home and she had somehow failed to notice? Was he waiting for her to call right this minute and explain or apologize for what she'd done or hadn't done? And why wasn't she on the phone right now doing just that? Why was she drinking cold black coffee in the kitchen when she should be patching things up with her too-young boyfriend?

She knew Ron must be disappointed, but it wasn't all her fault. She'd tried to satisfy him—even been willing to swallow his cum. She hadn't intended him to

finger her into delirium again or planned on a night's worth of Black and Tans deciding the rent was due and they were ready to come out again.

Why hadn't she just explained herself? How could she be comfortable enough with Ron to put his hard penis in her mouth but too embarrassed to tell him she had to go to the bathroom? It didn't make sense to her and it certainly wasn't going to make sense to him.

She knew she'd blown it, but she still didn't call—even though she knew that this could only make things worse between them.



Arriving at her office didn't improve Kara's day.

Accounting required a certain minimum level of focus and concentration, and today Kara's thoughts were all swarming around Ron and his failure to spend the night with her. She missed him terribly, much more strongly than their brief time apart would seem to warrant. She wanted to hear his laughter, feel his hand in hers, and snuggle up with him in bed or on the couch.

She also wanted to feel his strong arms circle around her back, his hard lips press against hers, and the large bulge in his pants grind tight against her crotch. There had been a mirror in the hotel room where they'd played some games while waiting for a flight back to Detroit. Ron liked to come up behind her and watch her body slowly appear in the mirror as he carefully divested her of each and every

article of her clothing. He'd loved the contrast in their skin tones: his white fingers pinching her coal black nipples, his thick erection—itsself a beautiful range of shades—disappearing between the dark lips of her pussy or folded in the cleavage of her ebony breasts.

Now new images that she hoped had never happened began to cycle through her mind overlapping her honest memories and displacing them. Cass took Kara's place in Ron's arms—her stick thin legs wrapped around his waist while she rode him. His hands were on her butt, lifting that bony white ass up and down as she bounced on his pole.

Or Cass lying on her back—her needle-tracked arms stretched out above her while Ron knelt between her legs. He was working his hard erection, masturbating himself until his cock finally spat its load and spattered cum across her teeny tiny nipples.

Or Cass bobbing up and down on Ron's cock, stringy blonde hair splayed across her face and shoulders, while she-

With a conscious act of will, Kara pushed the images momentarily from her head. She didn't want to think about these things; didn't want to imagine filth that had probably never happened. Didn't want to get jealous and act the fool without any evidence that Ron had been unfaithful to her. But the further the morning

progressed the more frequently her cruel brain returned to these sick thoughts—and the more vividly her imagination conjured new scenes to torture her.

Where had Ron gone last night when he left her? And why couldn't Kara bring herself to pick up the phone to find out?

This wasn't like her. When had she become a coward? When had she started caring so much?

Kara's cell phone rang, blessedly interrupting her line of thought.

Looking quickly at the caller ID she was disappointed to see Ruth's name appear where she'd hoped to find her boyfriend's. She decided to accept it anyway, wondering what else in this day could go wrong. "Hi, Ruth," she mumbled, before stifling a yawn.

"Now don't go getting so excited to talk to me," Ruth said. "It might inflate my ego, or something."

Kara yawned again. "I'm sorry," she said, "I didn't sleep well last night. What can I do for you?"

"Well for one thing," Ruth said, "you can skip the details on all of your little sexual escapades."

Ruth's tone helped wake Kara. Her older sister had been sniping at her like this her whole life. She didn't intend to let Ruth get the better of her now. "I wasn't planning to share any," she said.

“But you saw him, I assume? Liz said he drove over and shoveled your driveway the night Al and I dropped you off.”

“He did,” Kara confirmed. “He’s a good guy.”

“And did he stay the night?” Ruth asked.

“No comment,” Kara told her. She could almost picture her older sister shaking her head with disapproval.

“And what did you do last night? More bedroom antics?”

“For a person who claims she doesn’t want any details, you certainly are pressing for them?”

“So you did!” Ruth said. “Honestly, Kara, I don’t understand what’s come over you unless sex is all that you intend to make of this relationship.”

“We went to a bar he likes and played pool,” Kara told her. She didn’t know how Ruth would react to this news, but given her clearly negative opinion of Ron, the odds were it wouldn’t be good.

“Pool?” Ruth repeated. “Like Daddy used to play with us?”

“Yes, pool,” Kara confirmed. “He’s really good too.”

“You were always pretty good also,” Ruth remembered. “You could beat Daddy even when he wasn’t drinking.”

“Thanks,” Kara said. “It’s nice of you to remember.”

“I always liked pool,” Ruth continued. “You know Al and I keep talking about getting a table, but we don’t know where we’d put it.”

“It’s a good game,” Kara said. “Ron’s better than me now, but I think if we play enough to get me back in shape, I’ll be able to give him a good game.”

“I’ll bet you could,” Ruth said.

That sounded suspiciously like a compliment—and that made Kara just a little bit suspicious.

“So what else did you do,” Ruth asked.

“Drank some beers, talked to a couple of his friends—it was a nice evening.” And it had been, Kara realized, until she’d let Cass get to her and mess things up at the end.

“He introduced you to his friends?” Ruth asked.

“Yes,” Kara said. “Why does it sound as if that surprises you?”

“Because I really didn’t think he’d do that,” Ruth admitted. “Maybe I...misjudged him.”

Now Kara knew something was definitely up. “Who are you?” she asked, “and what have you done with my sister?”

“Kara—”

“Seriously,” Ruth, “you’re never this nice. What’s going on?”

Ruth dropped all her pretenses. “I want to invite you and Ron over to dinner tonight. It’s hard, but I thought if I was nice you’d be more likely to come.”

Kara started to laugh. This was the sister she knew and loved—not that she was ready to let her off the hook. “*You* wanted to invite us?”

Ruth couldn’t keep from laughing either. “Okay,” she said, “Mama wanted me to invite the two of you over.”

Now everything made sense. “And does this mean Mama will be in attendance?” Kara asked.

“And Liz and her new boyfriend, Daryl,” Ruth added.

“Well I’m relieved that the body snatchers haven’t gotten hold of you, Ruth, all that sweetness and light was making me nervous. It’s good to see the old evil you poking through.”

“Come on!” Ruth complained. “I’m not that bad!”

“Who are you kidding? Satan wouldn’t be so cruel as to invite Ron to meet our whole family in one sitting during the first week we’re dating.”

Ruth laughed. “It will be a lot of Brennans, won’t it?”

“Yes, it will, and I’m not inviting him,” Kara said. Truth was, she didn’t know for certain if she and Ron were even dating anymore, but if there was one thing in the whole blessed world that was likely to finish driving Ron away, it was a family dinner with the Brennan clan.

“Of course, you are,” Ruth told her. “If you don’t you’ll have to listen to endless hours of our mother worrying about what you’re hiding from her. Tell your little boy that you’ve got to get this over with eventually and eventually is tonight at 7:00 P.M.!”

Ruth hung up the phone to emphasize her point, but rang back almost immediately.

Kara clicked the little green button and returned the phone to her ear. “Honestly, Ruth, I don’t even know if Ron is free tonight,” she complained.

Ruth found the notion that Ron might have other plans absolutely hilarious. “Well, best to let him know early on how we do things in this family. Mama is queen! When she speaks, we obey!”

It bothered Kara just how true a statement Ruth had just made. Everybody kowtowed to Mama. If Ron didn’t come out to Ruth’s tonight, Mama would never forgive him—no matter what his reason. That wasn’t fair but it was true just the same.

Ruth laughed harder. “And don’t tell me it’s not fair,” she said. “Not only did Al almost not propose to me because of Mama, but there’s at least two times we almost got divorced over her.”

“You and Al almost got divorced?” Kara said. The idea astounded her. “I always thought you had the perfect marriage. You tell Al what to do and he does it—usually without giving you any lip or even asking a question.”

Kara laughed hard at her joke but Ruth clearly didn’t find the matter so funny, so Kara tried to rein in her sense of humor. “Okay, all joking aside, I’ve always thought the two of you were very happy.”

“Every relationship has its problems,” Ruth said. There was no humor at all in her voice anymore. “Mama is one of ours. You deal with it and move on.”

“But divorce?”

“We talked about it,” Ruth said. If Kara had to guess, she’d say her sister really regretted having shared that piece of information with her. Appearances had always been important to Ruth. “And I don’t really want to talk about it anymore.”

“Okay,” Kara said. “I guess that’s fair enough. And I guess I’ll talk about all of this with Ron, but I’m not promising we’re coming.”

“You can think that if you want,” Ruth told her, “but the rest of us know better!”



After disconnecting the call, Kara put down her phone and considered what to do next. The obvious move was to call Ron, but she continued to hesitate to do this. Ron was angry with her. He’d figured out she’d been using him—even if she

hadn't intended to. Somehow she didn't think saying: *Hey, you want to come out to dinner with me and be insulted by my family for a couple of hours* was going to convince him she was changing her tune.

She needed to talk to someone about this, and much as she hated to admit it, her sister Liz seemed the only serious possibility. Liz supported her relationship with Ron, even if her stated reasons were bizarre. And she was weird enough that she'd have some ideas on how to handle this.

She picked up her phone and called her little sister, hoping her supervisor didn't decide to walk by and check on the cubicles.

Liz answered on the second ring. "Hi Kara, did Ruth call you about tonight yet?"

Kara sighed.

"I'll take that as a yes," Liz said. "If it makes you feel any better, Daryl and I have to be there as well. This is one of Mama's command performances, which means she's taking your little white boy toy very seriously."

"Will you please not call him that?" Kara asked.

"Okay," Liz said, "no problem. So when are you and your gesture toward racial restitution going to arrive?"

"Liz!"

Liz started laughing. “Don’t like that one either? How about *sex slave*? I can keep going all day!”

“I suppose that calling him *Ron* is out of the question?” Kara asked.

“As a symbolic gesture toward sisterhood, I’ll do that for you tonight,” Liz said, “but between you and me, I much prefer *boy toy*.”

Kara started to smile. “It’s a deal she said, when it’s just between you and me.”

“I think I better amend that,” Liz said. “I get to call him *boy toy* whenever he’s not around.”

Her sister’s laughter was contagious. “That’s not what you said!” Kara said. “We have a deal!”

“Now who’s the lawyer here?” Liz asked. “I don’t see a written agreement and you really don’t want to argue oral contracts against me.”

Thirty seconds passed before Kara’s laughter calmed enough to let her answer. “Thanks, Liz, I needed a good laugh.”

Liz continued playing the comedian. “What’s wrong? Did you use your boy toy so much he’s broken? You don’t think he can walk well enough to meet Mama tonight?”

“Might as well have,” Kara said. “I’m not sure but I think we might have broken up last night.”

Liz instantly became serious and began to interrogate Kara. “Tell me what happened.”

Suddenly Kara wished she hadn’t started talking about this. How on earth was she going to explain what had happened to her sister—and how could she do that in an open cubicle in her office. “I don’t know if I can do that here.”

Liz instinctively understood Kara’s dilemma.

“I’ll pick you up at twelve,” she said. “We’re doing lunch!”

Chapter Twelve

Facing Problems

“So what happened?” Liz asked. They’d ordered their food, but it hadn’t arrived yet. Liz had chosen a Mexican place called On the Border, and claimed the Margaritas were to die for. Kara had refused to order one—accountants really shouldn’t go back to the office with alcohol on their breath—but Liz was like the rest of the Brennan women. She ignored people when they disagreed with her and brought them into compliance with her wishes by main force of will. “You sounded so happy about him on Sunday night.”

“I don’t know,” Kara said. “It’s all really embarrassing.”

“That’s why I ordered you a margarita. You can go home sick today if you’re afraid to go back to the office, but you need to tell someone what happened between you and Ron.”

Kara really wanted a drink and strawberry margarita was one of her favorites. She took a sip enjoying the sweet fruit with the tequila bite underneath.

Then she took another. Maybe Liz was right. Maybe she should just call in after lunch and forget about this.

“I called Ruth after we spoke,” Liz told her, obviously trying to move their conversation forward.

“You didn’t tell her what I said?” Kara asked.

“Of course not,” Liz said. “But she was more forthcoming. It sounded like the evening started well. How did he know you like to shoot pool?”

Kara took another sip and thought seriously about Liz’s question. It was a good place to begin. There was nothing threatening about it. “I don’t think he did know,” Kara told her sister. “The whole idea of having a date was to try and learn something about each other. We...” She broke off when she realized what Liz could imply from what she had said.

“This is going to take a lot longer if you try to hide half the story,” Liz said. Her smile was only a tiny bit mischievous. “So why don’t I tell you what we’ve all assumed about you and Ron. You’ve already admitted you met in the airport and you were far too clean when you got home not to have spent time in a hotel. So we assume that you and Ron spent that time together—at least four days depending on when you got to the hotel room. And while Mama and Ruth won’t come right out and say it, we all know you spent that time fucking each other’s brains out.”

Kara ducked her head while the heat rose to her face.

“I in particular think that was a good thing,” Liz went on. “I was never as fond of Bobby as everyone else seemed to be. I’ll bet you had more sex with Ron in those four days than you’d had with Bobby since he moved to New York City.”

“Pretty much,” Kara agreed. “Ron’s a lot more...energetic than Bobby.”

Liz’s smile transformed into a wide grin. “He’s also, what, thirty years younger than Bobby?”

Kara nodded, still embarrassed but encouraged by Liz’s seeming support. “It makes a big difference.”

“I would think so,” Liz said. “You know women hit their physical prime later than men. “

“I’ve read that too,” Kara said, “but when you come right down to it, he’s still a lot closer to your age than to mine.”

“So who cares?” Liz asked. “You’re having fun with him, right? At least you were...”

Kara picked up her margarita and took another sip. When she put it down, she picked her napkin up off the table and unwrapped the silverware within it.

Liz watched all of this in silence.

Kara twisted the napkin a couple of times, then set it down and reached for a chip. The salsa was hotter than she’d expected which encouraged her to take

another sip of margarita. When she put the glass back down, Liz asked: “So are you going to tell me what happened last night?”

Kara picked up another chip and broke it in half. “There was a girl at the bar—a young woman really—who made a play for Ron.”

Liz didn’t say anything so after an overly long pause Kara continued.

“He really didn’t pay any attention to her, but she bothered me, followed me into the bathroom and told me I was too old and I was using him.”

Liz’s normally bubbly personality reasserted itself. She just couldn’t stay quiet when fed a straight line like that. “Well I should hope so!” she said. “What’s the point of dating a young stud if you’re not going to use him?”

Kara shook her head and broke one section of the chip in half again. “She made me feel very competitive and I was more than a little drunk. And when it was time to go, she followed us outside and I decided to show her that Ron really was my man. So I...”

“So you what?” Liz prompted.

Now Kara began to feel truly embarrassed. There was no possible way to make this sound good, so she just blurted it out in one fast sentence. “So I started making out with him in his car.”

Liz’s mouth dropped open, but with delight, not shock. “Really? You?”

Kara reached for her drink but Liz stopped her by placing her own hand on the glass. “Finish it!” she ordered. “That can’t be everything.”

Kara withdrew her hand. “We actually did a lot more than make out.”

Liz’s smile stretched from ear to ear as she leaned back in her chair and completely reappraised her sister. “You did the nasty in a car?” she asked. “*You!* I’m so proud right now I could burst!”

Kara sighed. “We didn’t do the nasty,” she said. This time she got her drink up off the table without Liz stopping her. The tequila felt good as it rolled down her throat.

“But you?”

“We got interrupted by another customer leaving,” Kara explained, “but we’d gotten far enough along that it was more embarrassing than if we’d just been kissing.”

Kara’s correction of Liz’s assumptions didn’t appear to dampen her sister’s appreciation. “So where’s the problem? You came home and finished rocking and rolling.”

“Not exactly,” Kara said. “You see, Ron had brought me farther than I had brought him and I kept thinking about what you and Cass said about using him. I don’t want to be a user. I wanted to make certain that both of us were satisfied.”

Liz rolled her eyes. “What you have to do is train him to be happy by the act of satisfying you, but don’t stop your story. I think we’re finally getting somewhere with it.”

Kara ignored Liz’s interruption, picking up her narration as if her sister hadn’t spoken. “So I made him pull over on the way home and I tried to....satisfy him.”

Confusion replaced the amused expression on Liz’s face. “And you couldn’t get him off?”

Lord, this really was embarrassing, Kara thought.

“While I was...in the process of satisfying him...he started...playing with me and I got...it was so intense that I...”

“Wow!” Liz said. “That sounds really good! What’s the problem?”

“Well, afterwards I realized I really had to go to the bathroom...I mean like an old fashioned little kid pee pee emergency.”

“Go on,” Liz said. Kara could tell that she still really didn’t understand what had happened.

“Well I couldn’t tell him that,” Kara said.

“Why not?” Liz asked. Then she made a vigorous slashing motion with her hand. “No, scratch that, go on with your story.”

“You can’t tell a guy—”

“Of course you can,” Liz interrupted. “Now go on with your story. You...oh! You told him you wanted to go home. Didn’t he realize what had happened when you sprinted for the bathroom?”

“He never came back in the house,” Kara said.

“What?”

“When I finished my business and went looking for him I discovered he’d driven off. “

Liz made a come-hither gesture. “So you called him and what did he say?”

“I didn’t call,” Kara confessed.

“What?”

“What was I going to tell him? I’m willing to suck your cock but not tell you I have to take a piss?” The crude vulgarity of her statement shocked Kara, but she pushed forward anyway. “I just, I couldn’t, you don’t talk about somethings.”

“What you should have said,” Liz told her, “is: *What the hell happened to you? I still want to rock your world tonight!*”

“I...didn’t think of that,” Kara said.

“Oh, this is so stupid. Give me your phone!”

“What?”

“Give me your phone! I’m going to call your boy toy and straighten this out.”

“You are not calling Ron!” Kara told her.

“Well somebody has to!” Liz said. “You’ve got to bring him to meet Mama tonight!”



Kara sat on her bed staring at the telephone, trying to build the courage to call Ron. She’d already called in sick so she could catch a couple of hours sleep before dinner with the family this evening. Now she needed to find out if she was going to dinner alone.

She didn’t fully understand why this was proving to be so hard for her. It was just a phone call. If Ron was having second thoughts about their relationship it was better to know. But she really didn’t want to hear that they were breaking up. When Bobby had abandoned her, she’d had Ron to help her through the pain. If Ron left, she’d only have her sisters and she just didn’t believe they’d be sympathetic to her plight. Well maybe Liz would be, but Ruth and Mama certainly wouldn’t.

Giving way to the inevitable, Kara cycled through the caller ID to find Ron’s number, growing increasingly frustrated when she couldn’t locate it. She’d looked through the whole directory twice before she realized she was searching her land line and got up to get her cell phone off the dresser. With the proper phone in hand, she quickly found Ron’s number, then gritted her teeth and hit the button that connected the call.

The phone dialed Ron's cell—or whatever the touch phones did now that rotary phones were out of fashion. It rang once, twice, then the line connected and Ron's voice carried cleanly through the speaker. "Kara? Are you talking to me again?"

Ron's question completely discombobulated her. She'd had her whole script planned out in front of her and now those carefully considered words disappeared from her mind. "Not talking to you? Who says I'm not talking to you?"

"Last night," Ron said. "You got mad. You wouldn't talk to me. You ran right into your house."

He genuinely sounded hurt. He wasn't upset at all about not coming in the car.

"I didn't...I wasn't...I mean, I think this is all a misunderstanding."

"Well what happened then," Ron asked. "I've been going crazy all day trying to figure out if I should call you or not."

Less than a minute into the conversation and Kara was already feeling good again. She sat back down on the bed and set about reassuring Ron. "You can always call me, Sweetie. You don't ever have to question that."

"Good to know!" Ron said. He also sounded quite relieved. "So what happened?"

Now they were back to it and Kara still didn't want to come right out and explain the problem. It wasn't just that she didn't think this was a topic men and women should discuss. It was just that she felt like such an idiot over the whole thing.

"Well?" Ron prompted her. "I spent the night wondering what I had done wrong. Are you going to tell me what I did?"

"Oh, Sweetie," Kara said. "You didn't do anything wrong. I...I had too much beer to drink and suddenly the problem became urgent."

"You were getting sick?" Ron asked. "For God's sake, why didn't you tell me?"

"Not sick," Kara repeated.

"Then, oh." Ron fell silent for a moment and then he began to laugh. "Oh, God, honey, that's not something to be embarrassed about. Everyone knows you rent beer, you don't buy it."

Ron's good humor continued to put Kara at ease. "I know that," she said, "but that doesn't mean that we should talk about it."

Ron laughed harder. "Man," he gasped. "I was really worried. I kept thinking through the evening wondering what I had done to get you angry."

"So you're not mad at me?" Kara asked.

“Of course not,” Ron said. “You had to go to the bathroom. What’s there to be mad about?”

“Good, because I need a favor.”

“Anything!” Ron said. She knew he had no idea what he’d just agreed to but she had every intention of holding him to his promise.

“I hope you still feel that way when you learn what it is.”

Sensing her seriousness, Ron settled down. “What could have you so worried?” he asked.

“My mother wants to meet you.”

“Ooh, boy,” Ron said. His voice sounded too light, like somehow this was all a joke. “That does sound like a fate worse than death. When does she want to inspect me?”

“Tonight at my sister, Ruth’s.”

Ron laughed again. “So they’re going to double team me?”

Kara’s call waiting beeped. “Just a second,” she said. “I have another call coming in.” She checked the caller ID and frowned. Bobby’s name and number flashed upon her screen. *What the hell could he want?* She wondered, but she certainly couldn’t put Ron on hold to find out.

She returned to her original conversation. “Sorry about that, I think it’s a telemarketer. Now what were we talking about?”

Ron had no clue that she had lied to him. “I just asked if your mother and sister were planning to double team me.”

“Triple team,” Kara said. “Liz will be there as well.”

“Is that one older or younger than you?” Ron asked.

“She’s ten years younger,” Kara said. “My sister, Ruth, is the old one at forty-three.”

“Didn’t you just break some female code by telling me their ages?”

Ron’s light hearted banter finally succeeded in making Kara smile. “The female code is that I don’t tell you my age. I can rat them out as long as they don’t find out about it.”

“I’m just making certain I have the etiquette down. I wouldn’t want to get you in trouble by saying, *Liz, right, you’re the thirty year old* or something like that.”

“I think you’d be better off avoiding the age thing altogether,” Kara told him.

“Well if Sunday was any indication, they’re not going to pay me the same courtesy,” Ron said.

“Probably not,” Kara agreed. “The explicit double standard is part of the joy of dealing with the Brennan women.”

Chapter Thirteen

The Second Date

“Ready?” Kara asked. She squeezed Ron’s hand. In theory she was offering him reassurance before facing her family, but as Ron seemed perfectly at ease she was probably only reinforcing her own self confidence.

She’d laid down after talking to Ron and tried to take a nap, but she’d been so excited that they had cleared up their misunderstanding that she hadn’t come anywhere close to getting any rest. Adrenalin fueled her racing heart and wouldn’t even think of calming down until it was time to get dressed and go.

Ron reached out and rang the doorbell, even though he held a bouquet of yellow roses in that hand. Then it was too late to turn and flee. The sound of scampering feet approached the door and suddenly Kara’s twelve year old nephew stood in front of them. “Mom!” he shouted. “Aunt Kara’s here!”

He turned and ran back into the house without opening the storm door or actually speaking to them.

Ron released Kara's hand and did the honors, holding the door while she stepped into the house. He followed with the roses.

Kara stamped her feet a couple of times to restore the circulation, then let Ron help her take off her coat. Al appeared in the foyer and greeted them. "Good, you made it. Ruth's been worried all day that you'd chicken out."

"Al!" Kara's older sister's sharp voice carried easily from the back of the house.

Al ignored her, taking Kara's coat from Ron and then waiting for him to shrug out of his own. Ron looked very sharp in a black suit and tie and far better dressed than Al in his t-shirt.

"You're making me look bad," Al said with what Kara deemed to be a forced smile.

"It's a big day for me," Ron said. "I'm going to meet Kara's mom."

"Well she isn't here yet," Al said. Then Al leaned in close and whispered something to Ron which Kara couldn't make out. Ron glanced skeptically at him and this time Al's smile was clearly genuine. "I'm just trying to give you a head's up. You'll see what I mean soon enough."

Al took the coats and left them in the foyer.

"What did he say to you?" Kara asked. "Oh nothing," Ron said.

She stared a little harder.

Ron raised his free hand in surrender. “He just said that I should enjoy myself now because fun would not be allowed when your mother arrives.”

Kara bristled in reflexive defense of her parent. “That’s not right! He—”

Ron slipped his arm around her. “Shhhhh,” he whispered. “Let’s not get upset before the evening even starts.”

“But—”

“Shhhh.”

“Kara,” Ruth called. “Bring Ron to the living room and then come get him something to drink.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” Ron said.

Kara pointed in the direction of the living room. “It’s a setup,” she said. “My mother hates it when people drink.”

“I don’t mind,” Ron said. “You get me whatever makes you most comfortable.”

“I’ll get you a beer,” Kara decided. “I just wanted you to understand what’s happening.”

They entered the living room where Kara’s nephew and a younger girl were watching Nickelodeon. Al came back into the room from the other end. “Ron, let me introduce my two children. Marc, Jenny, this is your aunt’s new boyfriend, Ron.”

Marc never looked up from the television. Jenny gave Ron the once over and pronounced her verdict. "I like you," she said. "You're tall!"

"I'm glad to hear it," Ron told her. "What are we watching?"

"I'll switch it over to ESPN," Al said.

"Dad!" both children protested.

"Let them watch their show, Al," Ron suggested. "A little iCarly isn't going to hurt us."

"You know about iCarly?" Jenny asked him.

"Of course," Ron said with absolute seriousness. "Doesn't everybody?"

Evidently, Jenny had just found something besides Ron's height to like about him. She scooted over on the couch. "You can watch next to me," she told him.

Ron grinned at Kara. "I can definitely use that beer now," he told her and went to take his place next to the eight year old.

"So what kind of trouble are they in this time?" he whispered to Jenny.

"It's a rerun," she whispered back. "They're trying to film their show while in detention."

Kara left Ron in her niece's capable hands.

Al followed her into the kitchen. "If Ron gets a beer, then so do I," he announced.

Ruth frowned. "You know how upset that makes my mother," she said. "She'll see it as picking a fight with her."

"It's my house," Al told her. "I pay for it. And I say: *if my guest gets to drink, then so do I!*"

Ruth turned to Kara for help. "Does Ron *have* to drink beer?" she asked. "You know how mother is."

Kara sighed. "Yes, I know, but no matter what he does she's not going to like him, so can't he at least have a drink he enjoys?"

"Here, here," Al added. Then he said to Kara, "There's Budweiser in the fridge in the garage. I'll get them. Are you drinking too?"

Actually, a beer would really go down well right now, but if she and Ron both drank, her mother would probably call 911 and report a DWI in progress when they left. "Thanks, Al," she said, "but I'll stick to ice tea."

He shrugged. "Suit yourself."

"Don't get the beers, Al!" Ruth ordered.

Her husband ignored her and opened the door to the garage.

Ruth wheeled on Kara. "This is your fault!" she said. "Now they're going to fight all night."

Kara shrugged. "Coming over here wasn't my idea. It's *never* my idea. And if Mama isn't at least kind of polite, Ron and I are going to make it a very early

evening. It's not fair to subject him to one of her moods in the first week we're dating."

"You're the one making her mood bad!" Ruth shouted.

She seemed to realize how loud she'd become because she continued in a much quieter voice. "It's bad enough Ron's young and white—you know how she feels about that. But now you're putting a drink in his hand? What's next? Are you going to tell her he's Catholic?"

"Ron is Catholic," Kara said. "And I'm converting."

Ruth put both hands to her temples and closed her eyes. "Dear Lord," she prayed, "can't you just have someone shove an ice pick into my brain instead of torturing me this way?"

Suddenly Kara felt guilty about teasing her sister. She never remembered her looking this stressed—not even the day she got married and *nothing* had gone right that day.

She stepped forward and put her hand on Ruth's arm. "Hey, it's okay, I'm just teasing. I'm sorry. I'll bring Ron ice tea if you really think that will help. I didn't realize how hard all of this is for you."

Ruth opened her eyes and lowered her hands. "You mean it? I just want to get this evening over with. I've got such a headache already and it hasn't even started yet."

Al chose that moment to come back into the kitchen. He had a six pack in his hand and a seventh beer open and half empty.

“Ruth, why don’t you sit down for a minute and let me help out a little,” Kara said. “Al, I hate to do this to you, but we’ve decided to go with ice tea and try to ward off one of Mama’s explosions.”

Al looked unhappy at this decision, but he didn’t fight against it. He turned around and went straight back into the garage.

“Come on, Ruth,” Kara said. “Let’s get you seated while I look for some aspirin.”

“I already took an Excedrin Migraine,” Ruth said, “and I can’t sit, I have a pot roast in the oven.”

“I can check the pot roast,” Kara said. “When did you start having migraines?”

Ruth looked at her like she’d grown a second head. “What do you mean *when did I start getting them*? I’ve had them ever since I started dating Al!”

“Now don’t go blaming me for those,” Al said as he reappeared beside them. “It’s your mother who causes your headaches. She causes most of the pain in this family.”

“Now don’t you get started on my mother!” Ruth shouted.

Al just looked at her for a moment, then stalked into the living room with Ron and the kids.

“Wow, what happened? I know you said things were getting worse, but I’ve never seen Al like this.”

“He’s angry that we have to put up with Mama again,” Ruth said. “He deals with her a lot this time of year. First it was Christmas Day. Then we had to see her the night we picked you up from the airport. Now she’s invited herself over tonight and New Year’s Day she’ll be over again. He hates her and he’s tired of pretending he doesn’t.”

“Al hates Mama?” Kara repeated. She knew Mama was hard on Al—Mama was hard on everyone—but she’d never before realized how much he resented it. He’d always appeared so easy going. There had to be more to the story.

“Al’s always hated Mama,” Ruth confirmed. “The problem now is he hates me too.”

Giant tears began to roll silently down Ruth’s face.

Kara couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “Hey,” she said, sitting down next to her big sister and placing her hand comfortingly on her back. “Al doesn’t hate you.”

Ruth sniffled. “Yes, he does. When he loved me, he could put up with Mama. Now that he admits he hates me, he can’t stand having anything to do with her.”

“Well Mama is pretty tough to handle,” Kara admitted. “Maybe the problem is you’re seeing too much of her. When was the last time you and Al had some fun together?”

“We never have fun!” Ruth declared. “We don’t even sleep together anymore. Here you are running wild with your young white man and Al spends most of his nights in his Lazy-boy. It’s not fair!”

Ruth’s hostility suddenly made a lot more sense to Kara. Liz had been right. Her sister was jealous of her.

The doorbell rang, effectively cutting off any chance that Ruth and Kara would continue their conversation this evening.

“Shit!” Ruth cursed. “She’s here!”

Kara stared at her sister in astonishment. When did Ruth start cursing?

“Marc!” Ruth called out. “Go get the door!”

“Marc, you heard your mother,” Al said.

“I don’t want to,” Marc announced. “She’s never nice to you, Dad.”

How had Kara missed that this was happening? Sure, she’d always tried to avoid her mother herself, dumping as much of the work of looking after her on Ruth and Liz as they would let her get away with. But when had Ruth’s family started actively hating the old woman? Ruth obviously hated her too! When had things gotten this bad?

“I’ll get it,” Ron said.

“You don’t have to do that,” Al told him.

“I don’t mind at all,” Ron said.

“There was a day Al would have said that,” Ruth told Kara. Then she shot to her feet. “Oh my lord, I have to go wash my face.”

She hurried from the room leaving Kara looking after her in astonishment. When had she stopped knowing her own family?

The front door opened and Kara nearly panicked. She hadn’t intended to let Ron do this alone.

“Good evening,” Ron said. “You must be Mrs. Brennan.”

Mama ignored him. “So Albert is too good to answer his own door now?”

The sound of her mother’s shoes clicking in the entrance hall reverberated through the house.

“I’m Liz,” Kara’s sister introduced herself, and this is my latest boy toy, Daryl.”

“ELIZABETH!” Mama snapped.

Liz laughed. “If you date Kara very long,” she said, “you’ll learn that bating my mother is the most fun you can have at one of these family gatherings.”

“I am not amused, little girl!” Mama said. Kara thought by now that she would have learned that reacting like that only encouraged Liz to say something more outrageous.

“Please let me take your coat, Mrs. Brennan,” Ron said.

“Ooooh, a peacemaker,” Liz said. Then she raised her voice. “Kara, you didn’t mention that Ron’s naïve and idealistic.”

Kara decided that she’d best intervene. She’d rather run, but that didn’t seem fair to Ron. She got up from her chair while her mother began to complain.

“I can get my own coat. Don’t hover. I’m old, not decrepit.”

Actually Mama wasn’t very old yet—only sixty-three. She just liked to act like she was ninety.

Kara walked through the living room and into the entrance hall. Al, she noticed, had suddenly grown rabidly interested in the iCarly program. She felt sorry for him but she also felt tired and sorry for herself. Couldn’t Al wait one more night to have his little rebellion? Couldn’t Ruth hold off her breakdown for one more day? Ron was meeting Mama tonight and they weren’t helping any.

Her mother caught sight of her as she stepped into the entrance hall. “There you are!” she said. “You’ve been home for three days and haven’t come by to see me yet.”

There was nothing unusual in that, Kara knew, but she didn't want to antagonize the old woman by mentioning it. Still, she couldn't help but correct her on the details. "It's only been two days, Mama," she said, kissing the old woman on her cheek."

Mama looked mollified by the little peck, but she couldn't drop an argument. "You got home *Sunday*. That's three days ago."

"I got home Sunday *night*," Kara continued the fight. That's less than forty-eight hours.

Mama focused her eyes intently on her middle daughter, searching for some sign of sass or disrespect.

"But I'm sorry I didn't get out to see you yesterday," Kara added.

The problem was over, but Ron didn't understand that and he good-naturedly stepped in to take the heat. "It's my fault, Mrs. Brennan," he said. "I was anxious to introduce Kara to some of my friends."

Mama turned the full power of her glare on Ron. "So I heard," she said. "You took my daughter to a *pool hall*."

Ron's smile survived the observation, so her mother tacked on another one. "You know my daughters and I are good Christian women," she said. "We all abhor gambling!"

If Mama had expected this to unnerve or upset Ron she was disappointed. His smile brightened. "I appreciate the heads up," he said. "I'd never want to ask Kara to do something she disapproved of."

Mama harrumphed, as if she found Ron's words completely unconvincing. Then she tossed him the fur coat the three daughters had gone together on three years ago and marched into the living room.

"I see you're also too good to stand up when a woman enters, Albert," she observed. "Children where are your manners? And where is your mother?"

"Ruth will rejoin us in a moment," Kara told her. "May I get you some ice tea, Mama? I was just about to pour some for Ron and Al."

"I'm certain that Elizabeth's young man would also appreciate a drink," Mama noted.

"And while you're at it," Liz cut in, "I'm sure Daryl would also appreciate a winning lottery ticket. Don't go cheap now, Kara, he wants to win Powerball or something."

"Gambling again," her mother clucked, but Liz ignored her and followed Kara into the kitchen.

A few moments later their mother ambled in after them.

“Those children are so disrespectful,” she said. “Did either of you notice that neither of them kissed me hello? And your new *young* man, Kara, does he plan to stand holding my coat all day or is he going to hang it in the closet?”

“I actually much prefer holding it,” Ron called into the kitchen. “It’s such fine quality and the fur is so soft against my hands.”

Liz started laughing. “Oh, Kara, I *like* him!”

Kara, on the other hand, felt mortified. She knew that Ron was joking, but she also knew that there was no way her mother would laugh at his jest.

Mama sniffed quite loudly. “It’s amazing how disgracefully parents teach their *children* to behave these days. I guess I shouldn’t complain. My own daughter has done just as poorly.”

Unfortunately, Ruth chose exactly that moment to reenter the room. She hesitated in the doorway, then walked forward as if nothing negative had been said.

Kara, for her part, felt even more embarrassed then before. She already felt self conscious about Ron’s age. She didn’t need her mother making her feel worse.

“Fortunately, Mama,” Liz said, “you were a very successful parent. Just look how well I turned out!” Liz spread her arms wide and turned about in a circle.

Kara couldn’t help smile and even Ruth seemed to perk up a little.

Mama just shook her head. “Honestly, child, I just don’t know where I went wrong with you. I ask the good Lord that very question every night. I’m sure it’s your father’s fault, God rest his soul. With all his many vices, he never was good for anything.”

All three Brennan girls bristled at the criticism. There were very few things that they agreed upon but they all had loved their dad.

In the other room, Liz’s boyfriend, Daryl, could be heard asking Al if they could flip the channel over to the game. Marc and Jenny immediately voiced their protests. Within a very few seconds, both kids were screaming and Al was shouting back at them.

It was going to be a terrible evening.



“This pot roast is excellent, Ruth,” Ron said.

Ruth tried to smile in response to the compliment, but her heart was not in it. The whole evening had been like that. Nobody’s hearts were in it tonight.

“Ruth’s a really good cook,” Al said. “You have to give her that.”

“The potatoes are good too,” Daryl said, before the table lapsed back into silence.

“May I be excused?” Marc asked. They were less than ten minutes into dinner and his plate was only half eaten.

“Sit quietly until we’re all through,” Mama said.

Al overruled her. “You can go watch television if you’re finished,” he said.

“Thanks, Dad!” Marc said and got up and ran from the table.

Mama glowered at him. “Is it any wonder these children are so poorly behaved when their parents refuse to instill any discipline in them?”

Al opened his mouth to reply, but Ruth cut him off with a warning look and sharp tone in her voice. “Al!”

Mama harrumphed. “Is it any wonder?” she repeated.

“Mama,” Ruth said, pleading with their parent to behave herself. Not that pleading ever had much affect on Mama.

Ron foolishly tried to change the subject and get the conversation moving. “So tell me, Daryl,” he said. “How did you and Liz meet?”

Daryl glanced at Mama as if wondering what he should say. He didn’t look gun shy. He hadn’t been to enough of these gatherings yet for that. But he was smart enough to wonder if his response would trigger her temper. “It was a Halloween party,” he said.

Kara saw Ruth and Mama frown, suggesting that that story didn’t jell with their recollections either.

Liz rolled her eyes. “Now we’re in for it,” she said. “I told everyone we met at a church picnic. Remember, dummy?”

Daryl looked very confused. “We didn’t—”

“No, you did not,” Mama repeated. “Elizabeth actually told us that you met at a social gathering for lawyers. Would you care to explain yourself, Elizabeth?”

Liz did not look embarrassed to be caught lying, but then, she lied all the time so she must be used to getting caught by now. “There were a lot of lawyers at the party,” Liz said. “I just didn’t mention that they were dressed as witches, surgeons and movie stars.”

“I see,” Mama said. She fell silent, clearly taking a moment to consider Liz’s statement. Evidently, she decided that the additional information was either irrelevant or less important than her primary concern this evening.

She turned her daggers on another prey. “So tell me, Ronald, what are your intentions toward my daughter?”

Kara had been expecting something like this, but Ron was taken completely by surprise. Caught with his glass of ice tea tipping liquid into his mouth, he choked and almost spit it back on the table. Keeping from doing so, triggered a fit of coughing that had both Daryl and Kara standing up beside him patting him on the back.

When he finally caught his breath again, his face was beat red from exertion and embarrassment. “Excuse me,” he said, trying to make light of the moment. “That was unexpectedly direct.”

He sat down again and carefully took another sip of tea, then wiped his mouth with his napkin.

Kara resumed her seat beside him and patted his thigh with her hand.

Mama was still waiting for her answer. “Your intentions?” she asked Ronald.

Ron regained his poise and shrugged. “Well let’s see,” he said checking his watch. “It’s ten of eight. I figure we’ll stay here with the family another hour and—”

“Ron don’t!” Kara snapped. She hated the sound of her voice even as she said it. She sounded like Ruth giving orders to Al, but she had to stop Ron from making a joke that would haunt them for the rest of their relationship.

Ron broke off his joke and looked at Kara. This was not a love-sick gaze, or even one filled with a great deal of sympathy. It was a serious appraisal of her mood and her wishes.

After a few seconds, he nodded. “Okay,” he said. “I’ll be good.”

“Your intentions?” Mama asked again. She wouldn’t let go of the question even if it took her the rest of the evening to get Ron to answer it.

Ron turned his appraising stare to her. It was as if some part of his soul simply couldn’t come to grips with what was happening here. He was a good guy and in his heart of hearts he was young enough to believe that everyone shared

that basic goodness. Even with the experience of his own messed up father, he wasn't prepared to understand that Mama had come tonight determined to find flaws in him.

"I'm waiting, young man!" Mama said.

Ron turned and looked over his shoulder, taking a moment to look over the dining room.

"What is it?" Kara asked him.

"I'm just looking for the camera," Ron said.

Kara's heart sank. He couldn't stop with the humor.

Liz giggled. "Oh, I do like him!" she told Kara.

Ruth didn't understand the joke. "What camera?" she asked.

"Is it Aston Kutcher or what was that old guy's name, Allen Funt?"

Liz laughed even harder.

"I hardly think this is a joking matter," Mama said.

Ron spread his hands in a gesture of peace. "Well what do you want from me, Mrs. Brennan? Kara and I have known each other for seven days. We haven't mapped out our future yet. Right now we're hoping to get to know each other better, take in a few movies, visit a museum, and meet each other's friends."

"And play more pool, I expect," Mama added.

“Oh, yes,” Ron added. “I really like pool. It’s an exciting game and I’m really good at it. Kara’s good too. I hope we play a lot more of it.”

Mama frowned.

Kara’s phone rang.

“I hate those things interrupting our dinner conversation,” her mother complained.

“Sorry, Mama,” Kara said. “Let me just switch it over to vibrate. She pulled the phone out of the pocket of her skirt and froze when she saw Bobby’s name on the caller ID.

Unfortunately, Ron could also see the name from his place beside her. “Is that who I think it is?” he asked.

“Yes,” Kara answered, wondering how the information would affect Ron.

“Well don’t keep it a secret,” Liz joked. “I want to see too!”

She plucked the phone out of Kara’s hand and her eyes widened when she saw Bobby’s name. “How dare he!” she said. Before Kara could act to stop her, she accepted the call and started speaking into the receiver. “You have a lot of nerve calling this number!” she said. “I heard about your little note. You are the lowest sort of dung beetle imaginable. Don’t you dare call here again!”

The volume on Kara's phone was high enough that everyone could hear Bobby's response. "I suppose I deserve that, Liz, but I've called to speak to Kara—to apologize for the appalling way I've treated her."

It infuriated Kara that Bobby thought she would let him walk back into her life. "Hang up the phone!" she told her sister. "We're eating dinner!"

Ron turned to look at Kara, mouthing the words: *We're eating dinner?*

Liz ignored Kara's instructions. "She's already moved on, you piece of shit! And Ron's a hell of a lot more virile and handsome than you ever were!"

"ELIZABETH!" Mama shouted. *Appalled* was much to gentle a term to describe her reaction.

"Kara!" Bobby shouted through the phone. "You have to listen! I'm sorry!"

Kara snatched the phone out of her sister's hand. "Stop calling me!" she shouted into the speaker, then fumbled to disconnect the call.

"Kara!" Bobby shouted. He sounded truly desperate now. "I made a terrible mistake! You have to take me—"

She finally depressed the correct button and disconnected the call.

"Did you say, *virile*?" Mama asked Liz.

Oh, dear Lord, Kara silently prayed. *One bolt of lightning through the window is all it will take to get me out of this!*

“You said *stop calling*,” Ron said. “Has he called before? Have you been talking to him?”

Please Lord, Kara mentally pleaded. *Just one bolt of lightning—get me out of this mess!*

Mama turned on Ron, her face screwed up with distaste. “Have you been having *sexual* relations with my daughter?”

“God, I hope they have,” Liz said. “Otherwise it’s a complete waste of boy toy.”

Mama was so angry at Ron she didn’t respond to Liz’s incitement.

Ron wasn’t listening to either of them. “Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked.

“It was just one call,” Kara explained. “I didn’t even answer it. I don’t want Bobby back in my life. You’re so much better for me than he ever was.”

“Robert was a gentleman!” Mama observed.

She finally succeeded in breaking through Ron’s reserve. He turned on her, incredulity written broadly across his face. “He cheated on her!” he said.

Incredibly, Mama was prepared to overlook Bobby’s transgressions. “It is true he appears to have made some mistakes,” she said, “but it’s obvious he’s come to his senses and wishes to atone for them.”

“He *cheated* on her!” Ron repeated as if he couldn’t believe Mama understood what had actually happened.

“Kara has to bear some of the responsibility for that,” Mama said. “She should have moved to New York City with Robert and compelled him to make an honest woman of her.”

Al’s face screwed up as if he were trying to remember the details of several old arguments. “Didn’t you forbid her to move?” Al asked.

“Al!” Ruth whispered—pleading with her husband not to get involved in this argument.

“Albert, I will thank you not to display your poor memory by interrupting my discussion with Ronald.”

Al opened his mouth to respond, then saw his wife’s expression and shut it again. It simply wasn’t his battle.

“I can’t believe,” Ron said, “that you would blame your daughter for Bobby’s actions. He cheated on her. He has no honor! Kara’s lucky she didn’t marry him.”

“How typical of the young to speak so confidently of things they know nothing about. Men stray when their women neglect them. It’s the way of the world. Don’t pretend you’re any different.”

“You know nothing about me,” Ron told her. “You have no idea what I will or won’t do in the future.”

“I know everything I need to know,” Mama corrected him. “You’re having marital relations with my daughter and by your own account you’ve known her a

mere seven days. When you're through using her for your physical satisfaction you'll discard her far faster than Robert did."

"Alright, this has gone far enough!" Kara declared. "We are not talking about this anymore. It's bad enough you have to do this in front of Al and Daryl, but Jenny's still sitting at the table."

"Jennifer, you are excused to go watch television," Mama said. "Your elders are talking about something very important."

"We're not—"

"So you really think Bobby was a gentleman?" Ron asked.

"Of course I do," Mama said. "He carried himself with polite dignity in my presence."

"And the cheating makes no difference to you?"

"I don't approve of cheating," Mama said, "but I lay the blame where it truly belongs."

Ron shook his head. "I cannot believe you keep saying that," he said.

"Truth often hurts," Mama observed. "That does not make it any less true."

"He broke up with your daughter by a card," Ron reminded her. "Does that sound like a gentleman?"

“Ron, please stop this,” Kara said. There was no hope of Mama stopping as long as Ron kept responding to her. And honestly, there was no hope now of Mama ever approving of their going out together.

“Knowing the relationship was over,” Mama continued, “he chose a manner of terminating it that avoided painful argument.”

“He left her stranded in an airport during a snowstorm so he could hang out with his new girlfriend.”

Kara put her hand on Ron’s arm. “Please!” she repeated.

“And how are you any better?” Mama asked Ron. “You’re a white man, taking advantage of a black woman, like so many of your slave-owning ancestors before you.”

Ron had finally had enough. “Oh, you did not just say that!” he said. He picked up his napkin and wiped his mouth. Anyone looking at him could see that Mama had finally succeeded in eradicating the last vestiges of his good humor.

Kara tried to prevent the final disaster. “Ron, don’t!”

Liz tried to help in her bizarrely unhelpful fashion. “Actually, Mama, the way I see it—”

“Be silent, Elizabeth!” Mama said.

Liz just kept talking. “Kara’s the one taking advantage because she’s fooling around with a younger man.”

“Close your mouth, Elizabeth!” Mama demanded.

“I’m not taking advantage—”

“Of course you are! You’re a white man!”

This proved to be the straw that broke the camel’s back.

Ron surged to his feet and threw his napkin onto the table. “Slavery has been outlawed in this country for nearly one hundred fifty years!” he shouted.

“Hundreds of thousands of men fought to make that happen and some of them were my ancestors!”

Mama was not impressed. “White men didn’t stop abusing black women because slavery was technically ended,” she retorted. “As a result, no self respecting black woman could ever date a white man. Kara’s demeaning us all by being with you!”

Kara couldn’t believe things had gotten so out of control. With each passing second, matters were getting more and more impossible.

“You fu—”

“Don’t say it!” Kara begged.

Ron turned to stare at her. “Did you hear—”

“More times than you can possibly imagine,” Kara told him. “Why do you think Liz holds her messed up views?”

“Hey!” Liz protested. By the expression on her face, Kara could tell her little sister still hoped to salvage the evening, but things had gone way too far for that.

“They’re not just messed up, they’re completely rac—”

“Don’t say it!” Kara said again.

His open hands were literally shaking with outrage.

“It hurts to hear the truth!” Mama proclaimed.

“Please stop!” Liz said to her. It was one of the very few times Kara remembered her sounding totally serious. She’d finally gotten it. Words matter and Mama had said too many of them.

Ron glanced around the table studying each of their faces. Ruth, Al and Daryl were each staring at the floor. Liz was on the verge of crying, big unshed tears filling her eyes. Mama sat triumphantly on her throne, fire and brimstone blazing from her eyes. And Kara, well Kara didn’t know what Ron saw on her face but whatever it was it settled him on his course of action.

Shoving the chair out behind him, Ron left the table and strode out of the room.

Kara started to go after him when her mother snapped out her name.

She hesitated and the front door opened.

She wheeled around to face the family matriarch. “I hate you!” she screamed, then ran for the door after Ron.

He must have been running too, because by the time she reached the front step he was already driving down the street.

Chapter Fourteen

Rage

Kara stormed back into the house. Her mother looked insufferably pleased with herself. “I know you don’t want to believe this now, Kara,” she said, “but I’ve just saved you a considerable amount of heartbreak.”

“No, you’ve just been insufferably rude to my boyfriend,” Kara told her, “and you know what? I’m not going to put up with it anymore. Al, if you wouldn’t mind getting Ron and my coats.”

“Don’t be absurd,” her mother said. “Albert is not going to help you until you calm down and admit that I am right.”

Al got up from the table. “I’ll get them right away,” he announced.

“You will not!” Mama said.

Al ignored her.

“Albert, we all know my eldest daughter made a mistake in marrying you, but I hadn’t thought you could possibly be this foolish. You will stay out of family arguments! They do not concern you!”

“Don’t speak to him that way!” Ruth shouted.

“What?” their mother turned to face her. The shocked expression on her face was eerily mirrored on Al’s.

“I said shut your foul and dirty mouth!” Ruth said. “For years we’ve sat here listening to you get more and more evil—treating your family worse and worse every day. I guess you won’t be happy until we’re all as miserable as you, but I’m not going to take it anymore. We never said anything to your face because Daddy wouldn’t want us to, but Daddy would never let you treat my husband like that either.”

“Your father—”

“Al’s a good man!” Ruth interrupted her. “Maybe even a better man than I deserve. He works hard, has his own business, gave me two wonderful children and keeps a decent roof over our heads. And most of all he’s always been polite to you no matter how evil and rude you’ve been to him in return. Well it ends now! If you can’t be civil to him in the home *he pays for* then you can get your wicked ass out of this house!”

Kara felt her jaw drop. Had Ruth really just cursed at Mama?

Evidently she had, because Mama launched to her feet and started screaming back at her. “I will not be spoken to like this!”

Al came around the table and hugged Ruth. He didn't say anything. He just hugged her like he never wanted to let her go.

Excitement lit Liz's eyes and she smiled happily as if she were watching a circus or a carnival and not a family tragedy.

Eight year old Jenny leapt out of her chair and ran to hug her parents.

"I raised you all better than this!" Mama shouted.

"No, you didn't!" Kara said finding her voice to speak in all of their defenses.

"Daddy may have raised us better than this, but you sure as hell didn't."

"I will not stand for this!" Mama screamed. "Elizabeth, get my coat! You're taking me home!"

Liz took the time to visually appraise each of her sisters, noting how upset they were before slowly getting to her feet. "I guess I can do that," she said, "although I think it'd be a lot more fun to stay here and watch you all keep brawling. Some things still need to be spoken. What do you always say, Mama? Truth hurts! But that doesn't make it false."

"ELIZABETH!" Mama screamed.

Liz conceded in her uniquely personal fashion. She gestured at Daryl. "Can you get the coats, baby? We can go somewhere fun after we drop Mama off or even come back here if you want to."

Mama glowered at her. “Has the world gone mad?” she asked. “What has happened to my daughters?”

The four Brennan women stood staring at each other until Daryl returned. Then Kara watched Mama and Liz slip on their coats, pick up their purses and make their way to the front of the house.

The moment the door closed behind them, Al and Kara breathed sighs of relief.

“Don’t be so sure it’s over,” Ruth said. “It would be just like Mama or Liz to peak back inside and make one more comment.” She walked through the living room to the front of the house and looked out at their mother through the window.

“They’re getting into the car,” she said. And then ninety seconds later, “they’re pulling out.”

Kara sat down, the brief fight having completely drained all of her energy.

“I can’t believe the two of you finally stood up to that woman,” Al said. “I’ve been waiting to see that for fifteen years.”

Ruth came back into the kitchen and slipped her arm into his. She didn’t say anything, but it looked to Kara as if things between them were much better than they had been an hour ago.

“You’d better call Ron,” Al told Kara. “He’s a pretty good guy. If you tell him what happened, I think he’ll understand.”

Kara shook her head. “Who in their right mind would go out with me again after having endured all of this?”

Al shrugged. “Shouldn’t Ron be the one who gets to decide that?”

Kara thought about that. At the very least he deserved to know that she’d fought with her mother over the way she had treated him. “Alright, I’ll call him,” she said, “but I doubt he’ll come back and pick me up.”

She looked around on the table for her cell phone.

“What’s wrong?” Ruth asked.

“Did you see where I set my phone? I set it down after Bobby called.”

She moved Ron’s napkin and leaned over the table to see the far side of drinks.

“It was right there,” Ruth said, “across from Mama.”

All three of them stopped and looked at each other.

“You don’t think she’d take it, do you?” Kara asked.

“Stealing is a bit much, even for her,” Ruth said.

“She wouldn’t think of it as stealing,” Al objected. “She’d call it teaching you a lesson.”

“Well let’s cut this lesson off before it gets started,” Ruth said. “Call him on our phone, Kara.”

Kara kept looking for the phone on the table. “I can’t!” she said. “I don’t know his number. It was in the phone. I didn’t have to memorize it.”

“Well you can dial information then,” Al suggested.

“If he has a land line,” Kara said. “He might not. A lot of young people don’t bother with them these days.”

“Well try!” Ruth demanded. “There’s no point in getting upset before we find out how bad the situation really is.”

Kara picked up her sister’s phone and dialed 411 but there was no listing for Ron Hall.

She began to panic. “I don’t even have his address!” she wailed.

Ruth came over and put a tentative hand on her shoulder. “He’ll call,” she said.

“He didn’t this morning!”

“He’ll call,” she repeated.

“He’ll call, Mama,” Kara said. “She’s the one with my phone.”

Ruth grimaced, then tried again. “He’ll call directory assistance and find your home line.”

Kara felt close to tears. “Unless he thinks I’m purposely ignoring him.”

Her sister didn't have anything to say in response to that.

Chapter Fifteen

Finding Ron

It had been a week and a half since Kara had truly slept well. Three restless nights with Bobby followed by one sleepless evening in the airport followed by four nights of incredible sex with Ron and capped now by two nights of tossing and turning wondering if she had lost him. Cold showers and hot coffee were only getting her so far. She actually nodded off in her cubicle at the office. If she didn't get her affairs in order quickly she was going to lose her job.

Of course it didn't help that she wasn't even trying to think about books and ledgers. All she wanted to think about was finding Ron.

She just didn't know where to start. It wasn't that he hadn't given her his contact information. It was that all of that data was stored in her cell phone and even if Mama hadn't tossed it out the window of Daryl's car she still wasn't going to give it back to Kara any time soon.

All she really knew about him was his name and the location of his favorite bar.

His favorite bar...

It was her only hope.

She googled the Church Key and found a primitive web page with a picture of the bar. She'd intended to search the site for a phone number but immediately realized that that wouldn't be necessary. Scrawled across the Home Page in large letters was an invitation to JOIN US FOR OUR NEW YEAR'S EVE BASH.

Kara knew where Ron was going to be tonight.

And come hell or high water, she was going to be there beside him!



As matters turned out, it was snow, and not high water, that threatened to frustrate Kara's plans New Year's Eve. The promised snowstorm arrived twelve hours early, quickly coating the roads and threatening to become a genuine hazard.

Kara refused to let this stop her. Hazardous or not, this was the best chance for her to find Ron again and she wasn't going to let anything get in her way. She arrived in the Church Key parking lot at 8:00 P.M. with big fluffy white flakes in the air and a lot of snow already under her tires. It was a foolish night for driving, but Kara felt the circumstances justified the risk.

She had no idea what everyone else's excuse was. The Church Key lot was so tightly packed she almost didn't find a place. Who would have thought that the

chance to get drunk New Year's Eve would override the good sense of every person in Wayne County?

She got out of her car placing one high-heeled shoe into the cold white blanket covering the asphalt. The four inch spike disappeared into the snow and the open toe of her shoe was completely covered over. She knew she should have worn boots, but she hadn't thought it would snow this fast and Ron had been quite clear that he found high-heels sexiest.

She studied the long walk across the parking lot, measuring the distance to the entrance to the Church Key in her mind. How on earth was she going to make it? Already her toes were screaming in response to the cold. Wouldn't it be better to wait here in her warm car for Ron to realize the weather was getting bad and come out?

She scanned the lot again, looking at all the cars until she convinced herself that she couldn't be certain she would spot him leaving. If she wanted to be sure she got to speak with him, she'd have to go inside. And what kind of guy wanted a girlfriend who skipped the party anyway?

She gritted her teeth and started across the lot, slipping and sliding and freezing her feet off. To top matters off, she'd insisted on wearing a skirt tonight. Too late she began to see the wisdom of pants. Each gust of wind brought a swirl of freezing whiteness up under the hem of her skirt and against her bare legs.

It wasn't fun.

It wasn't easy.

But she kept going because she needed Ron to know she still wanted him.

She found his car parked directly across the fire lane from the entrance to the bar. Kara hesitated. He'd been here a while, probably playing pool and getting drunk, and letting that anorexic junkie hang all over him. Then she shook her head and pushed those images out of her mind. Ron was the one who'd told her about the needle tracks on Cass' arm. She'd heard the disgust in his voice when he spoke about her. And even if she hadn't, she wasn't going to give him up to that little skank without a fight.

She crossed the fire lane and climbed the front step, being careful not to slip in the new fallen snow. She needed to be just as cautious when she entered the place. She wanted to see Ron before he caught sight of her. She knew he'd be a gentleman if she got close enough to talk to him, but she didn't want there to be any chance at all that he would catch sight of her in the entrance and decide to slip out the back to avoid a confrontation.

She placed her gloved hand on the door and then suddenly remembered what had happened the last time she had visited here. Head lights snapped on in her memory and she couldn't help pulling her coat more securely over her bosom.

Walking back here might be asking for trouble. Not walking in here could mean she'd never again see Ron.

She stiffened her resolve and entered the bar.



The crowd was much thicker than the last time she'd been here, making it hard to see and move about.

Kara considered her course of action and started directly for the bar. She'd order two black and tans and surprise Ron at the pool tables with one of them.

Snow fell off her coat and melted in her open-toed shoes. She wanted to take them off and shake them out but in the middle of the crowded bar that wasn't practical.

The noise was deafening. *Who Are You?* blared over the stereo like they were in somebody's basement in the early 80s, not in a modern bar in the twenty-first century. Bodies pressed against her, mostly white but with enough black faces in the mix that she didn't feel too out of place. A lot of the patrons were older too which further eased her discomfort.

She reached the bar without seeing Ron. Nick stood by himself behind the counter, pouring drinks as fast as he could work the tap. She waited for him to get close enough to hear her then shouted out her order over the din of conversing voices.

“Two black and tans please!”

Nick shook his head without looking up, continuing to fill a glass with Budweiser. “It’s too busy tonight and my stupid sister’s disappeared again.” He let go of the tap and pushed the drink down the bar, then turned to face her. Pleasure brightened his face. “Oh, it’s you, Kara. You came after all. I think I can make an exception for you and Ron.”

Kara pulled a twenty dollar bill out of her purse. “If it’s not too much trouble,” she said.

Nick just grinned at her. “Jim, my other bartender, is deathly afraid of driving in the snow. So he called in sick, would you believe it? And then my sister disappeared. New Year’s Eve and I’m handling this crowd by myself.”

“Just make it a bass and a Guinness then,” Kara told him.

“No, no,” Nick said. “I’m glad to see you. It’s obvious Ron really likes you, but he said you’d had a fight and weren’t answering his calls.”

Nick had just confirmed Kara’s fears. Ron thought she was giving him the cold shoulder. She had to set the record straight in case she didn’t get to talk to Ron.

“We didn’t have a fight,” she said. “Ron fought with my mother and I’m embarrassed to say Ron was right. She said some terrible things and after he left the whole family had it out with her.”

Nick pushed the first black and tan over to her and proved he was really listening with an insightful question. “So why aren’t you taking his calls?”

“I lost my phone,” Kara told him. “Actually, I think my mother stole it. She’s mad at us for telling her she was wrong.”

Nick cracked a smile. “Last time I saw Ron clearly he was still shooting pool. I don’t think there’s room to do that anymore with all of these people here, but that’s where I’d look.”

He gave her the second drink and took her twenty dollars.

“Oh, good, there’s Cass,” he said. “How about a little help back here, little sister? Hey, come back!”

Kara turned to look for the woman, but all she caught was a glimpse of dirty blond hair disappearing in the direction of the pool tables.

“Come on, Nick!” someone shouted. “I’m dying of thirst over here.”

“Keep your shirt on!” Nick shouted back and reached for another glass.

Kara turned toward the pool tables and ran straight into Charlie. He had foam on his beard and something about his goofy grin suggested he was drunk.

“Hey, Kara,” he said. “Ron said you were too embarrassed to come tonight.”

Heat rushed to Kara’s face. She tried to step back a pace but someone had already filled her spot at the bar.

Charlie didn't seem to understand he was making her uncomfortable. "Ron asked me to apologize, but I said, for what man? I've paid good money to see tits that weren't as good as Kara's."

Kara really didn't know how to deal with this situation. Did Charlie think he was complimenting her? "You...don't need to apologize," she stammered. "It's not like you knew what we were doing when you turned your headlights on, did you?"

"Hell no!" Charlie said before taking another drink of his beer. "But man I'm sure glad I did! You are really stacked, Kara. Every guy should be as lucky as Ron is to have you."

Kara continued to stammer, wondering how to get out of this increasingly uncomfortable conversation. "I...thank you...I guess. Do you know where Ron is?"

"He's over by the tables," Charlie pointed in the direction Kara had already been trying to walk. He lifted his now empty beer. "I'd show you the way, but I need to fill her up," he said. "I can't face the New Year sober."

"I'll find him," Kara assured him.

Charlie let her slip past. It really was crowded and she had to be careful not to spill her beers. She squeezed between groups of people until she finally spotted the back of Ron's head through the crowd. She pushed harder until she reached

the side of the pool table across from him. Then stopped—horrified beyond her ability to comprehend.

Ron was kissing Cass.

The dirty blond tramp had one hand cupping the back of Ron's neck and the other covering his hand as he fondled her small breast.

Kara didn't wait to see more.

She set the black and tans down on the edge of the pool table and fled the bar.

Chapter Sixteen

The Snow Storm

Kara couldn't see straight when she stumbled out of the Church Key and back into the storm. Tears filled her eyes obscuring her vision. How could Ron do this to her? With all the women in the world he could have cheated with, why did he have to choose Cass?

Her impractically shod foot skidded on a particularly slick patch of snow pulling her feet out from under her and dropping her to the ground. She landed hard on her hip, with a pile of fresh snow shoved up inside her skirt. She rolled to her hands and knees but couldn't climb to her feet again. Her right foot wasn't working and the pain shooting through her ankle threatened to make her scream.

This day kept getting worse and worse.

She was shivering from the cold, and her foot wasn't working properly. The sensible thing to do would be to go back into the bar and call Al, but there was no way she would ever do that. Ron was in the Church Key making out with Cass and Kara wasn't ever going to risk seeing something so utterly disgusting again.

She tried her foot. She didn't think it was broken. It might be sprained, but it wasn't broken. She tried to put a little weight on it and it held up, but the unnatural angle that her high-heeled shoes forced upon her feet threatened her balance with her very first step. There was no way she could make it without falling again.

Angry now, Kara took off both of her shoes. It wasn't like they were doing any good anyway. The stupid open toes were like a vacuum cleaner for snow and the thin elevated heel gave her absolutely no traction.

The only problem with removing the shoes was there was nothing to protect the soles of her feet from the three or four inches of snow crunching beneath them. The high-heeled shoes were poor covering, but poor covering was far superior to no covering at all.

Still, considering her single other option, Kara decided to put up with the pain. Wincing with every bare step, she staggered from the trunk of one car to the next until she crossed the entire parking lot and found her vehicle.

It made her furious to think of Ron inside kissing Cass while she suffered like this.

Forcing her key into the driver's side lock she finally escaped the swirling snow. She started the ignition and immediately turned on the heat. Her feet were freezing and the warm air didn't seem to be doing much for them. She turned on

the window wipers which only extended her vision for a few feet, but it was enough to let her get out of this place.

She put the car in reverse and pressed the gas.

Her ankle began screaming again so she switched feet, driving with her left so she could ease her car back into the lot. She slid a little when she hit the brake, but she didn't hit anyone so it didn't matter.

She switched the car into drive and slowly made her way out onto the road.



Kara couldn't stop crying.

Ron was with Cass and it was so damned dark on this road and the snow fell so heavily that her headlights couldn't show her more than a few feet in front of the car.

She drove very slowly, no more than fifteen miles per hour, and wished to God that the snow plows would arrive and start to clear a path for her.

She'd made a mistake coming out tonight—and not just for the obvious reason that Ron had had enough of her. It just wasn't safe, and she was very, very concerned about her ability to get home.

Her ankle throbbed, and her feet were hurting as well. A thousand needles jabbed at them as the heater finally succeeded in beating back the cold.

Headlights loomed out of the storm directly ahead of Kara.

She twisted the wheel to the right and slammed the brake with her injured right ankle. Screaming, she pulled even harder on the wheel, skidding past the car in front of her even as it tried to swerve in the other direction.

She didn't know how the two cars missed each other.

Just as she began to breathe easier, a large truck appeared out of the snowy darkness. Kara spun the wheel again, hoping against hope that it would do some good. A horn blared! The pavement changed underneath her from the smooth asphalt of the road to the broken gravel of the shoulder.

A horn blew again!

Then the front of Kara's car dropped ahead of her and the airbag exploded out of the steering wheel.



The truck didn't hit her.

Kara was quite certain of that. She didn't know exactly what else had happened but she was quite certain that the truck didn't hit her.

The airbag deflated in front of her permitting Kara to twist about in her seat and try to assess her circumstances. Inside the car, it was clear that the vehicle sat at a very strange angle, front end much lower than the rear. Outside, she couldn't determine. All she could see through the windows were the swirling flakes of snow and even those quickly disappeared as they accumulated on the windows.

The engine was still running and she was afraid to turn it off lest it not start again. She pulled on the door handle and had to push hard to get it to open. The door grated on the ground, pushing snow and dirt ahead of it until the opening was large enough for Kara to climb out, once again putting her wet feet in the cold snow.

Her Taurus was in a ditch and even if she weren't injured she could never get it out on her own. She began to reach back inside for her purse when she remembered her mother had stolen her cell phone. How was she supposed to get help?

She limped to the side of the road to flag down a car. She couldn't believe this was happening to her. How the hell had she'd ended up in a ditch on the outskirts of Taylor without shoes or phone in the middle of a snowstorm?

Headlights appeared on the road ahead of her and she stepped out onto the pavement prepared to wave it down. It was coming much faster than she'd been driving—foolish in these conditions. When it got to be about twenty feet away, Kara began to wave her arms back and forth over her head. The car kept coming, not slowing down but drifting gradually in her direction.

She began to wave more frantically. Her ankle throbbed and her feet burned beneath their fluffy white covering. Why the hell wasn't the car slowing?

At the very last moment, Kara realized the driver genuinely did not see her. There was too much snow in the air. The headlights weren't reaching her. And his projected path was much too close to where she was standing for her comfort.

She leapt out of the way falling again in her haste.

Her knees burned in the snow, but when she looked back at the road, she saw the car's tires had smeared her footprints.

What was she supposed to do now?

How long before a snowplow or an emergency vehicle noticed her car was stuck off the road? Why the hell had her mother taken her cell phone?

Kara stumbled back to her car and worked her way back into the driver's seat. It was warmer inside—warmer, but not truly safer. What was she going to do? She couldn't walk to safety and she couldn't count on someone noticing her here in the blizzard.

What was she going to do?



The snowstorm got worse!

Kara struggled outside for the third time, braving the freezing of her feet and the bitter bite of the storm to clear the tail lights and rear window of her Taurus. Someone had to find her soon. She only had a little more than a quarter tank of gas left in her car. If someone didn't find her before the gas ran out she didn't know

what would happen to her. There was no way she could make it down the road for help without shoes on.

She was shivering badly as she got back into the car. The warmth of the heater helped, but it took time to ease the pain in her frozen feet and did nothing for the ache of despair taking root in her heart. She'd really messed up this time. When they found her body later this week everyone would wonder how she could have been so stupid as to get stuck in a snowstorm without proper shoes on.

She couldn't help but wonder that herself.

The clock on her dashboard told her it was 10:03 P.M. She was frightened, lonely and on the verge of despair. She didn't think she could make it very far down the road without shoes and she didn't know what she was going to do when the car ran out of gas and the heater ceased to work.

She was going to die, she realized. She was going to die because of Mama, Cass and Ron.

Chapter Seventeen

Rescue

The driver's side door opened beside Kara, startling her into full wakefulness and dropping an avalanche of snow onto her thigh.

"Kara! Oh, my God, are you all right?"

Ron leaned into the vehicle and cupped her face in his gloved hands, gently turning her head so he could look in her eyes.

She hugged him compulsively, so relieved to see him that she momentarily forgot about Cass and the kiss. "Oh, Lord, Ron, thank God you're here. I thought I was going to die!"

"I didn't think I was ever going to find you!" Ron said. He backed out of her embrace so he could look at her. "Are you hurt? What happened? And what the hell are you doing on the road in a storm without your cell phone?"

The last question sounded angry and she didn't know if this sudden burst of emotion made her want to laugh or cry.

Ron didn't wait for an answer. "Let's get you out of here," he said offering her his hand to help her get up. His eyes widened as he noticed her stocking-clad feet.

The anger surged back into his voice. "What the hell happened to your shoes?"

Tears welled up in Kara's eyes as all the pain of the evening bunched together and returned to hit her full force. "I was wearing heels, and I hurt my ankle, and I couldn't walk in the snow, so I took them off and..."

She was crying loudly by the time Ron wrapped in his arms around her again. "It's okay now," he soothed. "I'm going to take you home."

"I didn't mean to wreck the car," Kara continued. "But I couldn't see the road, and there were cars and trucks coming and you were kissing that girl!"

The accusation came out of nowhere and got an immediate reaction out of Ron. His head shot up so he could look directly into her tear-filled eyes. "What girl? Oh, you mean Cass? I was not kissing her! She freaked out and manhandled me and then ran away laughing like it was a big joke."

"But I saw you!" Kara said. She played the image back over in her mind.

"You saw what?" Ron said.

"I was right across the pool table and you had your hand on her breast and your tongue down her throat!"

“Oh,” Ron said. “This all makes a sick sort of sense now. Cass must have seen you coming. She’d been hitting on me—yes, I admit now you were right about her. Anyway, all of a sudden she went beyond words, grabbed me around the neck and started kissing me. I was trying to push her away when she grabbed my hand and pulled it against her body. “

He shook his head ruefully. “She must have seen you coming and put on a show to make you mad. I shoved her away and that was that. I didn’t know you’d even been at the Church Key until Charlie told me about you half an hour later.”

He stopped again, probably assessing whether or not Kara believed him. The truth was, she didn’t know. As she played the scene back in her mind, she thought it could have happened the way Ron said—but that certainly wasn’t what it looked like at the time.

Ron returned his attention to practical matters. “Now are you ready to go to my car? I’ll have to carry you. We can leave this one here until the storm passes.”

“You really didn’t kiss her?” Kara asked. She remembered what he’d said to her mother about cheating. She really wanted to believe him.

“I thought I already told you this,” Ron said. “I wouldn’t touch her if she were the last woman on earth and the fate of humanity depended on us getting together.” He shuddered. “Something about her just skeeves me.”

The shudder convinced Kara. You couldn't fake a reaction like that. "I am so sorry," she whispered. "When I saw you with her—I just got so mad. I—"

Ron kissed her. His lips were cold from the weather but his passion was red hot lava. His tongue thrust deep inside her mouth so it could dance, play and fiddle with her own. His gloved fingers stroked her cheek, tickling her flesh, encouraging her love.

When they finally parted, both lovers gasped for breath. "I don't want to talk about Cass anymore," Ron told her. "I want to get you home where you're warm and safe and then I want to rip off your clothes and fuck you while the clock strikes midnight."

Kara liked the sound of that. She was briefly—very briefly—tempted to tell him they could start right now but the truth was she knew they couldn't. The storm wasn't getting any better and they'd already taken far too many chances. They needed to get back in Ron's car before some idiot driver knocked it off the road next to hers.

"Are you ready?" Ron asked.

"I love you," she told him.

He kissed her again, softer than before, with far more tenderness. "I love you too, Kara," he whispered.

"I know," she said. "I really believe that now."

He reached past her and turned off her Taurus' engine. Then he put her keys in his pocket, placed her purse in her lap, locked the car door and scooped her up in his arms. It was cold out in the wind was blowing hard. Four or five more inches of snow must have fallen since she crashed and it made the footing treacherous beneath Ron's booted feet.

Kara couldn't help him. All she could do was cling tight to Ron's shoulders and let her man carry her safely through the storm.



Kara instantly felt warmer and safer in Ron's jeep than she had in her Taurus.

He looked so confident and capable as he fastened her seatbelt over her and then kissed her lightly before closing the door.

Her ankle still hurt and her feet were still cold but she didn't feel the terrible fear anymore. She knew in her heart that Ron would get her home.

He got in the driver's side door and put on his own seat belt. "Are you ready to go?" he asked her.

She patted his thigh in response.

"Good!" He shifted the jeep into reverse and backed up onto the road. "It's a miracle I found you," he noted, "and I was looking very hard."

"Why did you think I had crashed?" Kara asked.

“Because you weren’t at your house and your sister thought you were with me,” Ron told her.

“Which sister?”

“Ruth. I don’t know where Liz lives.”

“You went to Ruth’s tonight? What time is it?”

He glanced down at his dashboard clock: “11:17 P.M.”

“Wow,” Kara said. “I was stuck there nearly three hours.”

“Roughly half an hour after you saw Cass kiss me, I ran into Charlie at the bar. He asked me what had happened to you about the same time Nick asked if you needed another black and tan. It took a couple of minutes to cut through the confusion then Nick turned off the music and banged on some pans until everyone was quiet enough to determine you weren’t there. You’d told Nick about your cell phone so I ran outside and drove to your house. The snow was getting bad and I was worried.”

While Ron was talking he took off his glove, reached into his pocket and plucked out his cell phone. “Here,” he said, “you better take this. When I didn’t see your car at your house I drove across Westland to your sister’s and she deserves a call to know that you’re safe.”

“So how did you find me?” Kara asked.

“I was pretty scared,” Ron admitted. “The only thing I could think of was that you’d gotten lost or had an accident. If you were lost, I couldn’t do anything but hope you’d turn up safe. But if you had an accident, I might be able to find you if I reconstructed your trip. So I went back to the Church Key and drove very slowly down the side of the road stopping every time I saw something that might be a car. For the record, I didn’t think your pile of snow was a vehicle, but a branch must have blown off the tree and hit your fender because as I drove past, one of your tail lights started gleaming and I knew something was back there.”

“Wow,” Kara said again. “I had no idea...you really almost missed me?”

“Call your sister,” Ron suggested. Then he grinned at her. “But you better not agree to go over there. Tell her it’s New Year’s Eve and we’ve got other plans.”

Chapter Eighteen

Love

Ron carried Kara into her house and laid her down on the couch. He was very careful not to bang her into the doorframe or against a wall, and very tenderly he propped up throw pillows behind her to help her sit up. Then he helped her slip out of her coat and ran up to the bedroom to bring down a quilt, spreading it out on top of her despite her wet clothing.

“I want to take a look at that ankle before you undress,” he said. “It will make it easier on you if we have to get back in the car and go to the emergency room.”

Kara snuggled back under the quilt and let Ron take care of her. It felt good to be loved and cherished. He gently lifted her bad foot and felt the swollen flesh. It hurt, but not enough to make her hiss or jerk away.

“It’s not as swollen as I expected,” Ron said.

He pressed on the sore flesh a little bit harder.

“That doesn’t mean it doesn’t hurt,” Kara told him.

“Obviously,” Ron agreed, “but I really don’t think it’s that bad. I’ll take you to the emergency room if you want but—”

“I want to stay here!” Kara said and that settled the matter of the ankle for Ron.

He poked the sole of the foot. “How about this?”

“What about it?”

“Does it hurt? Is it cold? Can you feel anything?” He tickled her sole to answer his own question.

Kara instinctively twisted away, making her ankle throb but not her foot. “Watch it! That tickles!”

Ron did it again. “That’s a good reaction,” he said. “What about the other things?”

“No, it doesn’t hurt and while it feels cold, it’s nothing like it was after I walked through the snow.”

Ron began to massage her foot through the stocking. “That’s good,” he said. “You do know that walking without shoes in the snow is a good way to get frostbite, don’t you?”

“I didn’t plan to do it!” Kara protested.

“Most people don’t,” Ron said. “But frostbite is both painful and dangerous.”

He began to pull on each of her toes, questioning her about the sensation in each of them. He seemed genuinely relieved when they finished checking her other foot.

“I think you got very lucky,” he said. “The heater in your car must have been enough to keep them from freezing. I can’t believe how foolish you were. Why didn’t you just go back into the bar and ask Nick to call someone to pick you up?”

“You were in there with Cass!” Kara protested.

Ron stood up and shrugged out of his own coat. “And now I’m here with you,” he said. “So let’s get you undressed.”

“Ron!”

“I’m only looking out for your welfare,” he insisted as he pulled the quilt off of her. “Sitting in wet clothing can lead to hypothermia. I must insist that we remove it.”

“Are you suggesting we play doctor?” she said.

Ron felt Kara’s forehead with the back of his hand. “Why? Are you feeling sick?”

Kara grabbed him and pulled him down on top of her. His broad chest flattened her breasts through her bra and his mouth bruised her lips open to make room for his tongue. Ron was a particularly good kisser. He could flutter his tongue lightly at the top of her mouth and thrust deep and strong to the back of

her throat. Despite the cold clinging to her wet stockings and clothing, Kara began to warm up. Ron inspired the warmth obviously, but it was an internal phenomenon, starting in her neck and chest and pelvis and radiating out through her body.

She kissed him some more, running her fingers over his back, feeling the contours of his long lean form through his t-shirt. She moved her legs trying to shift his weight above her and banged her sore ankle against the side of the couch.

“Ouch!”

Ron pulled back. “Are you all right?”

Kara pulled his face back down to hers. His thigh slid between her legs, drawing her skirt taut across her pussy.

She got her hands under his shirt, feeling his tight abs and trying to work her way up to his nipples. Ron got the idea and reared up above her pulling the shirt off and tossing it across the room.

“Now let’s say we take a better look at you,” he told her.

Bracing himself up with his left arm, he circled each nipple with the backs of his fingers, then began to unbutton her blouse. Kara cupped his pale white fingers in her dark ones and lifted his hand to her lips. She slipped his fore finger in and out of her mouth a few times until he got the idea, then lowered her hands to unbutton her blouse herself while she continued to suck on his finger.

The heat between her legs intensified.

Ron slipped the finger out of her mouth the minute her blouse dropped open. Tracing moist lines on her dark flesh, he caressed the top of her breasts just above the fabric of her bra. Then he scooted back on the couch and began to kiss her stomach, working his way down to her navel, making her skin glisten wherever he went.

Kara reached beneath her and unfastened her bra. The garment went soaring in the same general direction as Ron's t-shirt. Ron took the hint and changed directions, kissing and licking his way back to Kara's breasts where he tormented the soft curves with his tongue while working his way ever inward toward her nipples.

He slid off the couch so that he knelt on the floor as he kissed her puckered flesh. His right hand began to inch her skirt higher up her legs. He wasn't looking at her down there. He was looking directly at her face, staring into her eyes, making certain she knew exactly where his thoughts were.

His tongue lavished love on her thick black nipple, teasing it, worshipping it while the warm cloth of her wool skirt inched over her knees on its quest to expose her secrets to Ron's fingers. He began to tickle her thighs, scratching them lightly with his nails, always managing to bring the skirt higher until his hands past the top of her stockings and found bare flesh beneath.

He stopped.

“Oh, my,” he said. “This is something I have to see.”

Moving further down the couch he gently shifted Kara’s body so that her injured right foot could rest on the floor while he gazed at her bare thighs stretching up out of her stockings and the pussy-clad treasure above them.

Ron bent down and began to kiss his way up her legs, starting at the stocking-clad knee and working toward the tantalizingly bare flesh above him.

Kara spread her legs wider to accommodate him, enjoying the warmth of his breath and the light strokes of his tongue. He rubbed his cheek against the soft bare flesh of her upper thigh and lightly kissed her lips through her panties. She edged forward on the couch, presenting her pussy to him as he pushed her skirt up over her hips. His fingers began to play with the straps of her garters while his mouth began to aggressively explore the cleft between her legs.

His lips bit at hers through the silk fabric of the panties, first forcing the smooth cloth deeper inside her and then pulling it out again. His thumbs surfed her bare inner thighs, making her shiver as they glided up her flesh to slip under the crotch of her panties and pull it up off her moist lips. He hauled the crotch out of the way and blew lightly across her dark labia.

Kara closed her eyes and rode the sensation.

Ron licked her, inserting his tongue between her soft lips and tasting her excitement.

Kara slid her hands on to his head, running her fingers through his short hair, wondering if he could feel the way he made her body tremble.

He thrust deeper with his tongue, penetrating to her inner lips. His chin pressed against her as well and his nose buried itself in her flesh just below her clitoris. He began to shake his face back and forth, spreading her wider as he explored. His hands on her thighs pressed harder, widening the angle of her legs to the maximum possible extent.

Her hips began to gyrate beneath him, acting as if they had a mind of their own. Her fingers tightened their grip on his hair, adding her own muscle to the pressure Ron's mouth brought to bear on her pussy.

"Oh, yes," she moaned, the first words either had spoken since he began to go down on her.

Ron seemed encouraged by the sound. He slipped his hands beneath her ass and picked her rear end up off the couch. The result was a change in angle which brought his chin deeper into the folds of her pussy and his nose in to contact with her more than ready clitoris.

"Oh, yes!"

Kara's pussy bucked out of Ron's hands up into his face. The unplanned response serendipitously moved his mouth from her labia to her clitoris. He latched on reflexively and rocketed her deeper into an orgasm.

Her groin tried to move away, but his hands caught up with her ass cheeks and forced her back into place against his mouth. Her body tried to fight him, twisting and gyrating in response to her climax, but his iron muscles firmed leaving her no choice but to keep coming.

She bucked harder, first shoving her pussy into his mouth, then trying to twist and break away. The wet cloth of her raised skirt slid across the bare flesh of her stomach, further stimulating her hyper-sensitive flesh. She wanted more, but contradictorily needed less.

She yanked at his hair, pulling his lips up her groin so that her panties slid back in place beneath them. It was only a momentary respite, but it let her gasp for breath and grunt a few words at him. "Cock...now...inside me."

Ron did not need any further encouragement.

He pulled off of her body and unfastened his belt. Kara tried to help him but ended up falling off the couch into his arms. His arms instinctively encircled her and his lips found the pulse at her throat. He sucked hard, like he was making a hickey, then his hands started to roam.

His right hand squeezed her ass through her panties and his left mauled her breast. His weight began to bear her backwards until she was half lying on the couch again.

He kissed his way lower, slurping on her breast while his hands fumbled with her panties. Then he was pulling them down her thighs and pressing her legs high up in the air so he could lick her pussy again.

She couldn't help it. Her mind still wanted to feel his cock but her body was already climaxing again.



When Kara's body finally calmed, Ron was lying on the floor beside her with his head resting on her hip. His right hand lay on her thigh, occasionally stirring to gently stroke her flesh, but not yet trying to entice her into another orgasm.

Kara felt peaceful, happy and safe.

When Ron's fingers began to become more active, she scooted beside him, hoping to forestall him until they could talk a little. She rested her forehead against his—too close to really see him properly but the perfect distance to say this. “I love you, Ron Hall.”

Ron removed his hand from her hip and rubbed playfully at the tip of her nose. “I know that, Kara. I hope you've also figured out that I really love you too.”

“And the age difference doesn’t bother you?”

Ron shrugged. “I really don’t think it’s that big a deal.”

She caressed his cheek with her fingertips. “Good.”

She sat there just touching his face for several moments, enjoying the proximity of his body—even if he was still half clothed.

“I think we missed New Years,” Ron said. “The ball must have dropped while we were making love.”

“And you wanted to be inside me,” Kara remembered. The fact that he hadn’t been vaguely troubled her.

“I was inside you,” Ron insisted. “I just wasn’t inside you with my cock.”

Something both Liz and Cass had said returned to trouble Kara. Ron had just made her come wonderfully several times and she hadn’t even touched his penis. His pants, in fact, were still zipped and fastened. He hadn’t gotten any kind of stimulation at all. That wasn’t the way she wanted things at all.

“Well don’t think we’re through yet,” she told him.

“Ready for another go?” Ron asked.

“No, you are,” she said.

Kara began to work on Ron’s body, kissing and licking his face, nibbling her way down to his chest. She wanted to do to him what he kept doing to her—bring his flesh to life and make his world explode in pleasure. It was easy to stimulate

him. He clearly enjoyed her touch. His little nipples grew hard beneath her fingers and rock solid under her tongue. The tight muscles of his abdomen swelled, enhancing their definition, testifying to his rising excitement.

Ron settled back on to the floor to enjoy what she was doing, but he couldn't completely surrender his control. His left hand came up to play with her large nipple but she batted it away so that he wouldn't distract her. By the time she reached the top of his jeans, his bulge had become visibly more pronounced. She grinned as she opened him up and pulled his pants and briefs down to his knees. She intended to take them all the way off, but he had boots on and they caused some problems.

Ron laughed at her predicament. "I tell you what," he said as he sat up to help her. "I'll take off my boots and pants if you get rid of your skirt and panties."

Kara didn't have to stop to think about his offer. She quickly unhooked her skirt and finished undressing herself. Then she got to watch Ron pull off his boots and socks and slide those jeans off onto the floor.

Before she could resume her place between his legs, he caught her up in his arms and wrestled her to the floor.

"Wait a minute!" she protested, playfully hammering at his chest. "It's your turn! I'm going to make *you* come."

Ron hesitated. He seemed torn between his desire to kiss and fondle her and the obvious pleasure of having Kara bring him off.

She took advantage of his uncertainty to push him onto his back and roll on top of him. His eyes focused on her large breasts and his hands came up to fondle them.

It felt heavenly. Her nipples swelled, aching for his caress. Kara closed her eyes and cupped his hands, encouraging him, guiding him, helping him maximize her pleasure.

Her pleasure?

Hadn't she just said she wanted to focus on Ron?

Kara suddenly became aware that she was grinding her moist lips on Ron's hard stomach—smearing him with her juices while she helped him tweak her tits.

Why couldn't she stop using him?

Why couldn't she return the pleasure he gave her?

She pulled his hands off her breasts and slid down his body to bring them out of reach. Ron's cock was only about half hard, further proof to Kara's mind that Ron wasn't getting as much out of their love making as she was. She pulled her hair back past her ear and began to lick the limp phallus. She used deft little strokes of her tongue, starting with the shaft and working her way up toward the

head. Ron's penis quickly showed his appreciation, straightening out and then growing longer and harder.

"You're good at that," Ron observed.

Kara smiled up at him in appreciation. "I want to be," she told him. "You make me feel so wonderful."

"It's mutual!" Ron assured her. "I love the way your body feels against mine. I love the way you respond to my touch."

Rather than answer with words, Kara decided to show him what she loved. She licked the tip of his hardening cock before pulling it into her mouth.

"Mmmm," Ron moaned.

Encouraged, Kara sucked harder. She liked the way his penis thickened inside her. It was a form of instant gratification—immediate proof that her man found her exciting. She wrapped her dark fingers around his lengthening shaft and rhythmically squeezed the hardening flesh.

Ron began to stroke her cheek with his fingers, so she swallowed more of him to let him feel his own mushroom head through the barrier of his cheek. He was so thick and hard now that there wasn't a lot of room for her tongue to swirl about and lick the salty head.

Ron began pivoting about, leaving his cock in her mouth but shifting his torso around toward a sixty-nine position.

Kara took him out of her mouth and scooted away from him. “Oh, no, you don’t! It’s your turn to get some loving!”

Obviously frustrated, Ron stopped twisting himself about and let Kara return to bobbing on his cock. Her mouth moved up and down on the thick head while her hand pumped in time on his shaft.

Ron reached out and touched her thick nipple, sending a tremor of pleasure through her body.

Kara stopped sucking and slapped his hand away. “Stop it!” she said. “This is about you this time!”

Ron frowned and reached for her nipple again. “If it’s about me then let me touch you.”

Kara grabbed his fingers and held them away from her body. “I can’t concentrate on your pleasure when you start driving me crazy with your fingers.”

“But it brings me pleasure to drive you crazy!”

“But I don’t think it’s fair that you haven’t come,” Kara protested.

“Oh, I’m going to come!” Ron assured her.

“But you don’t!” Kara pointed out, “at least not always.”

“What are you talking about?” Ron asked. It was clearly an effort, but he finally mentally pulled himself far enough out of their love making that he could fully concentrate on her words.

“You don’t always come,” Kara said. “I keep having these incredible orgasms and you don’t get to climax.”

The look of confusion on Ron’s face puzzled Kara. “What are you talking about?” he repeated. “You may come a little more—you’re the woman, your body makes that possible—but I always get to shoot my load.”

“No, you don’t,” Kara said.

Ron scooted right up next to her and took her in his arms. “Yes, I do!” he said. “You’re a wonderful lover. You’re not leaving me unsatisfied.”

“What about the night we went to the Church Key?” Kara said. “You didn’t come then.”

“Yeah, but we had a misunderstanding,” Ron said. “Those things happen.”

“No, that’s not it. Even before then. I came in the Church Key parking lot but you didn’t.”

“And you tried to make it up to me by blowing me in front of that strip mall,” Ron said.

“But again *I* was the only one who ended up coming,” Kara said.

Ron seemed to be completely missing her point. “That was pretty great, wasn’t it?”

“*No!*” Kara protested. “It wasn’t great. You didn’t climax!”

Ron really didn't get it! "But you did," he said. He reached out and cupped her breast, lifting the soft flesh until her nipple pointed up at him. Then he bent his head until he was close enough to lick it.

"Stop it!" Kara said. She couldn't believe he was dismissing her concerns.

"No, you stop it!" Ron said. "I love driving you wild. It makes me feel completely masculine. It makes me heady with power. It gets my dick absolutely rock hard. Why are we even arguing about this?"

"Because I want to make you come too," Kara whispered. "I don't ever want to get to the point where I'm just using you."

"Using me?" Ron laughed, but then quieted down when he saw Kara really was serious about this. He pulled her into his lap so that his still-hard cock pressed against her outer thigh. "Oh, honey, if you want to blow me I'm never going to say no, but don't imagine that's the only way you make me come. You think you're not responsible when I fire off in your pussy, or when I pull out and shoot all over your tits and face. It's great when you jack me off, but it's still you doing it to me when I'm alone in my shower thinking about your sweet breasts."

He paused to kiss her, tenderly pressing his lips against hers. "We're in love," he whispered. "It's not using each other when we orgasm."

"I just want you to feel all the pleasure you give me," Kara whispered back. "You, you're more wonderful than I could ever have imagined."

Ron pulled her hand down to their waists and wrapped her fingers around his thick erection. "This is what you do to me," he said. "Every time I think of you I get hard. Every time you touch me, my cock responds. All I want to do when you're around is feel your naked body squirming against mine. I love to hear you moan when I touch you. I need to feel your tight pussy squeezing my shaft. I could never give you as much pleasure and excitement as you've already given me."

With Ron's encouragement, she began to stroke his dick. It was too dry so she licked her hand a few times and then went back to his shaft, lightly caressing him into full engorgement. While she did this, Ron began to nibble at her breasts, bringing her nipples back to full prominence, bringing her body back to life.

His hand found her pussy, teasing it as she stroked him, rekindling the heat between her legs. She had to lick her hand again and he used the interruption to lay her on her back and move himself between her legs.

She touched him again, feeling the iron in his flesh and the cords of steel that doubled as his veins. He rubbed himself in the soft folds of her labia and she spread her thighs wider to accommodate him.

Her breath caught in her chest when he entered her, and then his slow sure strokes began edging them both up toward an orgasm.

She grabbed hold of his ass, anchoring herself even as she encouraged him.

Ron increased his tempo, pulling up with his cock inside her so he could put pressure on the upper side of her vagina beneath her clitoris.

They both moaned—a spontaneous expression of their building pleasure.

Ron's thrusts became more jagged. His right hand left the floor to tweak her nipple. "I wanted...to do this...at midnight."

An image of Ron taking her on one of the Church Key pool tables flashed through Kara's mind, but she didn't think that was what he meant. "I want...to do this...every night," she told him.

Ron grunted and lurched, his hand barely making it back to the floor in time to keep his balance. A bead of sweat dropped off his nose and splattered on Kara's chin.

Her body decided to become more active. Her hips lifted up off the floor in time with his thrusts. Her pussy squeezed deliciously around his thick dick. His cock felt so damn wonderful inside her.

"Oh...yes," Ron growled.

She could feel him grow suddenly harder inside her. She knew he was getting very close. She lifted her hand to his chest, even as her hips thrust up even harder.

"Touch yourself!" Ron ordered. "Touch yourself!"

Startled, Kara lowered her hand to the thick curly hair of her pussy. She could feel Ron deep inside her moving in and out of her body. She touched her clitoris.

“Oh, Ron!” she shouted. She’d had no idea she was this close to coming. Her body was so highly tuned to his rhythm that her own rising excitement had snuck up on her.

She dug her fingers harder against her clitoris. Deep beneath her, the wedge-shaped head of Ron’s erection continued to split her body open.

“I...love you...Kara...oh!”

New heat filled her vagina, spreading out to coat all of her insides. Ron didn’t pull out, and he didn’t stop thrusting. His thick head squished in his own semen and he howled in mindless pleasure as she tightened her muscles around him.

Once...twice...three times and Kara’s body joined in his climax, thrusting up against him until Ron’s strength gave out and they collapsed together, drifting off to sleep in each other’s arms.

Epilogue

When Kara woke, the house was completely dark and Ron stood naked in front of the now open curtains of her living room window. The pale illumination of the street lamp showed snow continuing to fall, thick and heavy. Huge drifts had built up on her bushes. The plows had not yet reached her street.

She got up and joined him, limping across the room on her bad ankle so that she could stand beside him in the darkness. Both of them were naked. “It looks like we’re snowed in again,” she said.

Ron turned to look at her, his dick stirring between them. “I can think of worse things. In fact, being trapped with you is the best way I can think of to start the New Year.”

The End

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